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The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Study in Power Politics

A Thesis
Submitted to
Saurashtra University, Rajkot
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
English

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work embodied in this thesis entitled ***The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Study in Power Politics*** has been carried out by Mr. Arjunsinh K. Parmar under my direct guidance and supervision. I declare that the work done and presented in this thesis is original and independent.

I, further, declare that the work has not been submitted to any other institute or university for the award of any degree.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work presented in this thesis is original and wherever references to the work of others have been made, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

I, further, declare that this thesis has not been submitted to any institute or university for the award of any degree.

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Arjunsinh K. Parmar

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CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Indo-Anglian Drama:

India has had a distinguished theatrical tradition for more than a thousand years yet no clear history of the theater is found. The absence of a national language also hindered the development of an identifiable native drama. Sixteen major languages and hundreds of dialects are in use in India today.

Theater in India may have originated as early as the 3rd century BC. It was influenced by the Hindu religion, the caste system, and literature in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India. The earliest theater was patronized by the ruling classes. Two great Sanskrit epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, made up of history, legend, and myth, became the major sources of material for early Sanskrit dramatists. The *Natya Shastra* (The Science of Dramaturgy), a Sanskrit handbook probably completed sometime around AD 200, codifies practices in drama, dance, acting, costume, and makeup. Ancient tradition assigns this work to Bharata, the eldest member of a legendary family, who learned the art of theater directly from Brahma, the creator-god, and passed it down to his many actor-sons. Ancient theater was, therefore, regarded as a sacred art descended

directly from a Hindu god to human beings. Women were admitted to theatrical companies when another Hindu deity pointed out that women made exceptional dancers.

The earliest theatrical performances took place in palaces and temples. When theaters were built, the auditorium was divided by four pillars painted white, red, yellow, and blue to indicate social castes, and spectators sat near the pillar that corresponded to their caste. A curtain divided the stage in half, with the front half used for the performance and the rear for dressing rooms or other offstage functions. Although paintings and carvings decorated the stage, there was no scenery, and the actor indicated the locale through spoken description or mime. Attention focused on the actor, whose movements, gestures, costumes, and makeup had been codified by early Hindu writings. Each play was accompanied by musicians and singers.

Sanskrit drama was organized around *rasas* (moods), which ranged from furious to peaceful, and ended with good triumphing over evil. Dialogue was a mixture of verse and prose spoken in classical Sanskrit, the learned language spoken by gods, kings, generals, and sages; and Prakrit, the everyday dialects of Sanskrit used by women, children, servants, and people of low birth. Thirteen plays by Bhasa, written as early as the 3rd century AD, are the oldest surviving complete Sanskrit dramas. *Shakuntala*, written in the late 4th or early 5th century AD by Kalidasa, a court poet and dramatist, is considered the

finest of all Sanskrit dramas. Based on an episode from the *Mahabharata*, it recounts a love story with insight and sympathy.

Popular forms of entertainment, including shadow-puppet plays, folk drama, and dance, began to replace Sanskrit drama in the 7th century. By the 10th century, companies were touring and performing plays in regional languages. By the 15th century, many regional theatrical forms had emerged, dominated by folk plays that were performed outdoors, often with spectators surrounding the performance space. Many of these plays featured legendary heroes, along with themes of love and chivalry.

Modern Indian theater owes its origins and development to the growth of urban centers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay evolved as theatrical centers, largely because of the British presence in these cities. British theater was imported to entertain British soldiers, business people, and government officials, and proscenium theaters built on British models became centers of urban theatrical activity. Plays were then written in the language of the region, based on historical and mythological sources, and performed by actors of different castes, races, religions, and occupations. Songs and dances popular with Indian audiences were grafted onto dialogue.

Other modern Indian plays more closely resemble Western plays in style. These plays focus on families and on social and political events, including India's struggle for independence in the first half of the 20th century. Poet Rabindranath Tagore, who won the *Nobel Prize* in literature, successfully blended Indian and Western traditions in such plays as *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1910) and *The Cycle of Spring* (1917). Theater in India has remained highly diverse, ranging from productions of Sanskrit plays and folk drama to modern realistic works.

The *Natya Shastra*, written before 200 AD and attributed to a Hindu sage named Bharata Muni, is the world's oldest, most complete manual for all aspects of performance. It details the requirements for theater architecture, costumes, actor training and performance, music, playwriting, and the emotional exchange that takes place between the audience and the actors. The book relates how the Hindu god Brahma created drama (*Natya*) to entertain and to educate. While priests, musicians, and dancing nymphs were performing divinely created stories, jealous demons attacked the sacred stage. Brahma, however, created purifying rituals to include all beings - even demons.

The playwright approaches the audience effectively through Theatre. Actors go across the bridge of theatre and reach the heart of the spectators. When drama comes on the stage it moves to the audience from the hands of the actors. Life gets

unfolded on the stage in all its forms. The theatre envelops the whole of human activities.

Bharat Muni, the architect of Indian drama mentions four parts of drama – Pathya, Geeta, Abhinay and Rasa. Drama is known as *Natya* in our Sanskrit literature. According to Bharat Muni, the word drama is something like *Trailokashyasy Sarvasya natyam bhavanukirtanam*, meaning each and every performance of audiovisual art contributes towards its final composition.

In India, classical Sanskrit plays were performed in temples to please gods as there was no source as effective as drama itself. Such plays based on religious books, events and Hindu mythology were performed in the temples on different religious occasions. As the plays were performed in temples, they called it Temple Theatres. They praised gods, kings, princes, queens and great heroes of the time, and the demons were cursed orally on the stage.

Close to 200 BC drama and dramatic technique had developed to a notable height. Great poets and playwrights of Sanskrit literature emerged with their noteworthy contribution and drama blossomed on the classical theatre. Poets and playwrights of this time were Ashwaghosha, Bhas, Kalidas, Sudraka, Bhavbhuti, Magha, Dandi and many more. Three Buddhist's plays written by Ashwaghosha are there but they are

not available in complete forms, only a part of it is available to us, and it proves that during the time of Ashwaghosha, drama had fully developed. Bhasa is supposed to be the first poet and playwright whose following plays are available in complete form: *Malavikagnimitra*, *Urubhamasa*, *Swapnavasavdatta* and others. Kalidas was the most outstanding playwright who is known to the whole world even today.

Apart from Kalidas and Bhasa, the contribution of Sudraka and Bhavbhuti is also great. *Mudrarakhasa*, the play written by Sudraka has all the qualities of a successful play in Sanskrit literature. The great playwright Bhavbhuti was unmatched whose plays – *Uttararamacharit* and *Malatimadhava* represent the culture of the nation. Reading of these plays proves how great and rich are the plays of the past in Sanskrit literature. The treasure of Indian Sanskrit drama is certainly very rich, varied and par excellent.

This was the glory and these were the dramas of India – very rich and great. Of course one thing is worth noting that all these plays written in classical language were not publicly open for all. They remained confined to the elite group only. Unfortunately, a time came when the classical drama witnessed a great setback; Kironmoy Raha observes this setback in the following manners:

Creative involvement with Sanskrit drama, however, was confined to the elitist crust of society, and patronage for production of such play to the princely courts and aristocracy. Classical Sanskrit drama, in any case had declined by the end of the 7th century AD after the Muslim invasion it ceased to have whatever little patronage it might have enjoyed earlier. The plays were doubtless read or recited by successive generation of students of Sanskrit but there is no evidence of their being performed with any regularity before any except cloistered audiences.¹

This blank period did not register any play performance for a long time and hence a big gap. Drama on the India stage returned after a long gap but this time it covered a large area with the growth of vernacular languages and some other reasons, of course very interesting one. It was a sharp dramatic term and a kind of fresh start unlike classical dramas in Sanskrit. The immediate influence came from two sources, the English theatre of Calcutta, and the traditional folk theatre, the *Jatra*.

Among historians who have specialised in theatre, there is conflict as to which one came first and which one was more dominant – English theatre or folk theatre or English theatre. For many, the opinion of Brajendra Bandyopadhyay is not acceptable.

