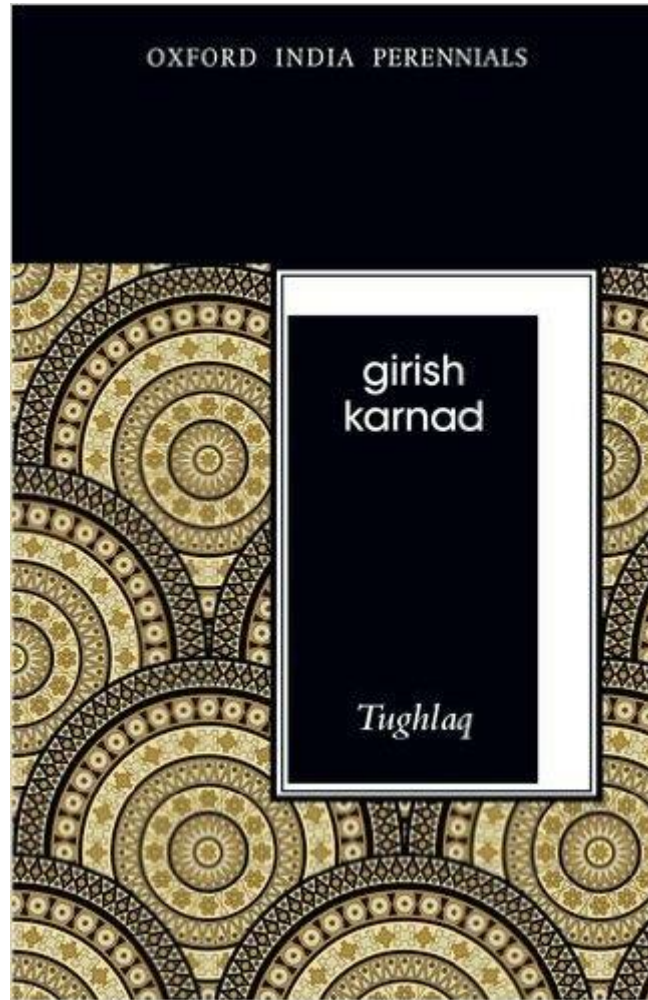


**Treatment of History in Girish Karnad's  
*Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda***

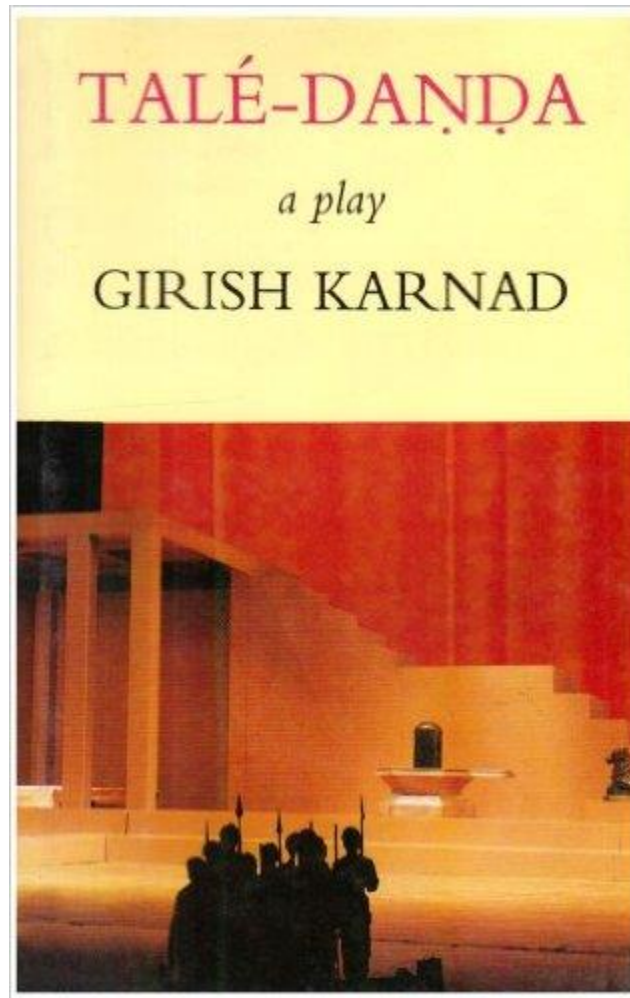
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**Abstract**

Girish Karnad's plays reflect the contemporary Indian society, cultural and social life through the use of folk-tales, myths and historical legends. Indian Drama has from its origin borrowed heavily from the country's mythological and historical past. *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda* are the two primarily historical plays in which Karnad employs history to comment on the pathetic and corroded state of Indian modern day politics. In *Tughlaq*, Karnad has taken a chapter from the Muslim period of history and drawn striking parallels between India then and India now.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* should be studied to find parallelism between the realities of the fourteenth century India ruled by the Sultan and the twentieth century democratic country governed by a Prime minister and his colleagues in the cabinet. In *Tale-Danda* Caste system has given the Brahmins and other high caste people a privileged position and they have never tolerated any violation, including an inter-caste marriage. This condition has not changed till now.



