

## A DISCOURSE OF CASTE AND INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH POWER IN TALE-DANDA

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### Abstract

Girish Karnad is one of the famous modern Indian English playwrights. He wrote thirteen plays in Kannada language and translated them into English. Most of his plays are based on myth, history or folk tales. Though rooted in the past, the plays have contemporary relevance. He wrote the historical play *Tale-Danda* when the Mandal-Mandir movement reached its zenith in India. *Tale-Danda* is based on Basavanna's life, the poet-saint, mystic, and social reformer. The play addresses the discourse of caste and its interrelationship with power in the light of the *Sharana* movement led by Basavanna, the poet-saint. *Tale-Danda* deals with power relationships in the caste discourse, with Bijjala-Basavanna and King Bijjala-attendants. *Tale-Danda* presents the evils of the caste system. Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse is also applied to examine the link between discourse and the modality of power relations in *Tale-Danda*. The paper aims to discuss how caste discourse functions through power and its implications for understanding the traditional caste system.

**Keywords:** Caste System, *Sharana* Movement, Discourse, Sovereign Power, Power Relations, King Bijjala, Sovideva, Basavanna, Michel Foucault

### Introduction

The word 'power', comes from the French word *pouvoir*. Etymologically speaking, 'power' means "ability to act or do strength, vigour, might." For Foucault, power is an abstract idea. He identifies three major types of power: bio-power, disciplinary power, and sovereign power. Power is not seen as a physical entity without a specific principality. According to him, power is

not a position, a thing or a capacity that an individual, a group or a society hold. Instead, it is a relation between individuals and groups that come together in an organised or unorganised way.

The historical play *Tale-Danda*, written by Girish Karnad, is based on Basavanna's life, the poet-saint, mystic, and social reformer. The play's events occur in Kalyan, Karnataka, during the twelfth century. The play can be understood as a discourse of caste and its inherent interrelationship with power relationships.

Foucault discusses this at length on discourse. He states discourse "as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements (*The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language* 80)." In the play *Tale-Danda*, the expression "general domain of all statements" covers all the ordinary statements and statements given by King Bijjala on caste that have a purposeful meaning and influence on others, "an individualisable group of statements" refers to the statements given by upper caste people like Damodara Bhatt, Manchanna Kramita and other lower caste people like Kalayya and Haralayya and "a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements" can be alluded to Basavanna's statements.

As Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker rightly observes: "Caste appears in *Tale-Danda* as the basis of Hindu socio-religious organisation across class divisions, and the play presents the philosophical dialectic caste as well as the practical consequences of the opposing positions" (Introduction xi). The play *Tale-Danda* presents how Hindu religion cuts Kalyan citizens by terming as upper caste and lower caste. As "the philosophical dialectic caste", the play abounds in various references to Indian caste system including *varnashrama dharma* and the *Rig-veda*. Apart from studying the play as a historical reconstruction and political upheaval, one cannot fail to see the caste as a discourse and its interrelationship with power at all levels.

Power relations have been within traditional Indian society at all levels-domestic, public to a significant degree, ordered around caste. Any discourse on caste, especially the caste system of stratification, is a relatively permanent feature that is based on one's birth, occupation, marriage, and even death. Because of caste-consciousness, social mobility ceased to exist, and inequalities sprang up because of this system in India. In his 'Introduction', Colin Gordon rightly writes, "Awakening ourselves to the real world of power relations is awakening ourselves to a world of endemic struggle. (*Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 3p. xx*)." In the play *Tale-Danda*, one finds an endemic struggle for power between King Bijjala and Sovideva, Sovideva and Jagadeva and even between the priests Damodara Bhatta and Manchanna Kramita.

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Dr. J. Priya (2021), in her paper 'Gender Discrimination in Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda* writes, "The play *Tale-Danda* helps the society in understanding the reality around them, especially the counterpoint to the patriarchal structures in the classical texts and institutions (301)." Her paper

considers the female characters in the play *Tale-Danda* and their reflection on incidents surrounding their male counterparts. G. Yadagiri (2020), in his essay 'Syntagmatic Significance in *Tale-Danda*', "looks for the hidden paradigms that form the part of the underlying structure and syntagm it creates (102)." This paper provides a structuralised approach to understanding the title and the incidents of the play. M. SaratBabu, in his brilliant article 'Social Deformity in *Tale-Danda*', writes, "Social deformity is... illustrated in its various aspects in Karnad's *Tale-Danda*. The ugly face of the caste system in India is exposed in *Tale-Danda* (287)" which speaks of how in the present, too, caste presents its ugly face. In his paper, 'Caste and Religion in *Tale-Danda*', A.R. Shukla studies the major theme of *Tle-Danda* from the point of view of caste and religion. He notes, "The major theme of Karnad's *Tale-Danda* is that deconstruction of caste and religion to arrive at its real, proper meaning and restructure the same for the benefit of the society and the country(290)."