It was a time when the growth of vernacular languages was very fast almost in every state and every region. Folk theatre became popular as it provided entertainment on a large scale. Folk drama developed in different states on different name narrating the story of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and other religious books and Hindu mythology. The most famous folk drama at that time was *Jatra* in Bengal and *Ramlila* in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. *Bhavai* survives even today in Gujarat and the people of Gujarat enjoy *Bhavai* as much as the people of Braj enjoy *Raslila*. These folk dramas were performed on folk theatre which was not as rich and expensive as modern theatre of western influence.

From the 1st century to the 10th century, dramas written in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, were performed in temples and at royal courts. Performance of Sanskrit drama ceased, however, because of foreign invasions and because the language was spoken only by the upper classes, providing only a limited, aristocratic audience. During the 15th century, Islamic rulers, who then controlled northern India, forbade theater. However, local folk and devotional genres emerged elsewhere in

India. Secular entertainment, puppetry, dance-dramas, and performances for religious minorities also flourished. In the 18th century, Britain colonized India and introduced Western performance styles. In the 20th century, new genres appeared, including political protest plays and experimental combinations of European and traditional Indian drama. Indian poet and playwright Rabindranath Tagore won the 1913 Nobel Prize for literature. His plays include *Raja* (1910), *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1914), *Raktakarabi* (1924), and *Red Oleanders* (1925). Significant contemporary artists include playwright and director Badal Sircar, actor Tripti Mitra, director Uptal Dutt, and director and educator Ebrahim Alkazi.

Sanskrit drama was one of the earliest formal theatrical genres to appear in India. It conformed to the rules laid out by the *Natya Shastra*, with its lyrical poetry, successful conclusions, song, dance, and mime. Both sexes probably acted in these dramas, though actors did not always portray characters of their gender. Theaters seated about 400 people. The stage had a rear balcony and machinery to aid in depicting supernatural events, such as the appearance of heavenly nymphs. The most famous Sanskrit dramatists include Bhasa, Kalidasa, and Bhavabhuti. Bhasa composed plays based primarily on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. His best work is *Swapnavasavdatta* (4th – 5th century; *The Vision of Vasavadatta*). Kalidasa composed the most revered Sanskrit drama, *Abhijnanashakuntala* (4th century; *Shakuntala and the Ring of Recollection*). It tells of love, loss, a

curse, and ultimate reunion between a king and a nymph's daughter. Bhavabhuti's greatest work is *Utara-rāma-charita* (8th century; *The Later History of Rama*). *Mrichchhakatika* (5th century; *The Little Clay Cart*), attributed to Shudraka, is one of the most popular Sanskrit works.

Scholars believe that some conventions of Sanskrit drama are preserved in *kutiyattam*, the country's oldest continuously performed theatrical genre. In *kutiyattam*, which comes from the southwestern state of Kerala, actors perform ancient Sanskrit plays in India's only permanent, traditional theater structures for Sanskrit drama. Ritual performances occur once yearly at two Hindu temples, Vatukumnathan and Irinjalagauda. Each play takes several nights to complete, three to eight hours per night. A tall, metal oil lamp on the stage provides dim light. Dance, song, chant, gestures with specific meanings, and exaggerated facial, and eye expressions are accompanied by drums, cymbals, a conch shell, and a wind instrument called a *kuzhal*. Performers wear elaborate makeup and costumes.

Several types of dance-dramas exist in India, including *kathak*, *bharata natyam*, and *manipuri*, but the most recognized is *kathakali*, from Kerala state. *Kathakali* originated in the 17th century. Its plots come from the Sanskrit epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*. Performers, who go through arduous training for six to ten years, wear brightly coloured makeup in symbolic patterns and multilayered beards

of paper and glue. Costumes usually include heavily layered, wide skirts and disk-shaped headdresses. Traditionally, performances lasted all night, but today they take only three or four hours. Actors dance, mime, and gesture while singers recite lyrical passages and dialogue. Drums, gongs, cymbals, harmonium, and conch shell accompany them. Kathakali may be performed in any locale for sacred or secular occasions.

Ramlila appeared in northern India in the 17th century. As a celebration of the life of Rama, the hero of *Ramayana*, Hindus consider it a part of their religious devotion. For Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and members of India's other minority religions, it symbolizes national unity and is a popular commercial enterprise. Each *Ramlila* lasts several weeks. In addition to hundreds of amateur actors, performances feature elephants, camels, burning arrows, fireworks, elaborate floats, and chariots. *Ramlila* performances are staged at rivers, forts, and other unconventional performance spaces in villages and cities. Performers wear patterned makeup, which may be embellished with sequins. If they are playing demons, they may wear multi-headed masks or black makeup. Local folk music and, occasionally, sacred chants accompany the play. Today, versions of *Ramlila* occur all over India, from September to November, and millions of people attend.

India was a legend in English long before the English people established themselves as the rulers of this land. We find many authors mentioning India in their works.

This was long back in the 16th and 17th centuries. The consolidation of the power of East India Company affected India in two ways. Firstly, the effect was negative because they ruthlessly exploited the Indian natural resources to consolidate their empire. Secondly, the effect was in a positive way because they introduced new concept of constitutional government, judiciary and English language. At first, the Indians reacted with suspicion towards the English language, but later on welcome it with open arms. English language was granted a special place in India's bosom. The seeds of English language by and by flourished into grown up trees and today India not only remains a member of the English-speaking world, but also contributes to a distinct genre of English literature called *Indo-Anglian Literature* or *Indian Writing in English*.

The term *Indo-Anglian* was first used in 1833, when a book published in Calcutta bore the little *Indo-Anglian literature*, which contained specimen composition from native students. Later on, K. R. Srinivas Iyengar adopted it as the title of his first book on this subject, *Indo-Anglian Literature*, published in 1943. After the publication of one more book on the subject by him the term, Indo-Anglian not only acquired considerable currency, but also now it stays with as an accepted

term applied to Indian contribution to literature in English. This has come to be known as Indo-Anglian writing and has been quite an active school of didactic and creative art for at least a century.

The term *Indo-Anglian* is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. Today, there are a large number of educated Indians who use English language as a medium of the creative explorations and expressions of their experiences of life. Their writing has now developed into a substantial literature in its own right and it is this substantial body of literature, which is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. As C. R. Reddy in his foreword to Srinivasa Iyengar's work *Indo-Anglian Literature* points out:

Indo-Anglian literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian literature. It is a part of it, a modern facet of that glory which commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history ever increasingly upon the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghosh, and bids fair to

expand with ours, as well as humanity's
expanding future.²

English drama came to India through East India Company. From Bengal it spread all over the nation. English brought drama and staged in for the entertainment of their English officers. Throwing focus on the arrival of English drama, Nand Kumar has this to say:

With the emergence of the East India Company on the political horizons of India, English education began to take roots in this land. English schools and other institutions created an atmosphere of reading and writing in English. English education in India not only fostered the critical study of western drama and the classical Indian drama, but also gave rise to the English theatre in India. A glance at the development of theatre in India during and after the British Raj serves to illustrate the point.³

Indian English drama did not develop in India as fast as it should. But it is not disapproving because a trend of course

under the British influence started and soon we saw a number of theatres all over the country. In the beginning, theatres were founded to please British officers and army officers.

Despite the fact that a number of Theatres and drama companies came into existence Indian English drama suffered a great setback due to the growth of vernacular languages and many other reasons.

Dr. P. V. Prasad in his article *The Sense of History and Tradition in Girish Karnad's Hayavadana* gives his opinion regarding the setback in the following manner:

Indian English drama has not been so fortunate as poetry and fiction in Indian English because drama requires specialized skill and talent in selecting a theme which is presentable on the stage and in picking up a technique which appeals to the audience.⁴

Language is the main reason why Indian English drama did not develop in India. The growth of vernacular languages created attraction in the audience for regional plays. English being the second language can't reach the heart and mind of the common people. Even the writers at times find themselves comfortable only in their regional languages. Another reason for

the failure is that the writers have failed to highlight Indian ethos, culture, myth and heritage through a foreign language. Lack of adequate stage in India is also responsible for this setback. Of course, poor remuneration to the actors can also be considered as a reason for this setback.

