

TUSSLE BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG TALE -DANDA (PRE – MODERN HISTORY OF INDIA) AND FIRE AND THE RAIN (FOREST CANTO OF MAHABHARATA)

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ABSTRACT

Religion is a major factor in India. Some of the scriptures are propagating the wrong philosophy and some are misinterpreted by the people to befool the public. The Dalits have shown that the saying Ignorance is Bliss does not apply to them. They have been following the politicized standard of religious preaching; they consider themselves lesser than the people who belong to the higher caste of the people. The upper caste people misguide the lower caste persons and make them understand that they are born to be subjects for doing menial jobs. Wrong literature has made the situation worse which spreads the message of caste discrimination as the godly concept of the world. This paper will portray the caste system in India with a critical analysis of the celebrated books of Girish Karnad namely TALE-DANDA and FIRE AND THE RAIN.

KEYWORDS: *Manusmriti, Dalit, Savarna, Discrimination, Technique*

INTRODUCTION

Talking about the origin of religion is a pet technique of Girish Karnad to show a mirror to the society; the feud between Hindu and Muslim is shown in the text. Showing the movement against the social evils of the society is a technique to show people that they need to start campaigning against social problems and the result may be not in favor because we are trying to challenge the status quo of the orthodox society. That all human beings are susceptible to troubles and they are going to have a tough time but the spirit of rising from the worse situation to the good one is the essence of life. Sorrow is the center of life and without it, no one can learn or rise. Karnad dexterously shows all this in the mentioned plays. He is always appreciated for showing the dark reality and solutions for the complexities of life.

People have different castes and Savarna are treated as the higher caste; they can keep their God with them in a sort of cell and the lower caste person is not allowed to even look towards the idol of God. God is declared as it is only for the high caste people and the lower caste people are destined to remain bereft of benediction of God. The higher caste Savarnas works according to their book *Manusmriti* and they control other Verna and castes to rule over them. Rapacity, greed, trickery, and fraud by the Savarnas are the root cause of casteism. The text of *Manusmriti* is written with a biased intent where a particular caste is given privileges.

Savarna gets all the power by the rules as the logic is given that Brahmins are born from the mouth of Brahma. Damodara explains it by giving an allusion to *Rig Veda* that Brahmins are born from the head and the Shudras from the feet. There is no logic in this concept but it is written, accepted, and truly followed by the people.

Rig Veda tells us that the four varnas
 flowed out of the Primordial Man: the
 Brahmin from the head, the Shudra from the
 feet, (55)

The upper-caste Brahmin enjoys limitless privileges as the humans are given the higher position amongst all the animals, and the Brahmins are the best of all. The Brahmins are treated as the Kshatriya and even considered as the father of Kshatriya. Shudras are not allowed to hold any property because that can create problems for Brahmins and Shudras are considered as the depressed ones. The significance of the life of a Shudras is not more than killing a cat, frog, dog, rabbit, owl, or a cock. Thus, their life is like an insect. They are made for wearing worn-out clothes and to eat leaf overs. A Shudra is a servant, not a human being. Kshatriya stands for power and Vaishya for richness but a Shudra is treated as an abominable name.

TECHNIQUE

The point of Indian Secularism is pointed out in *Tale-Danda*. The technique of presenting the major problems of the society like casteism and racism is adopted. Basavanna was the people who composed a verse to take arms against these problems but failed. Using songs is an inevitable technique of Girish Karnad used in his other plays. The song was:

“Do not steal.
 Do not kill.
 Do not ever lie.
 Do not rage.” (Karnad 21)

The action of the play is slow in the beginning but after the issue of an inter-caste marriage, it seems as the play is running at a high pace with fast actions. The rapidness of the actions has been turned faster according to the social turmoil. Hypergamous and Hypergamous were the two popular concepts that were hindering the development of society.