### **Basavanna and *Sharana* Movement**

In 1168 A.D., Basavanna started a socio-religious movement called the *Sharana* movement in Kalyan, North Karnataka. As a part of the movement, poets, mystics, social revolutionaries, and philosophers joined him. They opposed idolatry, believed in gender equality and condemned the caste system. They followed the dictum 'Work is Worship' and rejected anti-social practices such as gender discrimination. They talked and wrote about God in their mother tongue, Kannada, rejecting Sanskrit. However, the *sharana* movement came to an end in anarchy and bloodshed when a Brahmin girl married an untouchable cobbler boy.

### **King Bijjala, the Antecedents of his Caste and Scion Sovideva**

King Bijjala, a Shudra, a barber by caste, becomes the King of Kalyan. He describes how he has become a Kshatriya. For the first five years, his forefathers ravaged the land, and for another five years, they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor. They even got married to every royal family and bribed generations of upper castes with millions of cows so they could have the caste of Kshatriya branded on their foreheads. He marries a Kshatriya princess, Rambhavati, and has a son by her Sovideva. He has contempt for Sovideva's behaviour. He awards the sons of his other wives independent kingdoms. Prince Sovideva is anguished. His sovereign power is exercised on Kallappa, his bodyguard:

Kallappa, this scion of the Kalachuryas craves to be a king, we are told. Now, in order to be a ruler, what is the primary qualification? Surely the ability to kick people around? That is why they say to be born a king in this life you need to have been a donkey in your last. You've heard that? Good. Now my son and heir will try to deliver a kick on your behind. But you must not let it land. If his foot touches you, I shall skin you alive, mind. Now honourable Yuvaraj, proceed. Go on. Kick him. (*Tale-Danda* 12-13)

## King Bijjala, Sovereign Power and Caste as a Discourse

King Bijjala discourse on the ancient caste system speaks of the primary qualification of a sovereign ruler. His words make a mockery of the Indian caste hierarchy. He orders Prince Sovideva to kick the back of his bodyguard, takes his turn, aims at and kicks behind Kallappa, resulting in a crash in which he falls on the floor. All this is nothing but an absolute sovereign power. "... An absolutist abuse... in the sense that each individual could avail himself, for his own ends and against others, of absolute power in its enormity—a sort of placing of the mechanisms of sovereignty at one's disposal, an opportunity to divert its effects to one's own benefit, for anyone clever enough to capture them." (*Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1954 Volume 3* pp.167-168)

King Bijjala knows that people in his kingdom look down upon him and his caste. Despite being a victim of the traditional Indian caste system, he doesn't hesitate to show his sovereign power as the King of Kalyan. As a result, thereupon, a power relationship exists between castes. King Bijjala is well aware of the lineage of his barber caste and has insights into caste, in general. He says about caste thus, "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!" (14-15) Here caste becomes a "general domain of all statements" as Foucault refers to discourse

## King Bijjala and his admiration for Basavanna and *Sharanas*

King Bijjala humbles himself when he 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" (14-15) " He admires the "vision" and "prodigious courage" of Basavanna who "wants to eradicate the caste structure, wipe it off the face of the earth. Annihilate the *varna* system" (15). One can see Basavanna as a precursor of Dr B. R. Ambedkar. Here, "*varna*" refers to caste.

King Bijjala knows that the business activity is prospering in Kalyan because of *sharanas* and their unflinching devotion to work. He quite open-heartedly appreciates *sharanas* for their considerable economic enterprise:

Every *sharanas* seeks only to earn the day's keep, makes no extrademands, treats profits with contempt. So who benefits? From every corner of the country, trade and commerce have come pouring into Kalyan, and now the city is bursting at its seams with money and activity. Even those who despise the *sharanas* for their beliefs need them for their economic enterprise—as indeed I do—and so they pour money into the *sharanas* coffers. (24)

Sovideva bitterly resents his father's praise for Basavanna and *sharanas*. He expresses his hatred for Basavanna and his followers. He believes in the misinformation he received, which was that Basavanna had been systematically defrauding the money from the State Treasury. By opening the Treasury, he attempts to trap Basavanna. Thereby, he wants to gain sympathy and receive affection from his father.