Paucity of Indian drama in English is the one fact, which strikes even a cursory student of Indo-Anglian literature. Indian English drama lacks in both fecundity and excellence of artisanship. Drama is a composite art and it requires for its success various accessories, as stage, actors and audience. Indian theatre was occupied with plays written in regional languages, which were easily intelligible to the audiences. Actors too could easily act various roles in plays written in regional languages. Early Indian English writers could not enjoy this advantage and, hence, the growth of Indian English drama suffered. Secondly, English being a foreign language was not intelligible to the masses and the playwrights too found it difficult to write crisp, natural and graceful dialogue in English, which was not the language of their emotional make-up. Since they did not learn their earliest utterances in English but acquired knowledge of it at an advanced stage, their dialogue was bound to be stilted and artificial. Commenting on the paucity of Indian English drama, K. R. S. Iyengar writes:

Indo-Anglian Drama: isn't it like talking
about 'Snakes in Iceland?' Not quite, but

the problem is there, for while poetry, novels, and non-fiction prose can be read in the silence of one's study. Drama can come to life only in the theatre.⁵

When Bombay Theatre was founded, priority was given to English plays and not to Indian English Drama. Of course, The Dave Carson Troupe and Original Theatrical Company staged some English plays with Indian background using classical books and Indian mythology but they also could not do much as the audience were more interested in vernacular languages and not English. The Amateur Club came out with the writers like Ibsen, Chekhov, Camus, Eliot, Fry, Ionesco, Brecht and many more. However, the introduction and presentation of such writers could not do much in the field of Indian English drama. Naturally, for the lack of stage, drama could not develop much in both quality and quantity. R. K. Dhawan puts it in the following words:

It is a well known fact that the real success of a play can be tested on stage. A playwright need a living theatre to put his work on acid test, evaluate its total effect on the audience and thereby get a chance to improve upon his performance. This handicap has not

allowed him to pursue playwriting in a systematic and comprehensive way.⁶

From R. K. Dhawan's opinion, it is very clear that what is more important to inspire playwrights is the stage. Where there is stage there is drama, and where there are audience there is stage. C. L. Khatri in his article, *Introduction to Indian Drama in English* has rightly observed the following fact:

Indian Drama in English is still toddling in the race striving to walk straight at its own strength. It is a regrettable fact that it has not achieved the position that Indian fiction or poetry in English enjoys in the realm of commonwealth literature. It still relies heavily on the translation of regional plays into English. For example, from Kannad Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadan*, and other plays from Bengali Badal Sircar's *Pagla Ghora*, *Baki Itihas*, *Juloos* and the plays of Rabindranath Tagore, from Marathi Vijay Tendulkar's *Khamosh*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghasi Ram Kotwal*, *Kanyadan* etc. from Hindi the plays of Mohan Rakesh, Dharmvir Bharti and of others

have been translated into English to enrich the corpus of Indian drama in English. Surprisingly its reputation is more based on these translations than on original plays in English.⁷

Here C. L. Khatri has put a long detail and description of the growth of Indian English Drama concisely. The playwrights who have been mentioned by C. L. Khatri are in fact the pillars of Indian English drama.

Despite limitations and hindrances, Indian English playwrights endeavoured to write plays. Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote the first play, 'The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta' in 1831. It is a social play, which presents the conflict between orthodoxy and new ideas, which came from Western Education. It exposes the hypocrisy and blackness of the influential segments in Hindu Society. It is the earliest play on the East-West encounter theme, which has been an important theme in the entire range of Indian English literature. From the viewpoint of technique and artisanship, it is a crude presentation.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt translated his play - *Ratnavali* (1858), *Sermista* (1859) and *Is This Called Civilization?* (1871) from Bengali into English. Ramkinoo Dutt wrote *Manipura*

Tragedy (1893). Indian English drama thus made a humble beginning in 19th century in Bengal.

Commenting on the Indian English Drama, M. K. Naik says,

Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English Drama in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, grew sporadically as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and H. N. Chattopadhyaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing.⁸

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and H. N. Chattopadhyaya, known as the big three, made an invaluable contribution to Indian English drama.

Rabindranath Tagore was a versatile genius who himself rendered some of his Bengali plays into English. All these appeared in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1936). Tagore's English plays are remarkable for precision and well-knit plot, which is not found in Bengali originals. Tagore is better known plays *The*

Post Office and *The King of the Dark Chamber* were translated respectively by Devabrata Mukharjee and C. K. Sen. Tagore's plays have been failures upon the stage because they are extremely symbolic and poetic plays. In the original, they have great musical qualities but even these qualities have been lost in their English transcription. Tagore has tried to impart new values and symbolic significance to ancient Hindu myths and legends. Whatever may be the value of such plays, they are not successful stage plays. However, plays like *Sacrifice* have been very much successful on the stage also.

Sri Aurobindo wrote plays directly in English. He successfully imitated the blank verse drama of the Elizabethan cast. In spite of the variety of setting, theme and characterization all plays of Sri Aurobindo are soaked in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti - though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones.

As both a poet and playwright, H. N. Chattopadhyaya is noticeable for his richness and versatility. *Five Plays* (1937) has a Galsworthian elegance for social awareness and realism. Dialogues are written in stinging prose. All the important plays of Chattopadhyaya have a purpose and are flooded with realism, which is hardly found in Indian English dramatic writing. He is considered as one of the milestones in the history of Indian English drama

The Indo-Anglian play from its beginning to the present day has traveled a long way. The approaches have changed, the techniques have changed, experimentation has increased but still audience is lacking. Practical considerations of finance weighs as much as, if not more than, aesthetic ones. Cost for rehearsals, costumes, make-up, equipment and other stage properties have considerably risen. Today staging of a play needs much more preparation on every level; hence, the absence of large audience affects it adversely. No doubt, plays in Hindi and other regional languages are being staged successfully but the total turnout for Indo-Anglian plays is comparatively less. H. M. William correctly observes,

Despite the remarkable and abiding contribution of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Chattopadhyaya, Indian English drama has never reached the high status of prose fiction or poetry...up to now in the 20th century would be dramatists have not solved the problem of fusing dramatic stories with dialogue and sense of good theatre, all of which are indispensable to the success of a play on the stage.⁹

Ayengar connects the cause of the scarceness of good actable dramas written by Indian dramatists to the fact that the natural medium of conversation with us is the mother tongue rather than English, and hence, unless the characters and situations are carefully chosen, it would be difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound convincing. This problem will be tackled, most probably in the near future when drama groups will get sponsors, in the new developing market economy and in the era of globalization.

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CHAPTER - 2

CHAPTER – 2

GIRISH KARNAD –THE MAN AND HIS WORKS AT A GLANCE

Born on May 19, 1938, in Mathern, Maharashtra, Girish Karnad has become one of India's brightest shining stars, earning international praise as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, and translator. As a young man studying at Karnataka University, Dharwar, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics and Statistics in 1958, Karnad dreamed of earning international literary fame, but he thought that he would do so by writing in English. Upon graduation, he went to England and studied at Oxford where he earned a Rhodes scholarship and went on to receive a Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. He would eventually achieve the international fame he had dreamed of, but not for his English poetry. Instead, Karnad would earn his reputation through decades of consistent literary output on his native soil.

He is a man of many talents. He is a renowned actor, film producer and playwright. He is a contemporary writer, playwright, actor and movie director in Kannada language. He is the latest of seven recipients of Jnanpith Award for Kannada, the highest literary honour conferred in India. For four decades, Karnad has been composing plays, often using history and

mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He is also active in the world of Indian cinema working as an actor, director, producer and screenwriter, earning numerous awards along the way. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the government of India. He has been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford from 1960 to 1963 and a Bhabha Fellow from 1970 to 1972. (The Rhodes scholarships are awarded annually to students in 19 regions designated by the Rhodes Trustees: Australia, Bangladesh, and Bermuda, Canada, Caribbean members of the Commonwealth of Nations, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa, Uganda, the United States, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Students from the United States form the largest national contingent of Rhodes scholars). Karnad's perfect and flawless command over English is one of the main causes of his exemplary success as a playwright.