The most controversial text *Manusmriti* prescribes unbearable punishment for a lower caste person if he or she recites *Veda* or by mistake hears it. For many centuries, Brahmins kept the lower caste people away from basic education which is infected inhuman. The Shudras are a slave to three upper varnas Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya. The condition of untouchables was extremely tough in India as they were bound to keep a broom hanging at their back to clean the trodden path as it can be used by any Brahmin and he or she can get polluted. Moreover, they kept an earthen pot at the head to spit in it as they were not allowed to spit anywhere.

Nikunja Vihari Banerjee is a prominent author who has shown the venomous Rules of Manusmiriti. According to him the rules based on caste are stopped the growth of Hindu society a time ago and still hampering it. It led the country towards backwardness. (Banerjee 212)

To cite more examples in the context where the untouchables are disallowed in the society. Mulk Raj Anand has written a wonderful piece of writing *Untouchable* where the underdog Bakha has to announce before moving anywhere on the road like Posh Posh. (Anand 57) for the upper caste people as they can get into his touch and spoil their purity. In the

same text, the upper caste people try to molest the lower caste girls like Sohini and blamed them like Pandit Kalinath blames Sohini.

In the *Fire and the Rain*, Nittilai a hunter girl comments on the same aspect that the high caste people are a hypocrite and they want to bed with the low caste women as they are not capable to oppose them but don't want to wed them as they are earthworms. These high-caste men are glad enough to bedour women but not to wed them. (*Fire and the Rain* 8)

In society, the system of marriage is very strange as two phrases are very popular Anuloma and Pratiloma. In the Anuloma marriage, a higher caste person can marry a lower caste girl but the opposite of this is not possible. It means a lower cast person cannot marry a higher-caste girl.

It is explained in such a way by one of the authors that “Anuloma, marriage between a higher position and lower standing lady, is passable; yet pratiloma, marriage between a lower rank man and a higher station lady, is not the middle of the road at any cost.” (Rao 3)

It is also seen that the upper caste people are privileged to take water first from the reservoir and the lower caste people are only allowed to take water after them. They fear if the lower caste person takes water first then the water will get polluted.

Among all these incidents which are relegating the lower caste people, some reformative actions also took place in history as the famous one-act play *Chandalika* (1933) by Rabindranath Tagore shows that a Buddhist monk accepts water by the hand of a Chandal girl (according to the *Manusmriti* Chandal is a despicable caste) and stated that water is always pure, it can't be polluted just by the touch by a lower caste person. As I am a human being, so also are you and all water is clean and holy that cools our heart and satisfies our thirst. (Tagore 148)

In the play *Tale-Danda*, Basavanna's wife says about the cheap mentality of people for the woman that they are just like cattle and people feel shame being in the company of a woman. It is said about women that: A woman is just a ripe mango on a roadside tree for all of you, isn't she? (42)

Elaine Showalter describes the condition of the women that they are mistreated especially the foremothers and the condition of Rambhavati in the play of karnad reflects the same.

In the play *Tale-Danda*, the people from the Basavanna realized the need for quality at the level of discussing caste. They tended to generate a system where every caste should be respected as well as get privileges. They organize a new sect Sharana to give everyone an equal chance to live their life.

In the play, Sharanas perform a heinous act by attacking the people of the Jain community. Sambhashiv Shastri is very critical of Basavanna as they propagate the quality at the level of caste. He thinks that they are rebellious for the Brahmins as they don't support the thought of superiority of Brahmins. They opened the temple of Lord Shiva and decided to allow all the people in it. They wanted to reject the orthodox of low and high caste. They refused to accept the orthodox and slavery.

The king of the place Bijala is also in favor of such thoughts but he knows the orthodox of castism prevailing at that place. He says that people have a particular thought for the low caste people. According to him, a Shudra is a poor guy

who is born to tolerate poverty and die in the same condition. One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it off the top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barbera shepherd—a scavenger (14, 15)

The thought of belonging to a pure race is a myth according to the ethnologists. The Brahmins boast over their purity of race as they came directly from the mouth of Brahma. There is no pure race all around the world as every caste and creed is a mixture.