So, in *Tale-Danda*, Karnad deals with one of the most sensitive issues of all times – the ugly face of caste system of India that was in the past hailed as an ideal one. Though the play is based on an historical event, Karnad's adept use of symbolism, irony and humour makes it a modern play. It is because of these modern devices that the situations and the minor characters in the play dramatize the contemporary socio-political scenario in India.

The play *Tughlaq* offers a clear suggestion that mixing of religion and politics always results in national disaster. Girish Karnad has shown us the importance of the past in the

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present. Through the select plays, he has not only raised the issues of majority-minority religions but has also given vent to intra-religious problems like caste system. Although he delineates the issues of both inter-religious and intra-religious problems, he advocates a non-violent and need- based ideology without giving privilege to any one of them. He is of the view that there is a need to learn lessons from the past as our past prefigures our present and myths resonate in modern experience.

**Key words:** Girish Karnad, *Tughlaq* play, *Tale-Danda* play, treatment of history in plays, Basavanna, veerasaivism.

### **Presentness of the Past**

Girish Karnad is one of the foremost playwrights of the contemporary Indian stage a richness that could probably be equated with his talents not only as playwright but also as an actor and a director. He is widely appreciated for his technical experiments, as well as, displaying a wide range of themes and subjects. He merges myth and reality, past and present. He brings in legendary and historical figures that are able to carry his message of restructuring the present society. Karnad artistically links up the past and present in his plays, even when he takes up a legendary or a historical figure like Tughlaq in *Tughlaq*, or King Bijjala and Basavanna in *Tale-Danda*. He relates them to the present times, they hold a contemporary relevance. Commending his plays, Kirtinath Kurtoki has said, “Karnad’s plays are thoroughly modern in outlook and spirit” (239).

### **Modern Day Relevance of *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda***

Indian Drama has from its origin borrowed heavily from the country’s mythological and historical past. *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda* are two primarily historical plays in which Karnad employs history to comment on the Indian modern day politics, and through which he engages to illustrate how ‘history is made’ and ‘repeated’.

Karnad discloses that he has written *Tale-Danda* dealing with the two decades ending in AD 1168, in the city of Kalyan, a man called Basavanna assembled a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers. Together they created an age unmatched in the history of Karnataka for its creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment. Indeed, they rejected anything ‘static’ in favour of the principle of movement and progress in human enterprise. Karnad wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the ‘Mandir’ and

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the 'Mandal' movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for their age.

### ***Tale-Danda***

In *Tale-Danda* Karnad has given an old historical tale a new meaning and significance which is highly relevant in the present context. The play is based on a historical incident which took place in the twelfth century but the issues it raises are extremely to our contemporary society. The play is set in a place called Kalyan. The play questions the two thousand year old traditional values of the caste-system. As the caste in India is derived from birth alone and cannot be transferred from one caste to another in any way as reward or anything, it is a closed system. The essential features of the caste system was its hierarchy, restrictions on inter-caste marriages and on eating or living together to the extent of not touching each other.

### **Two Categories of Characters**

The characters in the play are grouped into two classes in this play upholders and detractors of the caste system. Basavanna, King Bijjala, Jagadeva, Madhuvarsa, Harlayya and all the Sharanas want dismissal of the caste system and are set to bring in equality based casteless society, whereas Sovideva, ManchannaKramita and Damodara Bhatta advocate the Vedic dharma and want to continue the restraints of the caste system. The upholders treat any attempt to shake it as a sacrilege and profane attack on the Vedic dharma and consider the caste system as divine and need-based.

### **Basavanna**

In the 12th century AD, during the two decades from 1148 to 1168, the city of Kalyan was the centre of a powerful social and religious reform movement led by the poet saint Basavanna. The movement known as Lingayatism or Vira-Saivism aimed at the abolition of the caste system in Hindu society and tried to propagate free thinking and devotional worship in place of ritualistic worship of god. This brought the followers of this sect, known as Sharanas, in conflict with the orthodox upper-caste section of society. King Bijjala had appointed Basavanna as the Finance Minister. The poet was not interested in the political life; but as a true religious leader, he was conscious of the then burning social problems of his age.

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## **Karnad's Approach**

Availing the ambivalent nature and episodic elements present in the Indian history, Karnad, on the one hand, permits its opponents to strongly demand its removal and, on the other hand, allows the exponents of the caste system to advocate its appropriateness and necessity.

Karnad's *Tale-Danda* takes us on a journey into history that brings forth issues equally relevant to our own times. Basavanna called the assembly or a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers. The participants were true thinkers who believed in creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment. The reformers talked of the religious matters and of God and Man.

For the first time, they emphasized the use of the mother tongue, the tongue of the common man instead of using Sanskrit, the language of the learned people. The new leaders condemned idolatry and temple worship, because they believed in the principle of kinetic and in the progress in human enterprise and rejected everything that was static. In addition, they emphasized in the equality of the sexes, and they dedicated themselves with devotion and hard work. Their outstanding work was to oppose the caste-system, not just in theory only; but also in practice. It brought tremendous opposition and the wrath of the orthodox Hindus of the society. Basavanna's movement ended in bloodshed. The year 1168 became an epoch-making event in the history of Kalyan. The movement started for the cause of humanity ended in bloodshed. A prosperous society plunged into anarchy and terror. Karnad's *Tale-Danda* pictures only one week of those turbulent days in Karnataka.