Though Karnad's mother tongue is Konkani, Kannada is his second language as his father worked as a health officer in North Karnataka. Originally, he wanted to become a writer in English but writing plays in Kannada fascinated him more. He had a good exposure to the plays in his childhood at Sisri. He used to go to Company Natak performances with his father. As his parents considered Yakshagana performances inferior to their taste, the young Karnad went to such plays with the servants. The technical aspects of these two varieties of drama have obviously gone into the making of Karnad's plays, though he has

imbibed the best from the Western theatre too. In his early life, however, he wanted to become a famous poet but to his dismay, he turned out to be a dramatist.

Girish Karnad has acted various roles with great éclat in a large number of movies and many of his programmes have been televised. After returning to India from Oxford, he stayed for a time at Dharward and was closely connected with many dramatic clubs. He worked with the popular Kannada stage director, Mr. B. V. Karanth. In the film, *Sanskara*, he played the leading role. The film won the President's Gold Medal. In the next film, *Vamsa Vriksha*, he worked again with Mr. Karanth, and both of them appeared in leading roles. *Vamsa Vriksha* as well as the next film, *Tabbaliyu Ninaade Magane*, was also winners of the President's Award. *Kaddu*, for which Karnad wrote the scenario and which he directed, won the *Golden Lotus*. All these movies are based on the very popular Kannada novels of the eminent writers, Dr. U. R. Anantha Murthy, Dr. S. L. Bhairappa, and Sri Krishna Alanahalli respectively.

Later, Karnad shifted to Poona as Director of the Central Institute of Film and Television Technology. After serving this institute for three years, he entered the field of Hindi films and has been working ever since with famous directors like Shyam Benegal. He has also produced, directed, and acted in many TV serials.

Though Karnad is a Kannada writer, he has translated his plays in English to reach a larger audience. He along with other playwrights Vijay Tendulkar and Rakesh Mohan revived the trend of theatre. They are trying to uphold the rich cultural heritage of India by using myths, legends, histories and traditional stories in their plays. Karnad has made an effort to fight the legacy of colonialism by upholding Indian values and its cultural ethos. The themes do have contemporary significance but the focus is on the presentation of complex cultural fabric of India. Karnad loves to discover less known and obscure myths, tries to understand their significance and relate them to the chosen story. Thus, he succeeds in providing romantic charm to his plays and that is also without killing the authenticity of the original tales!

Karnad has great insight into human nature. His knowledge of human nature has made him a great actor and playwright. He is well aware of the paradoxes in human nature and has thorough comprehension of life's little ironies. He has been a humanistic writer. His profound humanism is carved in all his works. His various roles as actor and the protagonists in his plays illustrate the glaring paradoxes in human nature and life.

Karnad employs mythical, historical, and folk themes as the skeleton for his plays, but they are identified with the contemporary scene. They come as amusing satires on the many

social and political forces at work in present day India. As we read his plays, we feel that history and Purana repeat themselves. Karnad has done great service to introduce the folk tradition into his drama and thus expand the very horizon of the Indian stage. When we view his total dramatic output, we are impressed by the loftiness of his artistic perception and creative ingenuity. He tries his hand at all the genres of the dramatic art.

Karnad is one of the most successful and outstanding playwrights in contemporary Indian English drama. Kirtinath Kurtkoti writes,

His work has the tone and expression of great drama. He has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic expression. He has imparted real dramatic verse to the technique of Indian English drama. This is an abiding contribution. As a rule, drama cannot remain in isolation from the stage. It is designed for representation by actors who impersonate the characters of its story. It is not a self-contained art like short story, epic and novel. His dramatic technique is conspicuous for consummate excellence. Had Karnad to acting and

film industry, he would surely have been one of the greatest dramatists in Indian English literature.

Karnad is a progressive dramatist too. To early Kannada playwrights play writing was a mere literary exercise, with no contact whatever with the living stage.¹

Kailasam and Adya Rangacharya rejected this trend but they could not create an enduring substitute for it. The new dramatic movement has given a new lease of life to Kannada drama. Kirtinath Kurtkoti writes:

With this new theatre going around them, new playwrights like Girish Karnad have been able to bring to drama a firsthand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique.²

Girish Karnad is reckoned as an eminent actor, playwright, Television artist and a creative figure and ranks among the top dramatists in Indian English drama. The entire

world of Indian English Drama was taken by surprise when his Tughlaq was published in 1964. It is unique in many respects and stands apart in its preeminence from all other specimen of its kind. It has already won coveted distinction of being an immortal work of great importance, creative skill and poetic excellence.

Girish Karnad's first preference was not writing plays. He acted in Kannada and Hindi films and television serial to earn a living. If writing plays could give him that he would not have done anything else. Although he got both popularity and critical acclaim by acting and directing films, yet he always cherished a wish in his heart to become a creative artist. He is a conscientious artist who is quite aware of the price of fame. He knows that the danger in turning into a public figure is that it eats into one's creativity. However, Karnad little cared for all the things that go to enhance the pedagogical status or aggrandizement or counting the feathers in his cap. He continues to write not only to please his own urge, that is, Swanta-Sukhaya (pleasing the self) but also to arouse the conscience of the thinking people in India and abroad.

It is hard for most of us to picture a time when people did not believe that God is just and righteous in His dealings with men; that God not only loves His children when they obey but is also willing to forgive when they have disobeyed. We take such ideas about God pretty much for granted. To the people living in

an age of computer and technology Girish Karnad's ideas and concepts seem startlingly new. They think of God, nature and world-in terms of power and might. God is someone to whom one turns when one is in trouble and needs help someone who might be called upon to aid one in seeking revenge against enemy. We are witnessing an era of material prosperity and fantastic growth of trade and commerce. However, people are becoming greedy and selfish. They care little about the needs of the poor, low and downtrodden. Their only concern seems to be their own comfort and luxury. Though some of them keep up the outward appearances of religion, their chief interest is in feasting, drinking and pleasure. No one is worried about good behaviour or about his neighbour's welfare.

Karnad has seen what life meant to the poor Indian people. How they lived and how they suffered. What he wanted was to show to his countrymen and to the people of the world the miserable condition of the poor, of the outcast and the woman, who suffered every kind of humiliation and suffering and thought that it was fated to be so and they could not change it, for they had no change in it, rather it was beyond their control. His very soul revolted against such an idea and while he shows what they are, he even suggests what they can become and how things can be improved.

In 1926, Britain faced the General strike which was nothing but a holy war between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. This

was not peculiar to Britain alone. Karnad discerned it in both the East and the West. He was quite akin to Indian thought and developed a secular and scientific humanism. In addition, by this humanism he means the illumination or enlightenment in the interest of man, true to his highest nature and his noblest mission. He looks at the whole European and Asiatic traditions. This he not only tries to compare and contrast them and also tries to achieve some kind of synthesis between them. He goes straight to the heart of the problem of our lives, the problem of human sensibility in the present context the tragedy of modern man.

His plays present a psychological interpretation of human history-not neither rational nor material, but the basic conflict of man, his littleness and limitness, follies and faults of his life and the continuous struggle he is involved in. They not only represent the modern age but also relate at length the existing class conflicts, spiritual degradation, utter helplessness and self-agony, while dramatizing the inevitable process of life and death and an ultimate goal, which dissolves all mundane desire into spiritual bliss and harmony.

His dramas are larger than life in their dimensions. We can read, explain and interpret them from various angles and different levels. They stand out as the culmination of Karnad's dramatic genius. They are steeped in mystery, myth of the creation of our society. Though rooted in antiquity the themes

have universal dimension of men's predicament. They are not time-bound though they refer to different periods of history. They are ageless. That is why even the modern reader finds so much of relevance of his contemporary world, his life and problem in them. They contain infinite variety and richness. Their appeal is – all embracing- emotional, intellectual and spiritual. They are the works of sublimity and magnitude. It is really creditable how Girish Karnad could present the subtle shades of emotional and revealed them in real motives that lie buried in the deep recesses of his characters minds. He also presented their spiritual and human predicament and, above all, a complex native cultural complexion in an alien language.