### **Jagadeva – a Brahmin *Sharana*-Caste as a Social Identity**

Jagadeva, an upper caste *Sharana*, learns Sovideva's opening plan for the Treasury. Immediately, he rallies *Sharanas* and encircles the Treasury to prevent Sovideva from tampering with it. He does all these to uphold Basavanna's honour. However, Basavanna immediately sends him to attend to his father on his deathbed.

Jagadeva reaches his house to attend his father on his deathbed from the King's Treasury along with his friend Mallibomma, a tanner's son. Jagadeva's mother, Amba, her friend, Bhagirathi and other women in the household detect the presence of a Tanner in their upper-caste quarter. Bhagirathi's words show hierarchy in a power relationship that exists between people in the name of caste: "Do you mind standing a little aside so the women of the house can move freely? What are we to do if you plant yourself on the doorstep like feudal chieftain" (3)? These words show the ill-treatment meted out to the low caste and discrimination against them by the upper caste. Amba, too, does not like a tanner coming inside their house. Jagadeva insists that his friend must be made to come into the house. He asks his mother to tell Mallibomma he will only enter the house if the latter comes inside. Later, she welcomes him inside the house. Here, caste is shown as a social identity regarding power relationships rather than ritual hierarchy. Here, power relationships regarding higher and lower caste status are often expressed with a purity-pollution nuance.

### ***Sharanas*, Inter-Caste Marriage and *Varnashrama Dharma***

The families of Madhuvarasa, a Brahmin-*Sharana*, Haralayya, a Cobbler-*Sharana* and other *sharanas* assemble at Basavanna's house to invite Basavanna on the occasion of betrothal. Basavanna foresees the danger involved in the marriage alliance, "The orthodox will see the mingling of castes as a blow at the 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" (38). He cannot digest the reality. In the present situation, understanding *Dharma*'s true meaning is very appropriate.

In his article 'Principles of Varna Dharma,' K. G. Mashruwala writes about Gandhi's conception of caste, "He [Gandhi] did speak of the abolition of caste to the extent they obstructed inter-dining, inter-marriage and social intercourse; of hierarchy in the caste system, and the differences in the incomes of several callings, as also of persons doing different types of works in the same industry or institution" (*Gandhi and Marx* 71).

Gandhi and Basavanna expressed a similar opinion about the caste system, though separated by some eight hundred years. They never spoke of inter-caste dining or inter-caste marriages in any public forum. Instead, they accepted the hierarchy in the Indian caste system prevalent among people in terms of their vocations.

Basavanna asks Sheelavanta whether he accepts the marriage with Kalavati. Sheelavanta likes Kalavati but does not want to marry her. He says the children in his neighbourhood would tease and call her a "cobbler's priestess" (40). Sheelavanta says that he is unwilling to give up his ancestral calling. Kalavathi holds her nose whenever she passes a cobbler's shop as she cannot bear the leather smell, which speaks of the rigidity of the Indian caste system, where one's caste is determined by birth rather than the vocation he takes up. Geeta Kumar writes, "As the caste in India is derived from the birth alone, it is a closed system. The caste cannot be transferred from one class to another class or be gained as a reward for the highest merit or given as an honorary title by even the most powerful monarch"(100). Basavanna is afraid of the consequences of inter-caste marriage, "We are not ready for the kind of revolution this wedding is. We haven't worked long enough or hard enough"(44). He remains pragmatic, has a foreboding sense that a disaster may occur, and vehemently expresses against the marriage. After a lengthy and heated argument, all the *Sharanas* agree that the marriage should be performed.

King Bijjala reaches Basavanna's house to stop the inter-caste marriage of Sheelavanta and Kalavati. As an absolute sovereign, he does not hesitate to pass an order, "This cursed wedding shall not take place! Do you understand. I am not willing to discuss the matter any further... I am Bijjala! Know that and be on your guard. If you insist on driving me to the limits of patience, I shall stamp all of you out like a cushionful of bed-bugs!" (*Tale-Danda* 48-49) The words of King Bijjala sound like an absolute sovereign who wishes to exercise his power and tries to keep his subjects under his control. Despite his initial vehement opposition to the inter-caste marriage, King Bijjala consents to the wedding. He is apprehensive that in Kalyan markets will collapse, streets will be empty and the trade will collapse resulting in the setback to the economy.

