CHAPTER III

SOCIAL DEFORMITY:

TALE-DANDA, STALE NEWS AND ONE DAY IN ASHADHA

... 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 ....

- TALE-DANDA

Disregarding for the moment the ideological distinctions among various Vedic cosmogonies, they all seem to be in agreement concerning one matter: the world we live in and know it emerged from a powerfully disruptive partition of a precosmogonic unity in accordance with the dictates of the law of necessity (Ṛta).¹

The Vedic cosmogonies thus symbolically reveal that the division of labour is an indispensable evil of civilization. These divisions did not remain horizontal for long but were hierarchized by the human urge to overcome
the feelings of inferiority of human beings caused by their alienation from Nature and to prove their power and superiority. The hierarchization, a major process of civilization, gave rise to competition which replaced cooperation. And the urge for superiority, as Adler would have argued, affected privatization, another major process of civilization. This process caused private family and private property. Even human love underwent privatization and so individualism emerged and replaced collectivism. Hierarchization and privatization have supported and sustained each other. All this has caused and consolidated social deformity and inequality.

Exploitation and oppression have become a ‘natural’ norm in our society as it has absorbed and observed individualism and competition. Consequently everybody takes inequality for granted. As Steiner aptly points out: "The difficulty which we have in feeling equality with all other human beings is the result in part of our banal training in competitiveness and individualism."\(^2\) He later talks about the dehumanizing effect of competition: "In our mad scramble to the top we forget how to love, how to think, and we lose track of who we are and what we really want."\(^3\) Marx also comments on the evil effects of the division of labour and social deformity:

It proved, incontrovertibly, the disastrous effects of machinery and division of labour; the concentration of capital and land in a few hands; over-production and crises; ... \(^4\)

The social deformity in the Hindu society took the form of 'caste system'. The Hindu society consists of four recognized classes called Varnas and one unrecognized class called avarnas. They are Brahmins (priests, poets, teachers and ministers), Kshatriyas (Kings and Warriors), Vyshyas (tradesmen), Shudras (craftsmen) and Panchamas (menial workers). Shudras and Panchamas toil and produce wealth which the
people of higher classes enjoy. According to a Hindu myth, the four recognized classes emanated from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet of Brahma, the God of Creation, respectively. Such myths and literature, created and perpetuated by Brahmins, seek to justify the social hierarchy and sanction their superiority. As Stanley Rice rightly observes:

If, then, it be admitted that Brahmans, at least in the earlier stages, became the superior caste by reason of their priestly office and all that is thereby implied, it is not unnatural that they should have made use of their position to glorify themselves, as the priesthood has shown itself apt to do in other countries. That they did this in extravagant fashion, claiming privileges unheard elsewhere and even arrogating to themselves the position divinities\(^5\) may be admitted.\(^6\)

Shudras and Panchamas are subdivided into various castes. Ambedkar elaborates on this:

Caste System is not merely a division of labourers - which is quite different from division of labour - it is an hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one about the other\(^7\).

The gradation of the various castes of labourers prevents them from being united and makes them easily exploitable. Moreover Manu says:

A Brahmana may compel a Shudra, whether bought or unbought, to do servile work; for he is created by the Creator to be the slave of a Brahmana\(^8\).

He prescribes severe punishment to Shudras for reading Vedas\(^9\) and for insulting higher caste people. Panchamas are humiliated, oppressed and exploited more than Shudras for they are considered untouchable. This is the most inhuman part of Hindu culture and so Gandhiji considers it a great stigma on Hinduism. Since caste system gives Brahmins and other higher castes a privileged position, they have never tolerated any violation, including
an inter-caste marriage and have punished the people most cruelly for violating the conventions of the caste system.

The social deformity of the Hindu society has not changed much for ages. Gross atrocities are committed on Shudras and Panchamas by high caste Hindus at one place or another, even now in the modern age of democracy. Like Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya in India English fiction, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh in Indian English drama are concerned with social deformity and expose the evil effects of caste and class in their plays, particularly in *Tale-Danda*, *State News* and *One Day in Ashadha*, respectively.

