

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN GIRISH KARNAD'S TALE-DANDA

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Abstract: Girish Karnad is a shining star in the galaxy of leading Indian English playwrights. Karnad has realistic approach to life in all his plays. His characters are not mere flesh and blood individuals but broad representatives of their class and ideology. The play *Tale-Danda* helps the society in understanding the reality around them especially the counter point to the patriarchal structures of the classical texts and institutions. Women Characters are aware of their position in the society and household levels. Even though the men are educated and make voices for the quality and social reform for the upliftment of women, in actual practice they are generally found to be chauvinistic, selfish and oppressive and treat their women unsympathetically. In Indian society a woman is said to be complete only after her marriage. For woman, the house is said to be an expression of her freedom; it is her domain. This paper explores oppression and repression of patriarchal order, the evils of gender discrimination in Indian society.

Key Words: patriarchal structures, oppression and repression, gender discrimination.

Girish Karnad has borrowed the plots of his plays from myths, legends, folk tales and historical events. But he has given modern consciousness to the mythical and historical dimension of his plays. The term 'modern consciousness' implies breaking away from the established rules, tradition and conventions both in themes and techniques, in form and style. Karnad's plays do not fall into the category of any of the conventional forms of drama- tragedy, comedy, problem plays, drama of ideas, history plays etc but they weave their own forms. Karnad is particularly provoked by gender discrimination in Indian society. Women are oppressed and exploited more than men in our society and it remains culturally patriarchal in spite of democracy. Women bear and bring up children do all the household work and some of them do jobs additionally. Women until their death remain the marginalized and suppressed group, without voice, without power and even without a consciousness of their peripheral position in society.

In *Tale-Danda* Queen Rambhavati clearly brings out her position to Sovideva. When Sovideva is raging against the sharanas, who have made a fool of him in the treasury episode, she tells him: "Do as you wish. Just don't upset your father, that's all. He turns his bad temper on me and I can't take it any longer" (TD, 8). When Sovideva accuses her of being in thrall to the sharanas's mystic saint-leader, Basavanna she

says: “What am I to do? Do you think your father ever listens to me?” (8) There is hardly a hint of equality in the husband-wife relationship. She might be the queen of the Kingdom, but her real standing is no better than any other servant of the palace, as far as the king is concerned. Bijjala’s mercurial moods which make him arrogant and overbearing towards Rambhavati testify to her inferior status. And how does she get him to fulfill her wishes? She has to wail and cry and shed tears to persuade Bijjala to leave sharanas alone. It is not that Bijjala does not love Rambhavati. He is fond of her and cares for her. But the deep-rooted patriarchal attitude made him feel superior and behave most of the time in a rude manner.

Rambhavati seems to be devoid of her ‘self’ or a ‘will of her own’. Her very existence is defined and concretized with reference to her husband. She does not mind her interiorized position and it is the outcome of the centuries of internalization of the patriarchal postulates by women in society. That she represents traditional women is also borne out by her unflinching allegiance to her husband through thick and thin. Though she is scolded and berated for her interference in the matter of the father-son antagonism, she willingly provides emotional succor to a suffering and tormented Bijjala, when he has been incarcerated by his son. Even in this condition, Bijjala remains brusque with her. Elaine Showalter’s words appropriately fit Rambhavati’s situation: “We have seen our forefathers as mindless, downtrodden souls, accepting century after century the fetters of their lot with passivity, unheeding or incapable of perceiving their exclusion from society” (229).

The other woman in the palace is Sovideva’s wife. He has discarded her and sent her to her parents, not bothering to bring her back. She is absent both literally and metaphorically from the scene. She does not exist in her husband’s scheme of things, who wantonly revels in the arms of a prostitute, Indirani. It is important to note that this voiceless woman acquires value in the changed context. Sovideva was in a confused stage after killing Haralayya and Madhuvarasa. He was advised to visit his father-in-law for support and bring his queen back. The words spoken by Sovideva on this occasion are revealing for his irony and male egocentricities. When Manchanna says to Sovideva: “And then pay a brief visit to your father-in-law, sir? His support may come in handy,” Sovideva answers: “Yes and see our queen again! She is our Queen after all, frigid bitch though she is” (TD, 48). Woman is valued for her functional utility only and not for her intrinsic worth as a human being.

The most important event in the play is the wedding between a high-caste Brahmin’s daughter and a cobbler’s son. The marriage is possible because both the families have embraced Sharana religion. It is a momentous event which forces even Basavanna to pause and reflect of the possible fall out. The girl’s mother Lalitamba’s reluctance has no weight or meaning, because it is her husband Madhuvarasa’s decision which matters. A typical characteristic of patriarchy is that men are in control and it is they who wield power. Women remain voiceless. Lalitamba points to the practical problems, besetting the alliance of a Brahmin girl with a cobbler boy. But her objections and fears are not satisfactorily resolved: they are

unceremoniously brushed aside by her husband, Madhuvarasa. The marriage takes place and after that Madhuvarasa and Haralayya are brutally murdered. That Madhuvarasa has to pay the price for his foolhardiness and his ignoring the points raised by Lalitamba is beside the point. Madhuvarasa acts as the representative of the stereotypical male in putting the woman's voice under erasure.

Basavanna's wife, Gangambiga does seem to enjoy a better position than many other women in as much as she takes part in the conversation that occurs at Basavanna's house. Basavanna himself is respectful towards her and regards her statements as worthy of consideration. She seems to have a voice. However she achieves within the four walls of the house. It is not for her to cross the threshold, and go out to lead the sharanas. Attainment of sainthood, the power to lead people, and the capacity to perform are rested in the male, Basavanna. Vanashree Tripathi says:

Women of all strata in *Tale-Danda* are made to suffer the trauma resulting from men's actions. Sapped and Sopped by the callous disregard of patriarchy their condition clearly indicates the difficulties their gender encountered in the historical past daring to transcend privately or individually the mundane, materialistic man-made constructs. (Three Plays, 117-118)

The most relevant example the shabby treatment meted out to woman is provided by the sharana Jagadeva. It is for men to become achievers, gather laurels and revel in glory by attaining their coveted goals. In the process, they feel free to take their vows, make resolutions, and not to look at their womenfolk. Marital responsibility does not matter. Woman is treated as a worm that can be easily trampled upon. When Jagadeva's wife wanted to inform his mother's illness, he refuses to meet her saying that, "I can't see. Tell her to go away. She knows I have sworn not to look upon a woman's face till we have achieved our goal.... She has to attend her mother-in-law" (TD, 71). In patriarchy, men command and it is woman's lot to obey, silently, without so much as a protesting sound. She will attend to her mother-in-law no doubt, but what about Jagadeva's responsibility towards his mother. He is not bothered. There is his wife to do the job. Woman's slavery leaves men free to pursue their wishes.

Such was the condition of women in the traditional Indian society, as the play predicts. Socio-cultural and religious movements and revolution left out this significant segment of society. Women remained a marginalized and suppressed group, without voice, without power, and maybe even without consciousness of their peripheral position in society. Women's condition was rightly observed by Elaine Showalter as the women's relationships to themselves and society essentially static, as fixed as to render women of the past mute and dumb, unable to write, and speak of even the truth.

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