Girish Karnad was probably the first to feel the necessity of visualizing theatre on the basis of native Indian traditions. In this early plays he has attempted to synthesize the West and the East. *Yayati* and *Tughlaq* reveal direct influences of the Western modes of expression and theatre practices. However, his journey as a playwright shows a definite move from West to East. While many playwrights of his time tried to bring in the traditional elements more or less in the manner in which the Western theatre practitioner who were inspired by the East were experimenting. Girish was looking at the folk traditions to explore a new kind of theatre that could be totally Indian. As such, his plays are based on cultural concepts and theatre devices that are drawn from Indian traditions. He experimented in his plays especially in structure where the blended prevalent theatre

concepts and practices with native mythical themes. He did not depend exclusively on the trends of immediate past.

The mythic theme is refashioned to make a contemporary statement. There are fluctuations in the tragic lives of quite a few mythic protagonists which have given the playwright ample scope for the theatrical variety of the Greek tragedy. Karnad's plays bear testimony to a larger cultural matrix of mythic modes, oral folk forms and narrative conventions than any other plays written and performed in the recent times. His re-writing of myths and folklore instills unique emotional and intellectual perspective to the given prototypes and thus attains a larger range of reference. Such types of complexities are so rampant in modern hard times that they shake the very foundation of human existence. We find its reflection in life around us in our personal and public life.

Karnad felt that drama being composite art draws on all components of human culture any ritual can be lifted from its original religious setting and performed as a theatre-just as a everyday life event can be. It is also possible for the ritual to arise out of theatre by reversing the process. The main purpose of drama is to please the audience rather than to follow the prescribed rules.

Hence in Karnad's plays we find a continual renewal of form and its representational and philosophical meanings. His own translation of his plays from Kannada into English, their subsequent translations in Hindi has increased the readership of his plays.

Karnad's dramatic world is most strange. Peeling the multiple layers of fantasy his protagonists seek to confront the mystery of life beyond the horizon. His plays represent a unique depiction of the dual between the internal and the external, the intuitive and rationalistic tradition and modernity. They are insightful and thought provoking. He catches the bewilderment of the individual psyches, confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural atmosphere and the ever-present modern promise of self-fulfillment. In the face of this conflict-crisis his Yayati, Tughlaq, Padmini, Rani, Bijjala and others are viewed from different angles of philosophical analysis.

Although, Yayati was a great king, he was also a human being. Like many rulers, he was tempted at times to believe that he himself was above the law. When that happens, the results are bound to be disastrous. One of the most flagrant examples was when he fell in love with Sharmishtha driven by the desire to have her as his wife. Yayati reminds us of a Biblical hero David who was a great leader. He fell in love with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his leading generals. Driven by the desire to

have Bathsheba as his wife, David sent Uriah to certain death in battle. When he came to his senses however, David realized the terrible sin that he had committed. In the depth of remorse, he wrote the beautiful 'Fifty-first Psalm', which has been called one of the finest expressions of repentance in the Bible. Yayati too becomes penitent after Chitrlekha's suicide. Karnad has reinterpreted the ancient myth in the light of the contemporary context.

Karnad's another play *Tughlaq* is also regarded as a contemporary play about a contemporary situation. It is called a minor classic of dramatic literature. Tughlaq's reign like king Soloman's began in glory but ended in near failure. Soloman failed for the heavy taxes, which he had to impose upon the tribes in order to raise money for the magnificent temple, which his, father: David, had long dreamed to build in Jerusalem. This made him unpopular. Tughlaq's changing of capital and currency became his hallmarks and which caused him considerable trouble. He miserably failed even to weld his people into a real nation, a powerful country and a united people. His dream was shattered. Even before his death, one could see the shadow of coming events that would wreck the good that his ancestors had done. The country began crumbling around the edges with the loss of certain satellite kingdoms, but for more serious were the forces at work within which would soon rip the country asunder. Man turns to God for help in times of troubles, discouragement and sorrow.

The unique success that Girish Karnad enjoys today owes a lot to the fact he started his experiment in Indian theatre after acquiring a thorough knowledge of what was happening in the west. This way, he was able to reach a successful proportion of the techniques of both Western and Indian traditions. From the beginning, itself he has taken his themes from Indian mythology and history. His first play *Yayati* is an attempt to give visual depiction to an ancient myth. While catering to the demands of the theatre performance, he was an able to retain the beauty of the myth; but making it more meaningful by focusing more on the theme of individual responsibility to oneself and society. In *Tughlaq*, the realistic mode and the over-emphasis on verbal expression continue to predominate, leaving little scope for suggestiveness. Even the way of thinking and the actions of the characters and the dramatic devices used are explained literally in a very realistic manner.

Karnad's plays show a marked difference from the purely Western type of drama. They are linked with the Indian traditions of storytelling as is evident in the play *Hayavadana*. The theme of the play is taken from *Kathasaritsagara*. Since the action moves around the central plot with enough potential to develop in to multi-lineal proportions, it gave enough scope to pose certain deep-rooted beliefs. The identity crisis posed in the play has global dimensions now when the distinguishing traits of race and religion are fast disappearing.

Nagamandala makes a high achievement in the evolution of the playwright. The text shows the rare quality of highly suggestive images and concepts transcend realism to produce a thought-provoking impression on the spectators. By developing an Indian myth, the play creates a mysterious and powerful experience through the dual representation of the cobra and Appanna... They are inseparably connected in the tale, leading to a multi dimensional situation; Rani's transformation from the moment of her oath taking heightens the suggestive quality of the play. The personification of 'Story' and the 'Flames' and their action-oriented representation make the entire play very powerful and help to project a wide a range of human experience. The most fascinating in the play in the playwright's attempt to recreate the Kannada myth to portray the human predicament in a contemporary social situation. His wearing together of the Western and eastern concepts of the theatre language in interpreting the myth is evident in the development of a plot.

Tala-Danda too poses the problem of human identity in a world of human relationships Basavanna is Karnad's mouthpiece who leads a movement of reformation in protest against discrimination based on caste, class and gender. The play stresses the old adage that excess of everything is bad. As such, extremes of prejudice as well as piety result in the doom of all human endeavours for bringing out social change. The political repercussions of activism of the reformers, the conflict of the

various sects within and without affect the fate of common masses. The play opens before us some interesting and controversial sites of our ancient and medieval culture. Karnad's great awareness of the power of caste consciousness alienation and the politics of riots make this play a novel experiment of orthodox Hindu society. The glaring paradox of disjointed happenings and helplessness are the prevalent in public life in our country. Like Basavanna, a man's mystic quest is solitary- a truth that cannot be communicated in verbal terms, it can be felt. The totality of the world remains deceptive.

Tale-Danda exposes the most elusive psychological drives the will to power and the problem of identity motivating people to excessive actions even to self-destruction. Karnad believes that the root cause of communal problems in India is our fixed opinion and his *Tale-Danda* is all about the vision of making a casteless society.

Karnad's ability to imbibe what is best in the two worlds- the East and the West- and to use it to produce the desired effect on the stage is best illustrated in his plays. They hold a mirror to the very evolution of Indian theatre. As a creative artist, Girish Karnad has contributed a lot to the world of literature and the world of celluloid as well. He has taken an initiative role in movements and crusades concerning social and cultural issues of India. His judicious use of folk-tales, myths and historical

legends exposes contemporary Indian cultural and social life. He has woven eternal verities about human life and emotions contained in ancient Indian stories with the changing social values and morals of modern life. His plays are basically concerned with the psychological problems, dilemmas and conflicts confronted by the modern Indian men and women in their social perspective.