The orthodox Hindus became violent when the reformers acted upon their age-old beliefs and traditions. A Brahmin girl married a low-caste boy. The orthodox people proclaimed *Tale-Danda* or Death by Beheading. Tale means Head and *Danda* means Punishment. Basavanna had used the words, related with the offering of the head and the barbarous practice, when people in the unpleasant situation or accusation uttered the words - May my head roll or I offer my head. Basavanna disliked this practice and expressed outrage in his movement.

## **Caste System**

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The Indian society was traditionally divided into four *varnas* and even the professions of the people were categorized accordingly. Now with the passage of time there is a freedom in the choice of profession but Indians have not been able to liberate themselves mentally from the idea of caste and creed. Rather, caste system remains an integral part of Indian thinking. As such, inter-caste marriages are not a very common phenomenon. *Tale-Danda* exposes this practice of the Hindu society. In this play, the movement against the social evil is launched by the Sharanas for whom sincerity of action and selfless service of humanity is a true religion in which all human beings are equal.

### ***Tale-Danda*- a Drama of Ideas**

Karnad's *Tale-Danda* is a drama of ideas. It is also a historical play, which is based on history. Its plot is centered on the great religious upheaval and social reform, which took place in Karnataka in the 12th century. Basaveswara, popularly known as Basavanna, was the central figure of the movement. He advocated and propagated moral, spiritual and egalitarian values for peaceful and purposeful life. He established 'AnubhavaMantapa' a unique academy of socio-spiritual and religious experience. It was based on democratic principles of universal love and goodwill. Philosopher, poet and minister Basavanna reformed and revived Vira Saivism in Karnataka. Shaivism or Saivism is the name given to the divisions that regard Lord Shiva as the highest Supreme Self or Brahman. It is considered as one of the oldest divisions of Hinduism and its followers are popularly known as Saivites or Lingayats. Under the leadership of Basavanna they formed a reformist religious group 'Sharana'. The basic notion of this religious group was that everybody is a devotee and ultimate offspring of Lord Shiva, so all are equal without any caste or class discrimination. For the first time in the history of Hinduism, Basavanna created awareness on discriminatory and exploitative nature of the dominant social practice called as caste system. The Shudras in the Hindu society were treated in the most inhuman way. Through the Sharana movement, Basavanna fought against this orthodox practice of caste system. As a great humanitarian he is also called 'Vishwa-guru' whose teachings are for the welfare of all humankind. His divine experience was the basis of his social life that aimed at providing everyone with equal opportunity, regardless of gender, caste or social status.

The great Hindu tradition saw such a sect as a dividing force. Basavanna was quixotic in believing that the prevalent system should be trackled and attacked to bring about change.

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But for reasons more than one, though the Virasaivism movement caught the imagination of all, it failed to bring about any dazzling revolution. Basavanna's disillusionment in the play begins with Jagadeva, the son of the staunch Brahmin, Sambashiva Shastri, who is estranged from his father because he becomes Sharana, member of the Virasaiva community and keeps the company of those who are the lowest in the Varna hierarchy, his best friend being Mallibomma, a tanner, which his family detests. Shastri's wife, Bhagirathi, laments her own fate as well as that of others like them. "Why can't that Basavanna see some sense? In every household in Kalyan, it's the same story. Father against son- brother against brother." (TD 2)

In India, particularly, one's original caste- identity is difficult to erase. Bijila, the king of Kalyan, while talking to his wife, Queen Rambhavati, reveals his past as well as opines on one's caste-identity in general which is crucial to the understanding of the play:

Your family- the Hoysalas, you may be Kshatriyas. But I am a Kalachurya. Kattachurra. A barber. His majesty king Bijila is a barber by caste. For ten generations my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For ... You can peel off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you have again: a barber- a shepherd- a scavenger! (TD 14)

Basavanna, the great Virasaivism saint-poet, was King Bijjala's Treasurer, later relinquishes his post, first to illustrate non-attachment to the material world and then to lead the people to salvation. Bijjala thinks very highly of Basavanna:

Basavanna wants to eradicate the caste structure, wipe it off the face of the earth. ... They sit together, indifferent to caste, birth or station. (TD 15)

Basavanna completely refused to accept the authority of Brahman class and ordained a new priesthood – the Jangamas (the spiritual Guru). The Sharanas opposed idolatry, rejected temple worshipping, upheld equality of sexes, celebrated hard, dedicated work and preached abolition of caste and animal sacrifice. The vision of Basavanna is shown in the play-

It'll solve nothing. They are insufferable moralists.

You know that verse of Basavanna's?

Do not steal

Do not kill.

Do not ever lie.

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Do not rage...