Karnad’s *Tale-Danda* exposes the ugly deformity of the Hindu society by depicting the twelfth century communal struggle in the city of Kalyan in North Kanara when Bijjala was the king. In his court, there were great scholars and poets. Basavanna, the king’s officer and the great poet-philosopher, united those brilliant people and fought for equality. They shed their castes and became *sharanas* or devotees of Lord Shiva. They talked about God in the language of common people. They considered their body the very abode of God and denounced idolatry. They condemned all the inhuman traditions and believed in social and gender equality. Finally their noble movement ended in a disaster when the marriage of a Brahmin girl to a Panchama boy led to the fateful war between *sharanas* and orthodox people.

Bijjala, a Shudra, a barber by caste, becomes the king of Kalyan. He himself says how he has become a Kshatriya:

> For ten generations my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight. Bribed genera-
Bijjala also marries a royal princess, Rambhavati and has a son, Sovideva. He loves Sovidenva but detests his unprincely behaviour. So he does not favour him while he makes the sons of his other wives local lords. Sovideva resents this greatly.

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" (15) 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. So who profits? 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 they pour money into the *sharana* coffers.... (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.

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 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. Damodara Bhatta, Queen's priest and Manchanna Kramita, 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 for 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. He complains that Basavanna gets the credit though he prevented Sovideva from tampering with the treasury. Basavanna repudiates the miracle attributed to him and criticises miracle-mongers for this. He is on his way to Maddur to stop the violence of Sharanas against Jains which Jagadeva approves. He then condemns all violence whatever may be its cause. He understands the agitated soul of Jagadeva and pacifies it through prayer. Then he goes out to see the people who are clamorous for his darshan.

Sharanas assemble at Basavanna's house. They propose the marriage between Kalavati, a Brahmin girl and Sheelavanta, a dalit boy. Their parents invite Basavanna to the betrothal. Basavanna is shocked so much that he cannot say anything. Sharanas are unhappy about his hesitation. So Basavanna explains his apprehension:
.... It’s a 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? .... (38)

Overwhelmed by the fervour of performing an inter-caste marriage, sharanas misunderstand Basavanna.

Basavanna then asks Sheelavanta for his opinion about the marriage. Sheelavanta likes Kalavati but does not want to marry her because she cannot stand even the smell of leather. Then Lalita, the bride’s mother, confirms his statement. Haralayya, the bridegroom’s father, regrets that his son will not be allowed to change his vocation by other castes on account of the rigidity of the caste system. Lalita aptly quotes the intuitive prediction of Haralayya’s mother: “Rivers of blood will flow if the marriage takes place” (41) Madhuvarasa, Lalita’s husband, feels angry with her and orders her to keep quiet. Immediately, Gangambika, Basavanna’s wife strongly objects to his male chauvinism: “Women and cattle, they are all the same to you, aren’t they?” (42) In spite of all the discussion, sharanas stubbornly stick to their stand and one of them questions Basavanna: “So how many more generations have to roll by before a cobbler marries a Brahmin?” (44) At last Basavanna gives blessings and sharanas leave.

Bijjala requests Basavanna to stop the inter-caste marriage as it leads to communal violence. Basavanna replies that he cannot make decisions for sharanas. He will sit with his sharanas in front of his palace if Bijjala bans the marriage. Bijjala knows that the act of Basavanna will paralyse the life of Kalyan. So he uses his army to avert the blood-bath during the marriage. Thus the marriage takes place peacefully. While sharanas feel jubilant about their great achievement, the marriage infuriates orthodox Hindus.
Damodara 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 Primordial Man: the Brahmin from the head, the Shudra from the feet. So what we have here in this wedding is desecration of the body of the Purusha. How horrifying!... (55)

Indrani is not convinced and praises Basavanna and his followers: "But the sharanas have done so much for the down-trodden and the destitute". (56) Damodara 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 any danger. As he leaves for Kappadi, Bijjala frenzily sobs and laughs.

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. Damadora 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 .... (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.