Basavanna prepares himself to express protest by sitting on the grounds in front of the king's palace till the prohibition is withdrawn. He reminds us of Gandhi, who offered passive resistance against the British to achieve freedom without violence, bloodshed, or threat. As Foucault states, "Where there is power, there is resistance... this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*The History of Sexuality: The Deployment of Sexuality*95).

### **Damodara Bhatta and the Distribution of Power**

A precursor of the foreboding incidents in the play and the gradual decline in the sovereign power of King Bijjala can be seen. Damodara Bhatta, Queen Rambhavathi's priest, enters the house of Indrani in the Courtesans' Quarter. By way of information to Sovideva about the inter-caste marriage, he explains to Indrani that the inter-caste marriage is sacrilegious:

“Indrani, the Rig Veda tells us that the four varnas flowed out of the Primordial Man: the Brahmin from the head, the Shudra from the feet. So what we have here in this wedding is the desecration of the body of the Purusha" (55).

For Damodara Bhatta, an orthodox upper-caste representative, inter-caste marriages are anathema and cannot come to the reality of the situation. He expounds *Sanatan Dharma*, bound with the Vedic tradition and Sanskrit language. By citing the Rig Veda, he tries to prove himself to be on the highest pedestal of the Indian caste system. He cannot accept the intermingling of castes in the name of marriage so easily. A firm believer in the caste hierarchy system, he turns to a bitter critic of Basavanna and repudiates Basavanna’s teaching philosophy of God.

Prince Sovideva joins hands with Damodara Bhatta and Manchanna Kramita, one of the perfect situations in the play to help us understand the ever-changing power relationship between the upper caste Hindus and the lower caste Hindus. Damodara Bhatta passes an order with power, “Can’t you hear the young Master calling you?(60)” The order is so harsh and powerful that even Kallappa, King Bijjala’s bodyguard, responds immediately. In Damodara Bhatta’s orders, one cannot fail to see “the distribution of power” from the sovereign King Bijjala to the other upper-caste people like Damodara Bhatta in capturing power. As Foucault opines, “The distributions of power and the appropriations of knowledge never represent only instantaneous slices taken from processes involving... Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distributions, they are matrices of transformations (*The History of Sexuality* p.99).” As a part of their political gambit, the trio-Damodara Bhatta, Manchanna Kramita and Sovideva- get King Bijjala’s servants killed and start preparations to make Sovideva heir apparent to the kingdom of Kalyan. The orthodox upper caste is hell-bent on indulging in revenge on *sharanas* for transgressing *varnaasrama dharma*.

### **King Bijjala and Power Relations**

King Bijjala doesn’t know the conspiracy being hatched by Damodara Bhatta that he has been made a victim of the power game. He could not stop smelling something fishy but too late for him to understand. He shouts, “You country bumpkin, who took you on? I ask for the court robes and you leave the crown out? Your parents be-! (*Calls out.*) Rukmayya" (61)! His shout clearly shows how relations of power exist by way of domination. As an absolute sovereign, he starts a vituperative attack on the man who replaced Rudrappa. It also shows the abuse of sovereign power. As Foucault writes about the exercise of power relations in the essay ‘The Subject and Power’, “Power relations are exercised... through the production and exchange of signs; and they are scarcely separable from goal-directed activities that permit the exercise of a power (such as training techniques, processes of domination, the means by which obedience is obtained), or that, to enable them to operate, call on relations of power (the division of labour and the hierarchy of tasks).” (*Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 3* p.338)

King Bijjala realises he has been made a victim of “Bloody treachery” (61). He cannot comprehend the reality of the situation in which he is placed. His self-reproach can be seen as a partial closure of King Bijjala’s sovereign power. He understands the foul game played by Sovideva. By the way, the latter laid a trap to fulfil his ambition for power. He realises he has become powerless and helpless. He is singled out by Sovideva, from all the other courtiers and servants and falls victim to the treachery played by his son. In this context, the words of Foucault are appropriate to understand the predicament and power of King Bijjala as an individual. “The individual, [here King Bijjala] that is not the *vis-à-vis* of power... The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.” (*Power/Knowledge* p.98) Sovideva captures the power, captivates the palace, and gets King Bijjala imprisoned with the help of the orthodox upper caste duo Manchanna Kramita and Damodara Bhatta.