I've built temples to keep my subjects happy. (TD 15)

The above remark exposes the double standards of those in commanding positions. It also reveals the superfluous relation of the state and the subjects. The lack of compassion at the top is responsible for the tides of vengeance that follow in any given society. Bijjala knows that the people of higher castes do not respect him properly. He admits: "In all my sixty two years, the only people 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" (TD 15)

Society is bonded by prejudices, which are useful and keep it cemented; so much so that Indian history as perhaps other histories also have proved that when broken they have proved dangerous. In a discussion with Basavanna, Bijjala says:

BIJJALA. As a child you tore up your sacred thread and ran away from home. Birth, caste, and creed mean nothing to you. But don't you delude yourself about your companions, friends. If you really free them from the network of brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, uncles and second cousins, and let them loose in a casteless society they will merely sputter about like a pile of fish on the sand and die! (TD 20-21)

Moreover his city flourishes because of their hard work and devotion. While accounting for his love of *sharanas*, the king himself says:

Every sharana seeks only to earn the day's keep, makes no extra demands, treats profits with contempt.... Even those who despise the *sharanas* for their beliefs need them for their economic enterprise- as indeed I do- and they pour money into the *sharanacoffer*. (TD 24)

Thus Bijjala feels grateful to Basavanna and his men. But his son, Sovideva is not happy about it. He dislikes Basavanna and his philosophy. He knows that Basavanna spends large amounts of money on his hospitality to his guests. So he suspects that Basavanna has stolen money from the royal treasury. He therefore decides to prove this by opening the treasury. Thus, he wants to win his father's favour by making Basavanna unpopular.



The play is a luminous illustration of Game of Power–Politics. Every one attempts to assert himself at the cost of humanity and brotherhood. Jagadeva abandons his old parents in chase of his political career. He confesses - “my father was breathing his last. My mother, alone and helpless, was banging her head against the wall. And I was at the Treasury! You know why...Tomorrow.....I shall be the hero of the sharanas.” (TD 30)

Basavanna’s preaching discards superstition. When Prince Sovideva, who suspects him of taking money from the royal treasury to spend on the ‘sharanas’ makes an inspection of the treasury, he finds no money missing from it. Jagadeva, a sharana, comes to know Sovideva’s plan to open the royal treasury. At once, he gathers thousands of sharanas and encircles it. Thus, he prevents Sovideva from tampering with it. Meanwhile Basavanna comes and immediately sends Jagadeva to attend to his ailing father. He takes Sovideva into custody, finds the treasury intact after verification and then releases him. People consider it miraculous that the treasury is intact. Bijjala scolds Sovideva severely for his misdeed. So, Sovideva feels deeply frustrated, humiliated and hurt. He, therefore, decides to avenge this on his father and Basavanna. Damodra Bhatta, Queen’s priest and ManchannaKramita, the Brahmin adviser to the king, are very unhappy about Basavanna’s mission and Bijjala’s support to it. So, they join hands with Sovideva in the plot against Bijjala and Basavanna.

Jagadeva goes home and finds his father on death bed. His father’s death makes him remorseful of neglecting home and so performs all the funeral rites for his father though it is contrary to his new faith. His emotion gets reversed as Basavanna visits him to express his condolences. Disturbed by the feelings of guilt for betraying the sharana-faith, Jagadeva blames Basavanna for his bereavement. The followers of Basavanna take it as a sign of miracle and try to deify him. Basavanna is grieved at it. In response to the query from a follower as to how many miracles he has performed so far, he says:

How many shall I say? Will eighty-eight do? Showing off my eighty-eight miracles my *Bhakti* has become a carnival wardrobe. It’s in such tatters I can’t find a patch large enough to hide my shame. (TD 25)

Basavanna is against religious intolerance. When the news reaches him that at Maddur, some sharanas have occupied a Jain temple by force and are threatening to smash the idols in it and turn it into a Shiva temple, he is disturbed. Jagadeva tries to justify the

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actions of the 'sharanas' by saying that Jains always provoke them. What Basavanna says to Jagadeva is pertinent to our own times as well:

Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and mortar is a monument to stupidity. (TD 29)

Basavanna's words are relevant to modern Indian socio – political crisis and it provides the solution to it, when he says – “What the world thinks is immaterial. It is a question of living; breathing human beings.....What matters is what *we* consider right.” (TD 44)

These words of Basavanna reflect the modern Indian socio-political crisis and provide the answer as well:

The rich will make temples of Shiva what shall I, A poor man do? My legs are pillars The body, the Shrine The head of cupola Of gold... Things standing shall fall. But the moving shall ever stay. (TD 29)

These words of Basavanna appear to hint at the root cause of all communal problems in India. We are “standing” and not “moving” and in order to progress we have to move. About the so-called miracles which the Indians are prone to believe in, Basavanna says, “Isn't this life abundant enough? Do we need more miracles?” (TD 29)

*Tale-Danda* criticizes the cheap mentality of people who take interest in other's household affairs and spread rumours through gossiping. When Mallibomma, an outcaste, comes to Jagadeva's house the doors of neighbouring houses fill up with women, children and old men, all watching. It is the dilemma of life when we are in a dire need even our neighbours retreat to extend a helping hand, but they are always ready to ridicule and criticize our weakness. Gundanna talks about the inhumanity of the people when no one approaches to rescue Haralayya and Madhuvarasa from the butchery of soldiers. They all watched, shut inside their houses.