Jagadeva and other sharanas are enraged about the persecution of their fellow-sharanas by Sovideva. So they decide to avenge this on Sovideva. For this, they enter the palace through a secret passage. But they do not find the Prince and feel greatly frustrated. Jagadeva leads them to the inner shrine of Shiva where the old king hides. Bijjala firmly embraces the Linga to protect himself. Then Jagadeva lies that Basavanna has sent them to him. Believing this, Bijjala comes out of the shrine. In spite of the request of the other sharanas not to kill him, Jagadeva stabs him to death. When they all leave on his request, he commits suicide. Basavanna returns from Kappadi and learns all this. He is greatly agitated and talks to himself philosophically.

Sovideva learns from messengers that 'the city reels under gruesome tales of rape, murder, looting and rioting'(89) He blames Damodara for this. He orders the guard to shut him up when Damodara tries to reply. The guard kills him at once. Another messenger says, "The sharanas flee Kalyan". Sovideva then instructs:

Pursue them. Don't let them escape. Men, women, children-cut them down.... 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. Each citizen shall consider himself a soldier ready to lay down his life for the King. For the King is God incarnate! (90)
The crowning ceremony of Sovideva goes on as the city of Kalyan is ablaze. The screams of the victims and the eulogies of Sovideva by Brahmins are heard simultaneously.

Karnad says: "...you can perceive deep irony, because, after all the martyrdom of the sharanas, when they re-emerged after three centuries of underground survival as lingayats, they were totally caste-ridden."\textsuperscript{13} It happened as Manchanna had predicted, "The sharanas have lost their drive and in course of time are bound to revert to caste for sheer survival." (79) Karnad tries to trace the cause behind the failure of Basavanna's movement, "Ultimately the final betrayal was not by the enemies, but by the followers."\textsuperscript{14} He feels that \textit{Tale-Danda} is relevant even today as religious fundamentalism is strong enough to destroy the Babri masjid and claim the lives of thousands of people. He adds: "when people all around us are slaughtered in the name of a temple, I hear echoes from those times long past."\textsuperscript{15} That is why the words of Basavanna point to mandir-masjid violence:

\begin{quote}
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.
\end{quote}

Therefore what happened in the twelfth century is still happening now. So Karnad rightly remarks:

\begin{quote}
It seems 800 years have solved no problems. We are back exactly where we started.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Badal Sircar also conveys through his play, \textit{Stale News}, that the social inequality, oppression and exploitation have not changed even a little till today. For this, he narrates the Santhal Revolt that took place more than a century ago when the British were ruling India. And he juxtaposes the gross
atrocities of oppression and exploitation of colonial India and those of post-colonial India. The statement that Man is the greatest creature on Earth is repeated several times as a refrain along the narration of instances of oppression and exploitation in the play. The irony is deep and deflates the human arrogance by stripping the social deformity of its ornaments and garments of civilization.

*Stale News* is the result of the collective work of Sircar and other members of Satabdi team. They have collected various news items of the exploitation and oppression and made a collage that portrays man. The play has got neither characters nor a story because 'A character may be too limiting in its individuality, a story may be too specific to suit his subject' as Sircar puts it. K. Venkateswarlu rightly observes that what the Dead Man observes is the play and compares him to Tiresias of *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot. The Dead Man symbolises the dead humanity. He shows his left palm for the past and his right palm for the present. ONE is a middle class urban young man who is exposed to various statements, news items and historical accounts narrated, reported and mimed by others. The play is acted by a chorus of eight people without any particular name.

ONE says, 'Man is the greatest creature on Earth' as the play begins. The actors mime the birth of ONE and then they attend to his education from school to college:

TWO. Tuesday! Thursday! Sunday!
THREE. Venus! Moon! Rahu! Ketu!
... ...
SIX. S is equal to vt plus ut square.
SEVEN. The basic elements of production are land, labour, capital and organization
EIGHT. Indian administration is structured within the framework of parliamentary democracy.\textsuperscript{19} 

As ONE grows, he is bombarded with various news items and statements and he also learns about the Santhals and their revolt. He also observes life around him. He is too confused to take any decision. But he continues his routine life. He completes his studies, gets a job and marries a woman.