An author Bhandarkar in his paper foreign elements in the Hindu stated that no caste is free from the stain of foreign blood; even the warriors like Marathas, Kshatriyas, and including Rajputs all are having the mixture of blood. It is a kind of delusion that they are having pure blood.

Damodar Bhatta is orthodox and he supports caste discrimination as mentioned earlier; he repudiates Basavanna's opinion of rejecting caste discrimination. He says that one's castes is one's home, reputation, and infect everything. "One's caste is like one's home—meant for one's self and one's family. It is shaped to one's needs, one's comforts, and one's traditions". (*Tale-Danda* 56)

The division based on labor is somewhat depressing for the people who are designated to do menial jobs. Other privileged castes can prove their superiority just because they are given more importance by default in the written scriptures.

Dr. Ambedkar who is called the panther of Dalits explained caste discrimination in a very lucid way by calling it a way to satisfy the Brahmin caste as the other caste people were not allowed to speak their minds.

In the play *Tale-Danda*, the priest of queen Rambhavati is an impartial man and king Bijjala mentions that Basavanna and his support treated him as a low caste person but Sharanas are the ones who gave him the true value and reputation.

He says that in all my sixty-two years, the only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly are the sharanas: Basavanna and his men. They treat me as—as what? — As a human being. (15)

Bhatta dislikes the open and bold behavior of the king. He instigates Sovideva to punish the king for his liberal attitude for caste discrimination and he is the only person who sowed the seeds of suspicion in the mind of the king to generate the atmosphere of animosity for the inappropriate use of the state fund by Basavanna.

The king was in favor of intercaste marriage and that idea created a problem and Bhatta was against such pratilom marriages.

In the absence of Basavanna and King Bijjala, Sovideva inspects the treasury to find the inappropriate use of money as he dislikes the idea of Basavanna that they spend a lot of money on the hospitality of guests. Sovideva wants to make "him unpopular" (Tyagi 6) before the king so he can win the favor of his father to handle the state funds. He finds nothing and all the people are happy as people trust the Basavanna for their honesty and follow the advice given to them. Jagdeva the followers of Basavanna felt it a conspiracy against them.

Sharana was happy to see the stainless Basavanna as they are the trendsetters of a good life. The vachana by Basavanna preaches that: Do not steal. Do not kill. Do not ever lie. Do not rage. (15)

The king proves them wrong in a very sly manner though Basavana was innocent according to the plot of the play. They are blamed to use the fund to help Sharanas and when the son of Bijjala inspected they again managed the fund and got it clear. The king made it clear to Basavana with the help of a sharan woman Rangwa who speaks aloud before everyone that they are the culprits. She says “you have borrowed money from the treasury fifty thousand sovereigns for your good works and Shiva replaced the whole amount. When the young Master tried to catch you, there was nothing amiss.” (*Tale-Danda* 22)

Thus Basavana was helpless before the cunningness of king Bijjala and he is looking like “A Shameless Baffoon.” He is forced to resign with his people.

In the play, an inter-caste marriage takes place and both parties are not against each other rather they are respectful of their different Varnas. The orthodox society goes against such things and a big feud was created by the people who do not support inter-caste marriages.

Dr. S. V. Ketkar who is an eminent scholar on the matters of caste says that the marriage of a lower caste person to a higher caste woman is a heinous crime according to religious texts like *Manusmiriti*. “Marriage between men of lower castes and women of higher castes was positively forbidden. The marriage regarded as the greatest horror was the marriage of a Brahmin woman to a man of shudra Varna. The Hindus observe Caste not because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing Caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy, you must grapple with is not the people who observe Caste, but the shastras which teach this religion of Caste.” (Ketkar 144).