In western countries there is a lot of scope to utilize one's experience in the development of the nation even after retirement. Even the government also provides aid to **Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 16:9 September 2016  
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find them work, but unfortunately in our country the experienced have to sit idly at home. The mutual cooperation of fresher and experienced can change the destiny of India. The government should take some steps towards it. Jagadeva in Scene Four shares with us the grief of Shastri, “Do you know how a man crumbles when he loses power? In the service of the court, father was tall and imposing and walked with long, confident strides. Weighted each word before parting with it. But the moment Bijjala threw him out, he shrank, like a piece of soaked cloth. Even his voice went shrill. It was loathsome” (TD 30).

Jagadeva who becomes an ardent and trusted disciple of Basavanna, in spite of his intimate proximity with Basavanna does not undergo the kind of ‘conversion’ that the saint aims at. Bhakti religious believed in proselytization unlike classical Hinduism. Conversion here is not to be mixed up with the narrow and restricted connotation that it has acquired in these days. Converts to Virasaivism were taught to give up the way of image-worship yajnas and animal sacrifices and instead strive for *anubhava*- the spiritual experience which was to be gained with help from the guru; the spiritual guide led the soul to Siva. Siva was the ultimate being, the formless God, since Virasaivas believed in the *nirguna* form of God.

Jagadeva as a convert presents a problem of a different kind from that of his fellow converts. Jagadeva lacks the humility that his guru possesses and takes his relationship with Basavanna to be a ladder by which he can climb to success. Having tasted of authoritative power over the sharanas, Jagadeva’s was a stray case of a Brahmin convert. The majority belonged to the lowest rung of the social structure that were naturally under his sway and misusing his ability for leadership, he falls a prey to his hunger for power. He tries to become a self-styled guru without the qualities.

Basavanna ignores his father’s serious illness to guard the Treasury, his unharnessed lust for power makes him bitter against the saint later, even in his presence, and the reader is shocked to read Jagadeva’s dialogues with Basavanna:

JAGADEVA. Do you know what you are? You are a manipulator. A clever, conniving trickster.

BASAVANNA.(Pained). Why do you say that?...

JAGADEVA: You and I must have been enemies through the last seven births. That's why, no matter what I say; you can turn me into a worm in the eyes of the people. (TD 31)

Jagadeva, blinded by burning ambition and demands of the ego, had expected to turn into a 'here of the sharanas' overnight by merely guarding the Treasury in the absence of Basavanna and to the 'taken out in procession, hoisted on the shoulders' of 'friends and companions', and this makes him spiteful about the 'hosannas to Basavanna's prime motive, like Gandhiji during the freedom struggle, was to lead his people to freedom, spiritual and social freedom in the latter case. But the irony is that the very cause which attracts mobs to a certain revolution is forgotten as soon as their ends are achieved and they revert to their old selves and mentality again. This results in a rejection and disregard of not only the ideals, but also the person behind them.

Basavanna had endeavoured to take the sharanas, the convert-devotees through the six phases of *bhakti* (the Life's way for the devotee) comprising of the *bhakta* phase, in which one engages in- devotion and worship (Bhakti), the mahesvara-phase, in which one practices-discipline (nishte), the prasadi-phase, in which one receives the Lord (avadhana), the pranalinga-phase in which one moves from avadhana to experiencing the Lord (anubhava), the sarana-phase, in which the devotee surrenders and suffers in the love of the Lord and feels the divine joy (ananda), and finally in the aikya-phase, one is ultimately united with the *linga* or the Lord and merges completely in Him (samrasa).

Basavanna himself in the process of the difficult spiritual ascent knew that he had a juggernaut task before him, particularly because it concerned common people who were caught in the quagmire of material life and for whom the lofty ideals of Virasaivism as of any religion were far-fetched and remote. Basavanna realised that he would have to translate his preachings in the people's language to make them comprehensible and palatable for them. When Gundanna, a sharana youth in his impulse about initiating some tribals into the sharana youth in his impulse about initiating some tribals into the sharana fold, approaches Basavanna along with Kalayya, another sharana youth, he tries to pacify them saying: "A roof over their heads first, and a piece of land to spread their mats on. We can minister to their spiritual needs later."(TD 34)

In a multi – cultural country like India it is difficult to erase the petty–mindedness regarding one’s original caste–identity, even it means lending a helping hand at the time of crisis. The play has a humanistic approach with an appeal for social justice. The sharanas lived a life of contradiction because of their mixed identity. On the one hand they treated King Bijjala with respect, as the King himself says:

In all my sixty-two years, the only people 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. They treat me as- as what?... as a human being. (TD 15)

On the other hand, they could not rise above their petty mindedness when it came for discrimination against others from lower castes, even it meant lending a helping hand in times of crisis. The sharanas turn their prime concern of humanism upside down and Basavanna laments his inability to convert his people completely:

There’s a famine raging in Andhra. These poor souls have trecked for weeks in search of food and shelter. But our people won’t let them stray this side of the river because of their low caste. I tell you, for sheer inhumanity our people have no equal. (TD 35)

Moreover, Sharanas were not satisfied with their own religion and mentality that again results into division of superior Sharanas and inferior Non–Sharanas i.e. another hierarchy.