The Santhals and similar ethnic groups came to India and settled in Bihar in prehistoric times. According to scholars, they were the first in India to cut down the forests, to set up homes and to discover agriculture eventually. When the State of Bihar came under the British rule, their barter-based economy and social life began to crumble under the impact of the exploitation and oppression of the British merchants and the money-based economy that those merchants introduced. The Santhals began to emerge into the open from the almost complete insularity that they had enjoyed in their social life for thousands of years. They started to spread over various areas in Bihar and Bengal around the year, 1790. The part of Bhagalpur where the Santhals formed a majority of population was known as Damin-i-ko or the Santhal Pargana. Bands of money lenders - Bengalis, Punjabis, Bhojapuries, Bhatias - converged on Damin-i-ko. They were called Dikus by the Santhals. They lent them small sums of cash, tobacco or cloth and bought their produce far below the reasonable price. The rates of interest were exorbitant, going up to five hundred percent at times. The Santhals had to sign a bond of perpetual slavery to get loans. As long as the loan remained unrepaid, the Santhal and his wife and children had to be the slaves of the moneylender. Thanks to an exorbitant compound interest and tampering with accounts, the loans never got repaid and the slavery became hereditary. If one such slave ever refused to work, he would be forced back to work with flogging, denial of food and threat of conviction.
There was no relief. The British judges and magistrates took bribes from the landlords and money lenders and punished the innocent Santhals severely.

Years of limitless exploitation, oppression and rapine left the Santhals the only option of revolt. In their language, Hool is revolt. On 30 June 1855, ten thousand Santhals representing four hundred villages assembled at Bhagnanidhi and swore to throw out all exploiters and oppressors from Santhal country and to reclaim all their land. Thirty thousand Santhals gathered to march on a deputation to the Lieutenant-Governor in Calcutta. They were disciplined and peaceful as long as their food lasted. Then they plundered the market for food at Panchketia and killed five notorious Bengali Dikus. Then Mahesh, a Police officer, ordered his police force to arrest Sidho and Kanho. But the Santhals caught Mahesh, tried him and sentenced him to death. Thus the Santhal Hool took a violent turn on 7th July 1855. It spread to various places like wildfire. Several Dikus and police officers were killed and Diku houses and markets were looted. The Dikus, Zamindars, soldiers and others were on the run. There was a fierce battle on 16th July: thirty to fifty thousand half-naked Santhals with their primitive battle-axes, swords, bows and arrows fought with fifteen thousand well-trained soldiers armed with modern powerful weapons such as cannons and guns. The British army killed the old, the women and the children without any discrimination. Some Santhals took shelter in the forest and adopted guerrilla warfare. The British Government used its ultimate weapon, martial law. Without a trace of human compassion, the British army resorted to reckless plunder, homicide, destruction, torture and humiliation of women - all a fury of horror. The Santhal rebels retreated, still fighting, from Birbum to Santhal Pargana. An English general wrote, ‘What we did was not war, it was mass murder?’ (131) Thus fifty percent of the Santhals were killed.
Indian Government is as bad as the British Government and the ugly deformity of the Indian society remains the same. The play quotes various reports and news items alternately along the narration of the Santhal revolt.

TWO. According to a survey on bonded labour, or men who have been forced to sign bonds enslaving themselves for life, there are 555,000 of these in Uttar Pradesh, 467,000 in Madhya Pradesh, 325,000 in Andra Pradesh, 250,000 in Tamilnadu, 193,000 in Karnataka, 171,000 in Gujarat, 111,000 in Bihar, 105,000 in Maharastra and 67,000 in Rajasthan. 66 percent of the bonded labour belong to the low castes, and 18 percent to the aborigins. 84 percent of the owners are high caste Hindus. Most of the bond labourers have been driven to this pass by extreme poverty. (118)

THREE. 70 per cent of the population of West Bengal live below the poverty line, and 95 per cent below the basic nutrition line...

The Minister for Education has estimated an expenditure of Rupees 280 millions for the proposed Asiad to be held in Delhi in 1982 ...(118-19).

It is evident that the government of India has done little to improve the conditions of the poor. Though it gets elected by masses, its administration always favours the rich. It ruthlessly suppresses the movements of the people against the inhuman exploitation and oppression by the rich. It seldom protects the down-trodden.