In the counter-reaction to such useless book descriptions, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar burnt the copy of the *Manusmiriti* in September 1926.

TECHNIQUE

The technique of allegorical explanation is used in the play *Fire and the Rain*. This play has also been cast into the film *Agnivarsa*. The play deals with theatre life, Vedic rituals, tribal life, and the relationship between man and woman. The language of intellect like Raibhya is shocking. He calls Vishakha 'a roving whore' and 'a buffalo' that's been rolling in the mud:

"You whore!

I could reduce you to ashes

turn you into a fistful of dust

with a simple curse

But let that husband of yours handle you

Let him clean up his shit!" (Karnad20)

Yavakari has just returned after his ten years of meditation and got special benediction by Lord Indra. Arvashu falls in love with a tribal girl Nittilai. He is to challenge the dignity of the Brahmin family his father, brother, and cousin forced him to choose out of two which are love or duty. In desperation, Yavakri seduces Vishakha which is his sister-in-

law; in anger, Raibhya leaves on him Brahmaraakshas for this. At the end of the play lord, Indra came to bless Arvasu as he chooses the path of duty and sacrifices his love. His love for Nittilai brings rain as they become the symbol of true love with the deep sense of sacrifice. The film adaptation of the play with the title Agnivarsha shows the same plot in a dynamic cinematographic way. It revolves around the seven mythical characters of *Mahabharata*.

Jackie Shroff plays the role of Pravasus, Ravina Tandon plays the role of Vishakha, and Arvasu role has been played by Milind Soman. Sonali Kulkarni is shown as Nittilai; Nagarjuna as Yavakri; Prabhudeva as Rakshasa; Mohan Agashe as Raibhya.

The title of the play *Fire and the Rain* has two opposite elements in it. On the one side, the fire of passion is shown in different forms, and on the other side the rain of sacrifice and love is projected which is essential for the survival of humanity.

It is rich with the clashing opposite elements like the jealousy of man against man, father against son, wife against husband, high caste against low caste people, man against God, freedom against bondage, hate against love, the fire against the rain, passion against the truth, and above all vidya against avidya. This play shows the human ethos and the modern apathy for human relationships.

Different personalities are struggling in their lives as they experience unexpected things in life. They transform according to the situations and take decisions according to social pressure. This shows the pain in the state when a person has an internal urge to do something but the control of the social code and conduct tore him up. Vishaka and Yavakri are two such characters who go against the code and they suffer. They try to find their real self and reach nowhere. As this is the thought of people that one person has multiple personalities and according to the situation one has to be caught up in a particular role.

For instance, Vishakha is under painful conditions as her husband abandons her for the sake of community. She becomes prey to bodily needs and finds the ex-lover and cousin as her best partner to satisfy her hunger. Before her pungent desire the morality and social conduct become menial; she becomes so desperate that she needs the sensual pleasure at any cost.

Nittilai represents the rain and Vishakha fire. Nittilai is murdered by her husband and brother and Indra comes on the Earth to give a boon to Arvasu for Paravashu's sacrifice and Nittilai's humanitarianism. Arvasu demands the release of BrahmaRakshasa and this act of love and humanity brings rain at the same moment.

Ultimately in the play, the idea of living life as Gods with immortality is despised and the momentary life of human beings is appreciated. This play is a great collection of metaphysical and supernatural elements and the climax of the play is where the human is in conversation with God and the rain comes.

The character of Raibhya is showing the human tendency of jealousy though he is also a learned Brahmin. He finds it odd to see that his brother got a supreme position than him in the community; in the spirit of revenge, he destroys his nephew Yavakari. He sends his son for the Yagya for rain as the chief priest. His younger son Arvasu involves in two things, one is joining the theater company and another is involving with a tribal girl; these two reasons are enough for him to be thrown out of the Brahmin community.

Vishakha the daughter-in-law of Rabhiya is experiencing life with a revengeful father-in-law who is crazy for taking revenge from his enemies. He is not able to focus on his ambitions.