The current idea of religious conversion from one religion to another can also be derived from the happenings in *Tale-Danda*. Kalyana and Gundhanna inform Basavanna about the arrival of some tribals in the region. Kalyana suggests to Basavanna about their belief in idol worship and desires that they should be taken in their fold by the sharanas: “Basavanna, those tribal have brought their god with them. You should see that idol. Rolling eyes, a tongue lolling out. It’s very funny. I think- the sooner you initiate them into our fold the better!” (TD 35)

This view is important in the contemporary context where some communities in India are visualizing a threat to their existence as their people are converting into other

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communities such as Christianity. But our main interest, at present is to cater to the physical needs of the people and their spiritual concern should be put on a back burner, suggests Girish Karnad. Gangabhika, the wife of Basavanna, offers bags of paddy, textiles, salt and spices for the tribals who are coming from Andhra. The sufferings of these tribes who have tracked for weeks in search of food and shelter, hunger and starvation of the people on their way from Delhi to Daulatabad in Tughlaq, remind the sufferings of the poor in India.

Sharanas assemble at Basavanna's house. They propose a marriage between Brahmin girl and Dalit boy. Madhauvarasa, a Brahmin by birth and his wife Lalitamba decide to give their daughter Kalavati, aged about twelve in marriage to Sheelavanta, aged about fifteen, the son of Haralayya, a cobbler by birth and his wife Kalyani. They go to see Basavanna and his wife Gangambika to seek his blessings. Basavanna is shocked, thrilled and dumb-founded when he hears of the alliance. At the back of his mind is the hair-raising vision that the mystic Allama had once showed him- 'a pantomime' in which along with the holy, beautiful, he had seen the 'grotesque and the evil'. Basavanna remembers: "Filth beyond belief. As though a river full of spring blossoms also carried decaying flesh, rotten limbs, uprooted hair, a flood of pus- the stench inter-woven with the fragrance. I couldn't bear it." (TD 32)

This trance-vision coincides with the routine prophecy made by the goddess Dyamavva of the Banyan Tree to Haralayya's mother on a full moon day. She had prophesied that 'rivers of blood will flow if the marriage takes place', and 'human limbs will rot in the streets' (TD 41-42). Madhuvarasa notices Basavanna's reactions and remarks: "Naturally, we are gratified to notice that even you are taken by surprise. It's evident you did not anticipate that your efforts would bear fruit so soon..." (TD 37)

The parents of the to be bride and groom desired to gain publicity as epitomes of Virasaivism- true sharanas not namesake, whereas in reality it was just the reverse. Basavanna intervenes to explain the futility of the act.

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 to 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. (TD 38)

The playwright has not only highlighted the orthodoxical and diplomatic nature of upper ruling class, but also makes careful examination of pride and self – righteousness of Sharanas, whom sole concern, was the propagation of their ideologies. At the prospect of an inter–caste marriage both the parents of Kalavati and Sheelavanta are unwilling to listen to their children, just to prove their sincere concern for the movement.

But Madhavarasa is in a heroic spirit and says that “Like Lord Shiva himself, we shall drink that venom and hold it blocked in our throats! ...It’s s question of life and death for these children. From tomorrow the wrath of the bigoted will pursue them like a swarm of snakes, to strike as they pause to put up a roof or light an oven. Who will protect them then?” (TD 38).

Madhuvarasa goes on to say “I shall not hesitate to sacrifice my daughter’s life to forward the cause of our great movement.” (TD 39) He behaves in the manner of a dogmatic typical father who dare not hesitate to sacrifice the life of his daughter in the name of Machiavellian ideologies like family, honour, religion, gotra, caste, etc.

India has come up as the host of Common Wealth Games on the platform of world. But is still circumscribed by hollow conventions and cherishes the family honour which depends on adherence to caste system. The murder of Delhi based journalist Nirupam Pathak, Kuldeep–Monika murder case, Sushma Tiwari–PrabhuNochil case, Monika–Rinku case, Manoj Banwala–Babli case and various such heinous crimes cover the headlines of daily news papers and tele–media that help to unveil the diehard and conventional thinking of our highly educated Indian society. Basavanna’s teaching that no one has a right to sacrifice anyone, not even himself, is soon turned down by Haralayya who says, “The word ‘sacrifice’ strikes terror in me. Too long have my people sacrificed our women to the greed of the upper castes, our sons to their cosmic theories of rebirth.”(TD 39)

The play deals with the issues related to the authority of parents imposed upon the decision making skills of their children. In our nation the judgment of parents is final irrespective of the views of their children. From the decision of career to marriage everything should be in accordance with their sole choice. When Sheelavata, the son of Haralayya, is

asked by Kakkayya for his take on marriage prospectus, the former is dumbfounded. He looks at his parents for their response and is confused a lot.