THREE. There were 3019 cases of atrocities on the Harijans in the first nine months of 1978. 175 Harijans were killed, 129 Harijan women were raped, there were 289 cases of arson.... (134)

FIVE. 13 April 1978. The police fired on a peaceful demonstration of 500 workers at the Pantnagar Agricultural University in Utter Pradesh after blocking up the entrance and exit. 150 workers were killed, figures
for the injured are not available. The dead bodies were later piled up in a sugarcane field and set on fire. (135)

FIVE. According to government reports alone, 80 prisoners were killed and 645 injured between December 1970 and April 1973 in the prisons of West Bengal and Bihar ... (136)

ONE. During interrogation at the Detective Department at Lalbazar, a fifteen year old class ten schoolboy had his right hand twisted and broken, had burns from burning cigarette ends all over his body, nails from his feet torn out. There were several young men in the police lockups and prisons at this time who screamed when passing faeces with permanent wounds in their rectums made by rods inserted during police torture. Women prisoners too once in a month in the name of interrogation ... (136-37).

All these instances and such incidents elucidate how social deformity and spiritual deformity sustain each other. Only loveless people go to any extent in exploiting and oppressing the innocent and ignorant masses who give away their colossal power to the privileged few by taking the social deformity for granted. This creates polarization of power, leading to political deformity. These deformities thrive on the ignorance or false consciousness of the people. The play not only exposes the social deformity but also throws light on how education and mass media bring about the false consciousness among people. Education diverts the attention of the people by teaching them several irrelevant things, mass media fills their mind with stale news, business advertisements and political propaganda.

THREE. The Chief Minister added that the situation had taken such a dangerous turn that the Executive Magistrate had no alternative to ordering a firing. The police fired nine rounds, killing and injuring...

FOUR. The house staff and internees of the hospital struck work on Wednesday morning in protest against the attack on a senior physician in the Emergency Ward. As a result work in the outdoor department....
FIVE. On the sixth day of the Asian Games at Bangkok, India won three gold and one silver medals. In the ten thousand metres race...(102)

TWO (requesting). Margo, your favourite soap in a new wrapping.
FIVE (a No). Clinivista.
TWO (pleading). Dial a discount! Kwalty Ice Creams.
FIVE (a wavering, and then a No). Come Alive with Nescafe.
TWO (tempting). Your kingsize favourite, Four Square, now in a distinctive new pack. (108)

The play quotes Rammohun, Bankimchandra and Vivekananda to show how intellectual leaders often mislead people with their wrong notions:

RAMMOHUN. "I now conclude my Essay in offering up thanks to the Supreme Disposer of the universe, for having unexpectedly delivered this country, from the long continued tyranny of its former Rulers, and placed it under the Government of the English,...(114-15)

BANKIMCHANDRA...For we are a nation under foreign rule and we shall remain under foreign rule for many years more...(116)

Veena Noble Dass therefore comments, 'The play thus attempted to expose the collaborationists role of the Bengali middle class during the British Raj.20 The exposure of any man to this kind of education and mass media will eventually cause the deformity of his mind. So Ella Dutta highlights this point in her introduction to Three Plays: "What is most important is that he is confused by the bombardment of a barrage of information, quite often contradictory, full of contrasts and perhaps even the most shattering bits of information come as stale news". (xi)

ONE learns about the exploitation, oppression and injustice that have been there in colonial and post colonial India. He cannot remain a silent spectator any longer. So he rebels at the end of the play when the Dead Man is arrested. He urges others to react to the injustice.
ONE, Death, blood and fear rule over this land. Everyone knows what happens and will happen behind the bars of the prison. Why don't you scream? Is it still not the time? Is the time still not ripe? (138)

K. Venkata Reddy compares ONE with Indrajit, the central character of Evam Indrajit, another play by Sircar:

The image of the young man in Stale News seems to be almost an inversion of the image of Indrajit in 'Evam Indrajit'. In 'Evam Indrajit' a rebel becomes a Nirmal, a compromising inert citizen.... But, in Stale News it is the other way round. The young man, who wanted to lead a normal, routine life, becomes a rebel and revolts against the capitalistic society.21

The Savaras and Jathas, the tribal people living on the mountains in Srikakulam of Andhra Pradesh, revolted against the exploitation and oppression of landlords, moneylenders and government officials in 1969, more than one century after the Santhal Revolt. It was also mercilessly suppressed. Thus the play will continue to be relevant as long as the social deformity, supported by other deformities, lasts.