Like an Indian writer in English, he is in a peculiar position. He is deeply rooted in the native tradition but like a tree getting its life juice from roots; it has to breathe in the surrounding air. In addition, air, in his plays, is full of modernity. He is fully aware of the predicament of man and has tried to bring about a happy and harmonious union of the tradition of the East and West of old and modern of myths and facts. He does it because he concluded that without any new stage of human development would fall as soon as it is erected. The values of art science and ethics are all integrated into a fuller and clearer sense of essential formative forces at work within the man. He asserts that the madness in exploitation and war for material gains leads to a degeneration of the soul and corrupts it forever. It is this soul stirring quality that raises him to a place of prominence among the writers of English drama. It is he who has brought to the Indian drama the abiding faith in the eternal goodness of man, the irresistible power of love and dignity of suffering. The picture of men and women ruthlessly trampled

under the heels of the stupid and callous tyranny of the privileged; few touch the springs of human pity.

Influenced by the western literary and philosophical obsession in Camus, Sartre, Malamud and other American writers Karnad finds it a fashionable craze to write about the modern crisis-crisis of identity, existential chaos almost in the same manner in which the seventeenth century English authors simulated to be melancholy: He knows that worldly affluence is not enough. The one world is dead and the other is powerless to be born. The escape from the outer world to the inner world, keeps man engaged. Therefore, Karnad's major characters find themselves in a situation from which they find it difficult to be disentangled. Thus, in the depiction of existentialism in the postmodern world in the wake of colonial hangover, economic depression, psychological split-up as well as existential angst and freedom of choice in his plays Karnad is unparalleled.

Karnad has won all India recognition with his plays *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Ate ka Kukkut* and *Hayavadana*. He has been in the west and has been attracted by the drama of Giradoux, Anouilh, Camus and Satre in his search for new forms of drama. Yet he is essentially in the Kannada tradition. His reworking of myths, Puranic, historical and literary, relates him to Kailasam and Rangacharya as much as it does to those European dramatists who remake their myths.

Karnad does not take the myths in their entirety. He takes only part of them that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination to make his plots clear. Thus in *Yayati*, he has not taken the entire myth but cleverly chosen the most significant part of it. In *Tughlaq*, most of the important characters such as the character of Barani, Najib, Aziz and the stepmother are seen in a new context. Even in *Hayavadana*, the myth of Hayavadana is discussed very tactfully and impartially.

Karnad's superb command over English language is an outstanding quality of Karnad as a writer writing in English. He chooses words, phrases and proverbs very carefully from a rich treasure of English language. His words are suggestive and reveal both character and situation. His language is smooth, poetic and easy to understand. This helps the Indian audience to understand and enjoy the English play.

Karnad remains undoubtedly the most important dramatist of the contemporary Kannada stage. He has given the theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor - director. He has shown the Indian stage as to what depths the mythical themes could be taken to in order to create a contemporary consciousness. Karnad's

advantages are many - his expert knowledge of contemporary European theatre, his exposure to the Western dramatic literature and more importantly his theatrical sensibility - all this certainly sharpened by his thorough knowledge of the stage. He has shown to the Indian theatre community and to the world theatre community how our past and present can coalesce to give our present day existence meaning and to theatre activity a direction.³

Honours and awards:

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| 1958 | Ranked first in the University in B. A. |
| 1958-59 | Dakshina Fellow in the Department of Statistics for M. A., Bombay University. |
| 1960-63 | Rhodes scholarship, Oxford. |
| 1963 | President, Oxford Union Society. |
| 1962 | Mysore State Award for <i>Yayati</i> . |
| 1970 | Government of Mysore Rajyotsava Award. |

- 1970 President's Gold Medal for the Best Indian Film for *Samskara*.
- 1970 - 72 Homi Bhabha Fellowship for creative works in folk theatre.
- 1972 Sangeet Natak Academy Award for playwriting.
- 1972 Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the Best Indian Play of the Year for *Hayavadana*.
- 1972 National Award for Excellence in Direction for *Vamsha Vriksha* (shared with B. V. Karanth).
- 1972 Mysore State Awards for the Best Kannada Film and Best Direction for *Vamsha Vriksha*.
- 1974 President's Silver Medal for the Second Best Indian film for *Kaadu*.
- 1974 Padma Shri Award from the President of India.
- 1974-75 Director, Film and Television Institute, Pune.
- 1976-78 President, Karnataka Academy.
- 1978 National Award for the Best Kannada film for *Ondanondu Kaaladalli*.

- 1978 National Award for the Best Script for *Bhumika* (shared with Shyam Benegal and Satyadev Dubey).
- 1978 Film Fare Award for the Best Script for *Godhuli* (shared with B. V. Karanth).
- 1978 West Bengal Film Journalists Association Award for the Best Actor of the Year for *Swami*.
- 1984 Karnataka Nataka Academy Award.
- 1984-93 Indian Co-chairman, Joint Media Committee (for Films, Broadcasting and Press) of the Indo-US Sub-Commission on Education and Culture.
- 1987-88 Visiting Professor and Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, University of Chicago.
- 1988-93 Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.
- 1989 Nandikar, Calcutta, Award for playwriting.
- 1990 Golden Lotus for the Best Non-Feature Film on Social Issues for *The Lamp in the Niche*.
- 1990 *Writer of the Year* Award from Granthaloka Journal of the Book Trade for *Tale-Danda*.
- 1991 Karnataka State Award for the Best Supporting Actor in *Santa Shishunala Shareef*.

- 1992 B. H. Sridhar Award for *Tale-Danda*.
- 1992 Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989 for *Naga-Mandala*.
- 1992 Karnataka Nataka Academy from the President of India.
- 1992 Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India Award.
- 1993 Karnataka Sahitya Akademy Award for *Tale-Danda*.
- 1993 National Award for the Best Film on Environment Conservation for *Cheluvi*.
- 1994 Doctor of Letters from Karnatak University, Dharwad.
- 1994 Special Honour Award from the Karnataka Sahitya Academy.
- 1994 Sahitya Academy Award for *Tale-Danda*.
- 1994 Elected Fellow, Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi.
- 1997 Gubbi Veeranna Award by the Govt. of Karnataka.

- 1999 Kalidas Samman by the Government of Madhya Pradesh.
- 1999 Bhartiya Jnanpith Award
- 2000-03 Director, the Nehru Centre, London and Minister, Culture, High Commission of India, London.

Karnad's Plays:

1. *Tughlaq*
2. *Hayavadana*
3. *Naga - Mandala*
4. *Bali*
5. *Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain)*, First Directed by Prasanna for NSD Rep.
6. *Odakalu Bimba*
7. *Yayati*
8. *Angumalige*
9. *Maa Nishaadha*
10. *Tippuvina Kanasugalu (The Dreams of Tipu Sultan)*
11. *Tale Danda*, in Hindi its known as *Rakt-Kalyan* translated by Ram Gopal Bajaj, first directed by E. Alkaji for NSD rep., then by Arvind Gaur (1995-2008) for Asmita Theater Group, New Delhi.
12. *Hittina Hunja*

Movies directed by Girish Karnad:

1. *Utsav* in Hindi
2. *Samskara* in Kannada. He got a National Award for best direction.
3. *Ondanaondu Kaaladalli* in Kannada
4. *Anand Bhairavi* in both Kannada and Telugu
5. *Kanooru Heggadathi* in Kannada
6. *Woh Ghar*, based on Kirtinath Kurtakoti's Kannada play *Aa Mani*
7. *Kaadu* in Kannada
8. *Cheluvi* in Kannada
9. Film fare Nominations as Best Supporting Actor for *Aasha* (1980) and *Teri Kasam* (1982)

Karnad's works in visual media:

1. *Manthan*
2. *Naga Mandala*
3. *Agni Mattu Male*, made into a Hindi movie titled *Agni Varsha*
4. *Umbartha* (Marathi, with Smita Patil)

Other notable works:

He has played the role of Karadi, the *Sootradhar* (narrator), for several stories in the popular audio book series for kids, *Karadi Tales*. He has also been the voice of APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India, in the audio book of Kalam's autobiography by Charkha Audio books *Wings of Fire*.

He also served as the director of the Film and Television Institute of India from 1974-1975, the Indian co-chairman for the Joint Media Committee of the Indo-US Sub-Commission on Education and Culture from 1984-1993, chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy from 1988-1993, and president of Karnataka Nataka Academy from 1976-1978.