Basavanna tries to convince the ignorant and fanatic sharanas; “We are not prepared for the kind of revolution this wedding is. We haven’t worked long enough or hard enough!” (TD 44). When Bijjala comes to know about the marriage, he goes to meet Basavanna to request him to call it off, as a horde of chest-beating Brahmins had confronted him and created uproar. Basavanna informs him that the parents are adamant in their resolve regarding the marriage, in spite of his warning. At that same time not approving Bijjala’s step-treatment to the sharanas he says: “But who is being punished for those crimes? Are the birds to be penalized because the snakes resent their ability to fly?” (TD 48). When Basavanna hints that a mass exodus of the sharanas will follow if he quits the kingdom, Bijjala is brought to his sense and his admiration for Basavanna gives way to contempt:

You are a sly fox, I admit it. A hundred and ninety-six thousand *sharanas!*  
They only have to lay down their implements...Will any jack-ass of a king  
agree to place himself willingly in such a mess? (TD 48-49)

^Bijjala feels that the sharanas being the economic backbone of the state are blackmailing him by twisting his areas behind his back; he threatens Basavanna that he will stamp all of them ‘like a cushionful of bed-bugs’. And then announces indifferently:

If you and the Brahmins are bent on self-destruction, go ahead. I wish  
you luck. I shall take my army away and entertain myself with a little  
warfare. When you are done, I shall return home to count your corpses.  
(TD 50)

Bijjala is as ineffective in controlling his indulgent son Sovideva, the future king, who has a claim to the throne because he is the scion and not because he is capable. This situation also has echoes in modern Indian political history, where there are ample instances of children promoting politicians. Sovideva’s hollow pride is injured when he learns that his father has conceded with the demands of the sharanas and is enraged: “They could have had a quiet wedding in some village Instead they have to flaunt it here- in the capital.” (TD 55)



Damodra Bhatta rushes to Indrani's house in the courtesan's Quarter to talk to Sovideva about the marriage. Indrani, the courtesan, sees no reason in their going hysterical about it. So, Damodara explains her how the inter-caste marriage is a great sacrilege: "Indrani, the Rig Veda tells us that the four Varnas flowed out of the Primodal Man: the Brahmin from the head, the Shudra from the body of the purusha. Howhorrifying!" (TD 55) Indrani is not convinced and praises Basavanna and his followers: "But the sharanas have done so much for the downtrodden and the destitute" (TD 56). Damodra criticises Bijjala for protecting the *sharanas*. As Manchanna arrives with some courtiers, tradesmen, soldiers and citizens, he starts proclaiming the titles of Sovideva as if he had become the king of Kalyan.

Sovideva, Damodara and Manchanna hatch a plot against the king. They first get the loyal servants of Bijjala killed and then imprison him in his own palace. Basavanna knows this and requests *sharanas* to stand by the king. But most of them refuse to save him from Sovideva. So he himself, followed by a few sharanas, visits Bijjala who is greatly perturbed. He advises him to cling to Lord Shiva who alone can save him from danger. As he leaves for Kappadi, Bijjalafrenzily sobs and laughs.

In a disastrous conjunction, Sovideva joins with ManchannaKramita, Brahmin adviser to the king and Damadora Bhatta, the queen's priest and conspires to arrange for his own coronation under the pretext that the king no longer deserves to occupy the throne. Bijjala is pained to see Sovideva wearing his crown and repents: "I was blind, Rambha. Blind! Fool! Fool! I was on the watch against the worm's outside- while raising a snake inside the house. Imbecile! (TD 62)

Karnad, in the convention of problem playwrights like Galsworthy and Shaw, exhibits the corruption and disorder prevailing in the contemporary society. Sovideva's bribing Bijjala's men, Bijjala's forefathers' bribing Brahmins for their sole profits and Mallibomma paying Rachappa, the palace guard, five gold coins to show him the secret passage that lead into the palace bring out the hollow structure of modern sophisticated society. Corrupters are easily escaped by bribing some amount. They do not pay the taxes and keep hidden the black money in Swiss and other international banks; still they are not questioned, because they have political support. Common Wealth Games 2010 scandal is a fresh example where thousands

of crores were spent without any planning to bring shame and criticism on the global front. If a person dares to reform the society he is misinterpreted by the same.

Sovideva follows the advice of Damodara and Manchanna and persecutes the *sharanas* violently and mercilessly. As Basavanna is away, the *sharanas* lose heart and go helter-skelter. Damodara and Manchanna feel satisfied with it. But Manchanna is afraid of Basavanna: “The *sharanas* have lost their drive and in course of time are bound to revert to caste for sheer survival. Unfortunately Basavanna is alive and we can take nothing for granted” (TD 79). Damodara pleads with Sovideva for forgiveness and generosity. But Manchanna advises him to get all the *sharanas* decimated without any discrimination and pay a brief visit to his father-in-law for his safety. Sovideva therefore leaves with Damodara, keeping Manchanna in charge of the kingdom.

Basavanna hoping in vain that politics could be spiritualised asks the *sharanas* to stand by the king as gratitude for his sanction to the marriage. Basavanna is let down once again by his followers who are not willing to ‘sit and sway in the shadow of the throne’. Jagadeva and others cannot wait and they hound the king and attack him with swords and finally kill him at his own behest, as he tells them that if they fail the curse of Basavanna would fall upon their head. Bijjala takes on the capital punishment voluntarily. Just as the *sharanas* have got out of a Basavanna’s hands, Sovideva was beyond his father’s control. Sovideva orders the preparations for his own coronation and commands that the *sharanas* be made to pay for their defiance of the throne. Sovideva spews violent revenge and sees to it that the *sharanas*- the ‘tribe of snakes’ do not escape death:

Men women, children- cut them down. Set the hounds after them... burn the houses that gave them shelter, Burn their books. Yes, the books! Tear them into shreds and consign them to the wells. Their voices shall be stilled forever- (TD 90)

Towards the end of the play, Basavanna is intimated about Bijjala’s death and it is the last straw that he can take. Basavanna can do nothing but pray:

Whose name? And whose face? Whose wound and whose blood? This carcass is mine. And I am also the King’s slayer. So this is the last of

Allama’s tableaux. The festivities are over, the streets deserted. The night

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has departed and the world is silent. Lord of the Meeting Rivers, absorb this inner shrine into the fine tip of your flame. Until all becomes light within light. The great dawn of light. (TD 88)

Basavanna is completely depressed by this time and confines to his wife that 'nothingness' had begun 'to beckon him'. Unable to convert the extremists that the sharanas had turned into in spite of his commitment to non-violence as well as the growing dehumanization all around, Basavanna leaves Kalyan and retreats to Kappadisangama, the place where three rivers meet in search of ultimate refuge. From reverence for the sacred confluence of rivers 'then' to dividing a river into four 'now', we have surely come a long, long way.

The end of Basavanna at the climax marks a disgraceful failure of 'Sharana Movement'. The whole city reels into bloodbath. People rush through the streets howling, panting and screaming. No one console them. The fathers of the bride and groom are caught, their eyes are plucked out within iron rods, and they are tied to the legs of an elephant and are dragged through the streets of Kalyan. There are widespread riots, stampedes, destructions and murders. "Temples are sacked, trading houses torched. The city reels under gruesome tales of rape, murder and rioting." (TD 89) Sovideva orders to kill Sharanas wherever they are caught – "Pursue them. Don't let them escape. Men, women, children – cut them all down. Set the hounds after them... Burn the houses that give them shelter. Burn their books... Tear them into shreds and consign them to the wells." (TD 90) The bloodshed and chaos in the play is reminiscent of the atmosphere of uneasiness during the partition of India.

The play depicts a strong opposition and rejection of the social change, which triggers social and political restlessness because of handful authorities that persist to maintain the pre-set social order and system as a stigma of our society and culture. The new King Sovideva declares, "From this moment all sharanas, foreigners, and free thinkers are expelled from this land on pain of death. Women and the lower orders shall live within the norms prescribed by our ancient tradition, or else they'll suffer like dogs... For the King is God incarnate!" (TD 90). Vedic chants at the coronation of Sovideva that re-established the caste order in Kalyan. Thus, all the efforts to establish a casteless society become futile.

The play criticizes the heinous practice of child marriage system, which unfortunately is still in practice in some undeveloped and rural areas of U.P., Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan, Haryana, West Bengal and some other states of India. Savitri, the wife of Jagadeva, aged about fourteen, Kalavati, a Brahmin girl, aged about twelve and the daughter-in-law of Guddevva are shown as child brides. Madhuvarsa's concern regarding Kalavati is appropriate when she says, "our daughter isn't a woman yet. To send her with her husband now." (TD 46) The early marriage of young children snatches their childhood before they understand the real meaning of it. It pre-matures them affecting their psychological and physical growth. The girls have to pay with their lives.

The play questions the rooted traditional belief regarding having a son for the ultimate salvation. Bijjala ridicules this Hindu philosophy, "A son is the final goal of human existence! It may be that he drinks your blood and chews your bones to mash. But he is the one who'll keep your soul fed till eternity."(TD 20) In scene seven Bijjala is kicked off by his son Sovideva to be rolled on the ground. Jagadeva the only son of Amba and Shastri is unconcerned for his ailing parents. He only cares only about the treasury and his reputation among Sharanas. Amba expresses her grief, "I was alone here. You went off with the sharanas and didn't even bother to check if we were dead or alive here. How much can one ask of the neighbours? So embarrassing to." (TD 4)

*Tale- Danda* is a tragedy of an individual as well as the tragedy of a society. Caste system remains an integral part of Indian thinking. As such, inter- caste marriages are not a very common phenomenon. The play exposes this ugly deformity of the Hindu society. In this play, the movement against the social evil is launched by the Sharanas for whom sincerity of action and selfless service of humanity is a true religion in which all human beings are equal.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* includes numerous illustrations of deceit, atrocity and political strategy so the play may be labelled as a tale of brutality, political scheming and treachery. However, that is just one aspect of this political saga. On a profound level, the play proves to be a meditation upon man's frailties, dilemmas, intentions and inclinations that ultimately determine the fate and existence of mankind. Karnad's *Tughlaq* thus, brings home the

message that if a man wants to fulfil his ambition, he must be true to his thoughts, words and deeds.

*Tale-Danda* exploits history for the purpose of social change and amelioration of low caste people. The play successfully exposes the heinous outcomes of this undesirable system. The play deals with the theme of love, humanity and brotherhood to treat all the people alike irrespective of their colour, caste and creed that poisonously sweep in to destroy the harmony and peace structure within the country. So many times innocent people have been slaughtered in the name of religion and caste, but the fact remain the same and “Casteism” still exists. People like Basavanna are born in every era in the form of Siddhartha, Gandhi, Vardhamana, but the power – mongers, sectarian bigotry and religious fanatics weaken the secularism and multi – culturalism.

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