One Day in Ashadhac22 by Mohan Rakesh exemplifies how the social deformity weakens human love and relations. The play portrays the life of Kalidasa, the greatest ancient Indian playwright. Rakesh just makes use of a branch of research on Kalidasa to throw light on the dilemma of the present-day writer. The play makes the character of Kalidasa represent a writer who cannot resist the temptations being offered by the state and other agencies and who ignores his committment to the people and the place that he owes his glory to. In the play, the poet succumbs to the royal allurements and betrays Mallika who loves him and who inspires him in writing great plays. Rakesh himself admits:
Therefore, poor Kalidasa has been unnecessarily dragged in, slightly demoted from his high pedestal for the sake of my dominions. But the play is about the contemporary mind. He is severely criticised for this. So he explains why he like Bharati and Karnad exploits history and legend to focus on a contemporary issue:

I don't think that there's any harm in exploiting a particular character or situation in history for the sake of saying something modern, particularly if using such a character or situation would make it easier for the writer to do so.

Kalidasa is an ordinary village youth. He tends the cattle of Matul, his maternal uncle. He sees and enjoys the beauty of Nature. He loves Mallika, a village lass, who shares his aesthetic sense. She becomes a part of Nature in awakening and inspiring the dormant poet in Kalidasa. She falls in love with him in whom she finds her aesthetic, feelings articulated beautifully. She adores Ritusanhar, his first literary work whereas the rustic people fail to perceive his greatness.

One day in the month of Ashadha, Mallika spends some time with Kalidasa on the hills as usual. As it rains, she comes home. Ambika, her mother, is worried about her health while Mallika enjoys the experience of being drenched in the rain. She describes her aesthetic experience poetically:

Soft and moist like the blue lotus, light like the wind, and picturesque like a dream. I wish I could take it into myself completely and close my eyes .... My whole body is saturated, Mother! The wetness of the clothes has drenched every part of me ... oooh! The touch of heat after the biting cold! (n.pag)

Ambika who works hard for her beloved daughter is not at all romantic. She frankly says:
Mother's life is not made up of feelings, it's made up of work. There is much to be done in this house. (n.pag)

She is worried about Mallika's marriage as people are not ready to accept Mallika as a bride on account of her relationship with Kalidas.

Dantul, a gentleman of the royal family, goes hunting and hurts a fawn with his arrow. Kalidasa takes the fawn and nurses it. Dantul, in his quarrel with him for the fawn, discovers through Mallika that he is Kalidasa, the poet. He informs that the Emperor of Ujjaini wants to appoint Kalidasa the Poet Laureate. In the beginning, Kalidasa does not like to leave the village. Finally being urged and persuaded by Mallika herself, he goes to Ujjaini. Mallika has absolute faith in him but Ambika intuitively knows the nature of Kalidasa and warns Mallika:

I understand this sort of person very well. His relationship without is one in which you are an instrument of his self-love and pride. But you, aren't you also a living human being? Doesn't he, or don't you have a duty to yourself? (n.pag)

Vilom, another village youth, who loves Mallika and poetry, fails to win either. He feels jealous of Kalidasa who wins both. So he bluntly asks Kalidasa: "Won't you forget about this countryside in all the glitter of the capital?" But Kalidasa has no answer to this.

It is another day in the month of Ashadha several years later. Ambika has been ill for two years. Mallika has waited for Kalidasa all these long years but in vain. Nikshep, the common friend of Mallika and Kalidasa, is shocked by the unexpected behaviour of Kalidasa. He says to Mallika: "But I have heard that he married the Gupta Princes and reminds her of those days, ... When he was living here he vowed that he would never marry." (n.pag) But Mallika does not blame him. Now she works hard as her mother did
previously. Rangini and Sangini, the ladies from the royal court, visit Mallika's house to discover what has made Kalidasa a great poet. But they are intoxicated with the royal pomp and cannot understand that the innocent Mallika living in her humble home can inspire marvellous poetry in Kalidasa. Then Anunasik and Anuswar, the two gentlemen of the royal court, come to make the place tidy for the visit of the Queen. Later Priyangumanjari, the Queen comes and says to Mallika:

I said that I want to take the atmosphere of this place with me. I do not want him to feel the absence of this place. His missing it is often very harmful .... (n.pag)

Then she offers to get her house renovated and to get her married to either of the two gentlemen. But Mallika does not accept it and Ambika is thoroughly annoyed by the indifference of her daughter to herself. The Queen leaves and Vilom comes. Kalidasa comes to the village but does not visit Mallika. Vilom frankly says, 'Friendship exists between equals'. Now Kalidasa is the Governor of Kashmir. He forgets Mallika as Dushyanta betrays Shakuntala in Abhignanashakuntalam, the famous play of Kalidasa.

It is again another day in the month of Ashadha after several more years. Matul commiserates with Mallika. He realizes that wealth upsets one's physical and mental health. He confesses:

Had I known I was going to break my leg inside the royal palace, I never would have left the village. While I was gone they made the floor of my house here so slippery that I can't take a sure step. They made it of marble slabs which won't grip my feet. The earthen floor was better. Now, even though I live in that house, I am homeless. (n.pag)
After Matul leaves, Kalidasa comes. He sees the destitution of Mallika. He is overcome by the feelings of deep remorse. He admits his guilt:

I have thought about myself many times, Mallika, and frequently decided that Ambika was right ... Why did I hesitate to go away from here? One reason was that I wasn't confident of myself. I did not know how I would react to the honour and fame after a life of poverty and dishonour. I was afraid that it would overwhelm me and change the direction of my life. This fear was not unfounded. (n.pag)

He could not stand the travails of administrative responsibilities any longer and fled in disguise. He feels ashamed to know how deeply Mallika has loved him all these years. In spite of her penury, she has saved money to buy all the literary works of Kalidasa. And she has bought a bundle of palm leaves for Kalidasa to write on another great literary work. He finds some stains of her tears and sweat on the leaves. He considers that it is indeed a great literary work that she has written in tears.

Kalidasa confesses that the royal comforts have not added anything to his poetic endeavour:

People think that living in that life and atmosphere I have written a great deal. But I know that while living there I wrote nothing. Whatever I wrote was a recollection of life here. The Himalayas are the backdrop for 'Kumarasambhav' and you are the austere Uma. The pain of the yaksha in 'Meghdut' is the pain I felt at being separated from you and the pain of the yaksha's wife is your pain, though I imagined myself here and you in Ujjalni. You were before me in the form of Shakuntala. Whenever I made an effort to write I repeated the tale of our lives over and over. If I turned away from this and tried to write, the works were lifeless. (n.pag)

He later learns that Mallika has accepted Vilom for her survival. Moreover she has borne him a child. So Kalidasa cannot share life with Mallika. He
thinks that time wins the struggle between herself and desire. So he leaves. Mallika calls him but he has already gone. She then takes her child and caresses her gently.

The social deformity distorts our thinking and perception. Our society appears to be made of a few superior people and a vast majority of inferior people. But we do not realize that superiority and inferiority which are often or always defined wrongly are actually psychoculturally programmed. Kalidasa and Vilom are equally great. The difference in their sensibilities reflects the different ways that they have been brought up. So Kalidasa becomes a successful poet while Vilom remains a peasant. Mallika is a victim of cultural prejudices; so she runs after Kalidasa who runs after royal honours. She does not love Vilom who offers to marry her. She cannot perceive the tenderness of his heart hidden under his rough behaviour. Vilom lives with Mallika who is forced to accept him by poverty. All of them ruin their life by trying to scramble up the ladder of social hierarchy. The play while depicting the inner conflict of Kalidasa deflates the concept of ‘superman’ Vivek Dutta Jha aptly puts it:

In our society, from the very beginning, we have had a tendency to consider a great thinker, preacher or an artist as a superman ... We are unable to accept them as having human weaknesses. But here the writer has tried to break this old illusion by bringing before us a character like Kalidasa with all the human weaknesses.25