Girish Karnad's Plays: A Bird's Eye View

Girish Karnad is one of the foremost playwrights in India. He belongs to the Kannada theatre. Although rooted in Indian mythology and history, his plays at the same time convey a strong and unmistakable Western philosophical sensibility. The existentialist crisis of modern man is conveyed through strong individuals who are locked in intense psychological and philosophical conflicts. *Karnad has been accused of escaping into the past*, said Laxmi Chandrashekar, an academic and an active figure in Kannada theatre. However, the use of mythology

in most modern literature validates individual experience and universalizes it. In addition, I think Karnad has been able to do that.

The publication of *Yayati* in 1961 and especially of *Tughlaq* in 1964 established Karnad as a dramatist. Consequently, he published *Hayavadana* (1971), *Angumalige* (1977), *Hittina Hunja* (1980), *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Tale-Danda* (1990) and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995). Karnad wrote all his eight plays in Kannada; these have been translated into major Indian languages including the national language Hindi. Five of his plays - *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda*, and *The Fire and the Rain*, - have been translated into English. The first three of these have been published by Oxford University Press in India and the remaining two by Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi.

(1) *Yayati*, Karnad's first play, was written in 1961 and won the Mysore State Award in 1962. It is an existentialist play on the theme of responsibility. It is based on an episode in the *Mahabharata*, where Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, is given the curse of premature old age by his father-in-law, Sukracharya, who is incensed by Yayati's infidelity. Yayati could redeem this curse only if someone was willing to exchange his youth with him. It is his son, Puru, who finally offers to do this for his father. The play examines the moment of

crisis that Puru's decision sparks, and the dilemma it presents for Yayati, Puru and Puru's young wife.

Yayati is the typical representative of the common man who, despite his varied happiness, is always discontented and is always madly running in pursuit of new pleasure and enjoyment. He mistakes momentary animal pleasure for eternal happiness. Karnad interprets the ancient theme in modern context. Like Yayati of the *Mahabharata*, the common man of today is groping in the darkness of material and sensual pleasures. He finds himself in a world in which the old spiritual values have been entirely swept away and new spiritual ones are yet to be discovered. The blind pursuit of pleasure has become the supreme religion and the ultimate goal in life.

(2) *Tughlaq*, Karnad's second play was written in 1964. The play was directed by E. Alkazi and presented in London by the National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1982. It was originally written in Kannada but was later translated into English by Karnad himself. Karnad was told by someone that there were no good history plays in India and so he decided to write one. For this purpose, he delved deep into history beginning with Ishwari Prasad.

Tughlaq is a play on the life of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq of the 14th century India. Karnad deviates from the facts of history when it is essential to create artistic and dramatic

effect. The chief aim of the dramatist is to highlight the contradictions in the Sultan's complex personality who is both a visionary and man of action, devout and irreligious, generous and cruel, civilized and yet barbarian. Tughlaq's close associates - Barani, the scholarly historian and Najib, the practical politician represent two aspects of Tughlaq's personality. Aziz and Aazam are two opportunists who take the best possible advantage of the Sultan's ideal policies and befool him. The play shows the transformation of the character of the medieval ruler Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq. From a sensitive and intelligent ruler who sets out to do the best for his people, suffers an increasing sense of alienation and is forced to abandon his earlier idealism and end up as a tyrant. Karnad found Tughlaq's history contemporary because it

reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country.⁴

Dry bones of history live once again in the pages and the characters and plot are suitably modified.

(3) Karnad won the Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972 for his third play *Hayavadana*. Its plot is based on the *Katha Saritsagar* tale, which Thomas Mann used

for his short novel *The Transposed Heads*. It is a play on the search of identity in a world of tangled relationships. Devadatta, the intellectual and Kapila, the 'man of body' are very close friends. Devadatta marries Padmini, the most beautiful girl of the village Dharampura. Kapila and Padmini fall in love with each other. The two friends kill themselves. In a highly comic scene, which is of great dramatic significance Padmini transposes their heads, giving Devadatta Kapila's body and Kapila Devadatta's! It results in a confusion of identities, which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. The situation gets complicated. They fight a duel and kill themselves again. Padmini performs *Sati*. The subplot of the play has a great comic and ironical significance. The horseman's (Hayavadana's) search for completeness ends comically at the same time pathetically. He becomes a complete horse but with the human voice still remains with him! The play was directed in German by Vijaya Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar.

(4) Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* is based on two Kannada folk tales, which he heard from A. K. Ramanujan. It was directed by Vijay Mehta in German, was presented by the Leipziger Schauspielhaus at Leipzig and Berlin for the Festival of India in Germany in 1992. Again, it was performed at the University Theatre at Chicago and subsequently at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis as part of its thirtieth anniversary celebrations in 1993.

Naga-Mandala was published in Kannada first and then translated into English by Karnad himself. He says *Naga-Mandala is based on two oral tales from Karnataka, which I first heard several years ago from Prof. A. K. Ramanujan.*

Karnad wrote *Naga-Mandala* when he was at the University of Chicago as a visiting professor. It was staged at the University with the help of colleagues and students; then in India, it was staged by *Sanket*.

The play has a prologue and two acts and in this play, the cobra plays an important role, or we can say that the King Cobra plays the role of the hero. The action of the play has three different stories. Yet they are brilliantly linked to produce wonderful dramatic unity. The three stories are involving the following characters: (1) The Man, his story is separate (2) (a) The story, and (b) The Flame (3) (a) Rani, the heroine of the main story (b) Appanna, Rani's husband (c) Kurudavva, an old blind woman, (d) Kappanna, the blind woman's son, (e) Naga, the King Cobra, (f) the Village elders, and (g) the crowds.

Before the exposition of the play, Karnad informs the audience about the story of the man. The play opens in an inner sanctum of a ruined temple, where the idol is broken, the moonbeams fall on the Man, he is yawning and trying to remain awake, and narrates his story and informs the story of his curse and that he was going to die in the morning. He was a playwright

and he caused many peoples' sleepless nights, so if he sleeps, that will be the end of his life. He has run away from home, come to the temple and wants to remain awake to escape the curse. Then many flames enter and narrate their own experience in many homes, the flames are presented as living beings and later on, the story comes as a woman. She tells them the story of unhappy Rani and how her husband ill-treats her.

According to the Story, Rani's story is full of miracles; the sad heroine is helped by the old blind woman, who offered her charms so that her husband will love her. Rani prepared food; but the moment she put the charm in the food, she became full of fear, so she threw the prepared food outside near an anthill. It was consumed by King Cobra, so the Naga came to her as her husband. She was happy but surprised at her husband's (The Naga's) strange behaviour. Then she became pregnant, the village elders arranged the trial; but with the Naga's help, she was saved and then worshipped by the crowd as a goddess. She became the mother of a child. Her husband has to accept everything, and then Naga came and finally became her long black tresses and lived upon her head. Thus, with the help of story of Rani, told by the Story as a woman pleased the flames and helped the man to remain awake. He is saved and everybody is happy in the end.

(5) *Tale-Danda* was written in 1989 in Kannada, translated by himself as usual, and published in 1994. The play is divided into three acts.

In the preface to this play, Karnad has stated that he was encouraged to write the play in 1989 when the *Mandir* and the *Mandal* movements were felt very strongly in India. At the time, the question of the caste system was beginning to show again that this question was very relevant. This ugly sore in the life of Indian social structure proved full of horrors as the problem was much dangerous and the thinkers of the nation have to pay real attention and not ignore the solution.

In the 12th century, from 1148 to 1168, the Saint poet Basavanna was active in the city of Kalyan. King Bijjal had appointed Basavanna as the Finance Minister. The poet was not interested in the political life; but as a true religious leader, he was conscious of the then burning social problems of his age. He called the assembly or a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers. The year 1168 became an epoch-making event in the history of Kalyan. The participants were true thinkers who believed in creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment. The reformers talked of the religious matters and of God and Man.