### **Fissures in the *Sharana* Movement**

Jagadeva, Mallibomma, Kalayya and a few other *sharanas* hatch a conspiracy to kill King Bijjala. At this critical moment, the words of Kalayya, a *sharana* comment on a pertinent issue related to caste superiority, show the gradual waning of caste power and fissures in the *Sharana* movement.

### **Final Catastrophe**

King Bijjala walks up and down and mutters as imprisoned in the *pooja* room. He knows that he deserves this type of imprisonment and partial closure of the sovereign power of King Bijjala. He asks Mariappa, a boy attendant, to step into the *pooja* room:

Where's the ladder? Ask for one-No, wait. Climb onto my shoulders. Here... I am Bijjala and I'm not dead yet. If you make any more fuss, I'll just wring your neck. So get up-  
(*He bends. The boy sits on his shoulder.*)

That's not high enough. Stand up. Go on! I won't drop you. (*Laughs.*) I am your sovereign after all-I bear the weight of the earth on my shoulders. I won't drop you, I promise. (74)

The words spoken by King Bijjala are replete with sovereign power. He still assumes the role of a sovereign to his subjects. In the way of assumption, he doesn't hesitate to proclaim what “sovereign” is to the citizens of Kalyan. His order and manner speak all that of sovereign power. He believes that his sovereign power is well understood. By promising Mariappa that he would not drop the former, he tries to prove that he has the sovereign power to save the lives of the citizens. On receiving orders from him, Mariappa stands on the latter's shoulders with the help of the well in the inner sanctum of the *pooja* room.



At this juncture, Damodara Bhatta opens the door and steps in. He cannot bear to see a low-caste attendant step into the temple. His words speak of the caste hierarchy in terms of power prevalent in the Indian traditional society. They help us understand the practices of caste *vis-à-vis* power relations. "Mariappa, you low-born cur, don't you know you are not to step into the sanctum? You dare pollute the royal Pooja room? Come out instantly or else" (76).

Basavanna, followed by his *Sharanas*, arrives at the palace front yard. King Bijjala and Basavanna watch each other for the first time after he is taken as a captive by his son. He tries to pacify the perturbed soul of King Bijjala, "Believe in Him. I too shall go now to Kappadi of the meeting rivers in search of him. May Shiva bless you. *Sharan*" (78). On saying so, Basavanna and his companions leave King Bijjala forever.

Unable to bear the treason committed by Sovideva, he turns insane. Despite exhibiting insanity, King Bijjala doesn't hide his ambition for power, as revealed in his address. His words sound very optimistic that *sharanas* will come to his rescue from imprisonment. He is hopeful that Prince Sovideva will realise his folly and surrender before him.

Sovideva, Manchanna and Damodara assemble to discuss the future course of action in the aftermath of the inter-caste wedding. Damodara Bhatta notes, "The *Sharanans* lie inert, lost, adrift in a void of their own creation. Excellent! Now we must act" (78). He advises Sovideva, "Arrest those responsible for the wedding, Expel the leaders of..." (79).

In the aftermath of the inter-caste marriage, which turned out to be " [a] A nightmare (79), Manchanna Kramitha notes that *Sharanas* have lost their drive and are bound to convert to their original caste for sheer survival. He feels they must strike *sharanas* immediately. He says, "The King partakes of the divine. Who dare judge the King? We are there to interpret the sacred texts. The King is there to implement our advice. That's enough" (79). Manchanna's words speak of the caste system prevalent during the eleventh century. Manchanna acts as a powerbroker, even side-lining Damodara Bhatta. While justifying Manchanna's words to Kramitha, Sovideva proves that he is an absolute monarch through audacious in his words when he says, "Bravo! That's grand! You are right. I am the King and I can now make them pay for defying me at the Treasury!....(excited) I shall strike terror in their hearts, I shall wreak havoc" (79-80).

Gundanna, a *Sharana*, describes to Jagadeva and other *sharanas* terror acts initiated by the King's soldiers:

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-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 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 of this macabre series of murders by Gundanna shows how deeply entrenched the evils of the caste system in the parlance of India, especially in the eleventh century, leading to bloodbaths and violence. In this context, it is entirely appropriate to quote Foucault:

For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death... But if someone dared to raise up against him and transgress his laws, then he could exercise direct power over the offender's life: as punishment, the latter's would be put to death... Power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it. (*The History of Sexuality* 135-136)

Jagadeva and other *Sharanas* decide to avenge the death of fellow *Sharanas*. So, they plan to attack and trap Sovideva in the palace.