In the past story of Yavakri, he was the lover of Vishakha and he left her for the sake of attaining Brahminhood. To appease Lord Indra he wandered in the wild with animals and poisonous insects. He ultimately attained what he wanted but the sensuousness of Vishakha always obsesses him. The moment he returns home he meets Vishakha and they are found in a compromising position by Rahbiya.

People are full of jealousy in the play to attain the highest order of Brahmin hood; some are dedicated to the cause of people but others are obsessed with their personal cadre. At the end of the novel rain comes and that is because of the Aravashu because he shows goodness by saving a demon from the curse and the Indra showers benediction. Now, it becomes a question that Indra is happy by the Yagya or by the humanitarian work by human beings. The rain comes the moment the comfort of a tormented soul is asked. It proves that the human race can only be saved by the act of kindness and modesty. Fake ambitions to become supreme in power or attaining the state of immortality are of no use.

Indian society has different standards for different castes. The conversation between Aravasu and Nittilai brings the difference between Brahmin and tribal life. Both the characters show great understanding and it was their decision by which they bring rain for the draught-ridden region. Nittilai tells Aravasu that he has to make an open declaration before everyone in her village that he is willing to marry her and it is difficult for him to do so. He is bound by the rules of Brahmin society but his aim in life was to act, dance, and love Nittilai.

In life, the natural inclinations cannot be controlled; the attraction of Yavakari for Vishakha is unflinching; she was his beloved before marriage but got married to his elder brother. Though Yavakari has been on the path of penance and sacrifice to please God, he succumbs before the needs of the body. He is the victim of lust which is not acceptable from an enlightened monk. Blind Rabiya finds Vishakha and Aravasu together and calls a demon to kill him. Vishakha takes the help of Aravasu to save Yavakari but it is late to do it. Paravasu kills his father as he disturbs his Yagya by killing Yavakari and misbehaving with Vishakha. Aravasu reaches late at the village of Nittilal as her father called all the people to listen to his declaration. Unfortunately, the father of Nittilai dies before this meeting. Paravsu tells the Aravashu that their father deserves death and he tells Aravshu to stay at home till his Yagya does not get completed. Aravshu is accused of murder and people beat him and Nittilai saves his life.

This play is a sort of reenactment of Indra's killing of his brother in jealousy. Aravasu regains his strength and presents an act before the villagers; these villagers find Nittilai in the audience and kill her. She dies in the arms of Aravasu and Indra appears to give one boon to him; he asks for her life but Indra convinces him that it would be wrong. At the same time, a demon comes and requests him to ask for his freedom from the curse. Aravasu asks for it and the rain comes as per his selfless decision. Aravasu's cry, "But why, Brother, why?" (*Fire and the Rain* 38), rings throughout the play frequently voicing the puzzled fury and heart-rending agony of betrayal by a worshipped brother. Girish Karnad expresses a deep concern over "the fear of brother destroying brother where the bonding of brothers within the Pandava and the Kuru clans is as close as the enmity between the cousins is ruthless and unrelenting." (246)

The myth of the *Mahabharata* is the story of a modern hero of every family and the play through the myth of Yavakri, an elitist Brahmin, tells the sad aspect of jealousy, power politics, and neglect of woman.

CONCLUSION

Talking about the origin of religion is a pet technique of Girish Karnad to show a mirror to the society; the feud between Hindu and Muslim is shown in the text. Showing the movement against the social evils of the society is a technique to show people that they need to start campaigning against social problems and the result may be not in favor because we are trying to challenge the status quo of the orthodox society. That all human beings are susceptible to troubles and they are going to have a tough time but the spirit of rising from the worse situation to the good one is the essence of life. Sorrow is the center of life and without it, no one can learn or rise. Karnad dexterously shows all this in the mentioned plays. He is always appreciated for showing the dark reality and solutions for the complexities of life.

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