Certain ideas and modes of behaviour get psychoculturally fixed firmly in the mind of every body and it is almost impossible for anybody to get freed from them. It is no wise blaming and criticising one. Only a new born baby is free from these until the psychocultural programming begins. So it is in a way symbolic that Mallika in the end caresses her baby instead of running after Kalidasa.
The social deformity manifests itself in various forms depending on the kind of hierarchy such as economic, ethical and cultural. It is logical and perhaps just for any body to covet the highest rung in the social hierarchy. It is equally natural for the people to compete for the highest rung and to do anything to reach their coveted goal. The people of higher rungs enjoy several privileges at the cost of the people of lower rungs. People take all this for granted. Tendulkar’s *Vultures* shows how some people in their mad scramble to the top do not mind becoming vultures, the birds of prey, which symbolize ruthless exploitation. Hari Pitale cheats his own brother in business and becomes rich. His children absorb his exploitative culture. So they bully their own father to get the money deposited in his name in a bank. Ramakanth and Umakanth break the leg of their own sister, Manik to prevent her from spoiling their plan of blackmailing the Raja of Hondur, her lover, for money. They mercilessly cause abortion to her when they learn that he is dead. They look down upon their servants and workers and grudge to pay them wages. The people of lower rungs accept their inferiority which is in fact psycho-culturally programmed. They seldom realize their potential of becoming as great as the so called superior people. In Karnad’s *Hayavadana*, Kapila, blacksmith, sits down on the floor while his Brahmin friend, Devadatha, sits on a chair. He does not sit on the chair even when Devadatta requests him to do so. Thus, most of the people give away their power to the privileged few by accepting the hierarchy which has, therefore, survived all the reforms and revolutions.

Social deformity is thus illustrated in its various aspects in Karnad’s *Tale-Danda*, Sircar’s *Stale News* and Rakesh’s *One Day in Ashadha*. The ugly face of the caste system in India is exposed in *Tale-Danda*. Most of the people accept it and observe the customs that sustain it. Moreover state protects it with military force. Basavanna is betrayed by his own followers in
his ideal struggle to eradicate the caste system gradually. Consequently, not only does Basavanna’s movement fail but also his followers emerge as a new caste after a few hundred years. Stale News elaborately presents several instances of ruthless exploitation and oppression in India during Pre- and Post - Independence periods. Sircar juxtaposes them and successfully proves that Indian Government is as bad as the British Government. The struggles of the people against exploitation and oppression like the Santhal Revolt are mercilessly repressed by military forces. The Santhal revolt meets with the same fate as the movement of sharanas. One Day in Ashadha shows how social deformity destroys human love. Kalidasa is tempted by royal luxuries. Therefore he betrays Mallika, the poor village lass, who has inspired him in writing his masterpieces and marries the princess. Thus Karnad, Sircar and Rakesh expose the evil effects of social deformity at cultural, social and psychological levels.
REFERENCES

3. Steiner, 187
5. Brahmins are called Bhusuras (Gods on earth) in Sanskrit.
8. Quoted by Ambedkar, 418.
9. Lord Rama beheaded Shanbhuka, a shudra, for reading Vedas.
10. Venkatesan, 'Caste Crimes', Frontline July 29, 1994; 104. (This can be illustrated by the incident reported by Venkatesan in Frontline. Subhash, a shudra boy of twelve years, allegedly broke the glass shell of 'akhand jyoti' on 28th May 1994 in Jaitsera village of Rajasthan. For not allowing him to be caught, Prakash Kaur, his mother, was most inhumanly punished. She was stripped naked, dragged with her legs tied around the Durga Temple and beaten with sticks all the time by upper caste men and one of them allegedly pushed hard a stick into her genitals. Then her head was tonsured, her face was blackened and she was paraded on a donkey in the market. Hot water and then kerosene were poured on a donkey in the market. She could not survive the heinous incidents that often happen throughout India).
11. Girish Karnad, Tale - Danda (Delhi : Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1993) 14. (In subsequent references, only page numbers are given in parenthesess after the quotation).
12. Linga is the holy phallic symbol of Lord Shiva.
13. Girish Karnad, "Where is the tradition?" (Interview) Frontline September 25, 1992; 76.
14. Karnad, 'Where is the tradition'? 76.
15. Karnad, 'Where is the tradition'? 76.
16. Karnad, 'Where is the tradition'? 76.
17. Quoted by Gowri Ramnarayan,"The endless road" Frontline August 28, 1992; 75.