Jagadeva and other *sharanas* rush into the inner sanctum. Jagadeva lies to King Bijjala, saying they have come from Basavanna and bringing King Bijjala out of the sanctum. Once King Bijjala steps out of the sanctum, Jagadeva stabs and pushes him to death on the floor.

After killing King Bijjala, Jagadeva commits suicide by plunging a dagger into his body. The act of committing suicide by Jagadeva reminds us of premature deaths, especially suicides of young leaders in anti-social activities. The suicide of Jagadeva points out the futility of any movement feeding upon violence and bloodbath without proper aim or direction.

Sovideva learns about the situation prevailing in Kalyan from two messengers. As one of the messengers gives the picture, "The royal guards have gone on a rampage and started looting the city. Temples are sacked, trading houses torched. The city reels under gruesome tales of rape, murder and rioting. Sir, you must rush to Kalyan" (89).

The information reveals "...one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power [which] was the right to decide life and death... It was no longer considered that this power of the sovereign over his subjects could be exercised in an absolute and unconditional way, but only in cases where the sovereign's very existence was in jeopardy: a sort of rejoinder." (*The History of Sexuality* 135)

Sovideva places the blame squarely on Damodara Bhatta for all these horror events. When the latter tries to reply, he orders a guard to shut Damodara Bhatta up. The guard kills him at once. He wants to wreak havoc in the lives of *sharanas* by the annihilation of *Sharanas* and crushing their progeny, which clearly shows how a sovereign exercises power. It is entirely appropriate to quote Foucault, "The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring" (*The History of Sexuality* 136).

A messenger informs Sovideva, "Sir, the *sharanas* flee Kalyan. They spread out in all eight directions. One lot has plunged into the fever-ridden jungles of Uluvi. Another heads for Andhra" (90). He passes orders directly to the messengers:

Pursue them. Don't let them escape. Men, women, children-cut them all down. Set the hounds after them. Search each wood, each bush. Burn the houses that give shelter. Burn their books. Yes, the books! Tear them into shreds and consign them to the wells. Their voices shall be stilled for ever...From this moment all *sharanas*, foreigners, and free thinkers are expelled from this land on pain of death. Women and lower orders shall live within the norms prescribed by our ancient traditions, or else they'll suffer like dogs. Each citizen shall consider himself a soldier ready to lay down his life for the King. For the King is God incarnate!(90)

While the city of Kalyan burns in flames, Prince Sovideva is seated on a throne by ManchannaKramitha and three other Brahmins. The eulogies of the heralds on Prince Sovideva drown the sound of drums, and screams of women and children.

Stating the reason behind the failure of the *sharana* movement, Karnad, in an interview, says, "Moreover, some of Basavanna's disciples revolted against their leader. For 200 years, the *sharavannas* [*sharanas*] hid in the jungle, re-emerging as casteists ironically, a majority of them are Lingayats. Everyone blamed everyone else for what had happened. But ultimately the betrayal came from the intellectuals." (Madhu Jain 160-161)

Thus, *Tale-Danda* presents the power relations that exist at various levels of Indian society, especially the hierarchy of caste and also shows how the upper caste people, in the name of power, victimise the lower caste people. Geeta Kumar writes:

The whole city of Kalyan is bathed in the blood of innocent people because the power-hungry rulers and the obscurantist nobility would not accept change. Their pathological hatred of the lower castes has led them to behave bestially. For the manipulators of the political system, men and women are merely pawns to be sacrificed at will for self-interest and grabbing of power. (100)

However, the play offers no solution to the caste problem in India. As Karnad says in an interview with Moutushi Chakravartee, "It's [the play] not necessarily an attack on caste. It's a question of why" (50).

## Conclusion

By delving deep into the historical past and breathing life into the characters of King Bijjala, Basavanna, Jagadeva and others, Karnad brings out the contemporary relevance of the caste. The idea of caste consciousness holds good even today with the power relations of the society, wherein people of upper castes wield supremacy over lower castes. One finds no difference between the twelfth century and the early nineties of this century in India. The issue of caste and power relations continues on fault lines between the rulers and the ruled.

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