For the first time, they emphasized the use of the mother tongue, the tongue of the common man instead of using Sanskrit,

the language of the learned people. The new leaders condemned idolatry and temple worship, because they believed in the principle of kinetic and in the progress in human enterprise and rejected everything that was static. In addition, they emphasized in the equality of the sexes, and they dedicated themselves with devotion and hard work. Their outstanding work was to oppose the caste-system, not just in theory only; but also in practice. It brought tremendous opposition and the wrath of the orthodox Hindus of the society. Basavanna's movement ended in the terror and bloodshed.

The orthodox Hindus became violent when the reformers acted upon their age-old beliefs and traditions. A Brahmin girl married a low-caste boy. The orthodox people proclaimed *Tale-Danda* or *Death by Beheading*. *Tale* means *Head* and *Danda* means *Punishment*.

Basavanna had used the words, related with the offering of the head and the barbarous practice, when people in the unpleasant situation or accusation uttered the words - *May my head roll* or *I offer my head*. Basavanna disliked this practice and expressed outrage in his movement.

Tale-Danda is a theme-presenting situation in which a group of people is trying of fight caste and social inequality. Basavanna's followers, the Saranas led the movement; orthodox Brahmins and other upper caste Hindus opposed the new

changes in the social structure, especially the marriage of a Brahmin girl to a Chamar boy. The parents of the bride and the bridegroom were Saranas and believed to put into practice, the teaching of Basavanna.

(6) While studying in college, Girish Karnad read the abridged legend of Yavakrit from the *Mahabharata*, which was translated into English by Chakravarti Rajgopalachari. For 37 years, the story was stored in one corner of Karnad's mind. Then in 1993, Karnad was assigned to write a play by Gruthie Theatre of Minneapolis U.S.A. and that old legend took the shape of *The Fire and the Rain*.

The Fire and the Rain was first written in Kannada and Karnad has himself translated the play in English. The title in Kannada - *Agni Mattu Male* clearly shows that the word *Agni* is with all the connotations of the word in Sanskrit; the second word *Mattu* means *and* and the last word *Male* means *rain*. The word is Kannada and contains all the glory.

Maharshi Ved Vyas has narrated the story of Sage Bharadwaja's son Yavakrit in four *Adhyays* from 135 to 138. The occasion was the night-stay of the Pandavas at Sage Raibhya's ashram; at that time, they were forced to live in the jungle for a period of 12 years, as it was one of the conditions. After Yudhisthir's defect in the game of dice against Shakuni, and then there arrives Maharshi Lomesh, who informed the eldest

Pandava, Yudhishtir and his family about the sacredness of the Ashram and how it came to be reversed as a holy place. Lomesh narrates the detailed story of Bhardwaj, his son Yavakrit, the Sage's another sage friend Raibhya, his two sons - Arvvasu and Parvasu, the family relations between the two sages, Yavakrit's lust for fame and status, his jealousy, malicious behaviour and the resultant downfall and the death; on the other hand, how Arvvasu achieved rebirth of Yavakri by very strict penance. Yavakrit's legend is an instance of a lesson how to lead life in the situation and circumstances that were before Yudhishtir, as also how Yavakrit lived a hero's life.

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CHAPTER - 3

CHAPTER – 3

POWER POLITICS IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *HAYAVADANA AND TUGHLAQ*

Hayavadana

Girish Karnad has taken the plunge into the unfathomable depths of age-old Indian mythologies to look for the subject matter of his plays and has successfully and artistically converted them into the world, which fits into the present framework to reflect the present day social dilemmas, hiccups, and problems.

Karnad's third play *Hayavadana* was published in 1970, exactly six years after *Tughlaq*. It is a masterful cross section of human and societal problems with humanistic approach. It reveals the conflicts and the storms brewing in human mind because of differences brought about by clashes due to the forces of nature and social compulsions, love outside and beyond matrimony, giving birth to children and man's crisis in attaining the unattainable.

One of the chief features of *Hayavadana* is that the plot of the play is based on the myths. Karnad has borrowed the theme

from *Katha Saritsagara* originally but the present work is from Thomas Mann's retelling of the *Transposed Heads*. He has added the subplot on Hayavadana himself. It has also the myth of *Yakshagana*.

Man's maniacal pursuit of perfection is fleeting. Karnad has understood this very well and successfully focused it in *Hayavadana* through the characters of the three worlds: *Divine, Human* and *Animal*. The quintessential teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gita* comes before our minds while pondering over the characters of Padmini, Kapila, Devadatta and Hayavadana. Man's majority of the problems are because of his ignorance about the real nature of the *Self*. It has been clearly and correctly stated in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that *there is no cause for grief*. Every basic problem arises from the fundamental human problem of the inadequate self. Unless one discovers oneself to be an adequate self, life continues to be a problem. Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* reveals that any human being-in fact, every being is a complete adequate self. The sense of inadequacy arises from the ignorance of the real nature of the *Self*. The knowledge of the self will eliminate the sense of inadequacy. When one discovers oneself to be a full and complete being, the conflict and the grief vanish. Happiness becomes natural and life in much more than worth living.

Before we examine the mythological aspects and issues in *Hayavadana*, it would be profitable if we try to study the sources

of the play. As stated above the story of *Hayavadana* comes partly from Thomas Mann's story titled *Transposed Heads*, which in turn is based on one of the versions of the story in *Vetal Panchavimshati*.

The outline story of *Transposed Heads* is as follows. Shridaman, a Brahmin by birth but Vanijya by profession, and Nanda, a cowherd and blacksmith, are very close friends. Shridaman falls in love with Sita whom he happens to see when the two friends are traveling together. Nanda laughs at the idea but agrees to act as a messenger of his friend. Sita accepts the proposal and marries Shridaman. Some months later while Shridaman, Nanda and Sita are traveling together in a cart to a house of Sita's parents they lose track, come across a temple of Kali and take a halt. Shridaman visits the temple alone and, overcome by an incredible urge, offers himself to the goddess as a sacrifice. Nanda goes in search of his friend, finds what has happened and afraid of the charge that he killed his friend because he was in love with Sita and because he does not want to live without his friend, kills himself. Sita realize what has happened and prepares to hang herself. The goddess Durga appears in front of her chides her for her act and grants life to the two dead bodies. Sita, in her excitement, fixes the heads wrongly. Naturally the problem is: Who is her husband? The hermit Kamdaman whose advice is sought decides in favour of Shridaman's head. Gradually Shridaman's head begins to control Nanda's body and the body becomes refined. Sita begins to pine

for Nanda, so much so that she sets out to meet him carrying Andhak, her baby boy with her. After a strenuous journey, she finds him at a pleasant spot in the forest. They spend the day and the night in heavenly bliss. Next morning Shridaman arrives on the scene. He suggests that they should kill each other in a combat and that Sita should perform Sati. Sita thinks that if she lives the life of a widow Andhak's future will be doomed but if she performed Sati Andhak will be a Sati's son and his social image will improve. Therefore, she gives her consent and burns herself on the funeral pyre of her two husbands!

The stories in the *Vetal Panchavimshati* and Somdeva's *Brihatkatha Saritsagar* are basically the same except for a few alterations in the latter, in place names and in the references to the names of the castes of characters. The story is as follows. Prince Dhavala married Madansundari, the daughter of a king named Suddhapata, through the favour of goddess Gauri, in a temple in the city of Shobhavati. Then one day Svetapata, Suddhapata's son, proceeded to his own country along with his sister and her husband. On the way, he came to another temple of goddess Gauri. Dhavala went into the temple to pay homage to the goddess. Through some irresistible urge, he cut off his head with a sword, which he chanced to see there, and presented it to the goddess. As Dhavala did not come even after waiting for some time, Svetapata went inside. When he found out what Dhavala had done, he also cut off his own head and offered it to the goddess. Then Madansundari, realizing that her husband and

her brother had been away for a long time, went into the temple and saw their dead bodies lying before the goddess and, in great grief, she also began to cut off her own head. Just then, the goddess Gauri appeared before her prevented her from doing so and offered to her what she wanted. Madansundari, naturally, requested the goddess to restore her husband's and her brother's life. The goddess asked her to set their heads on their shoulders. However, through excitement, she joined her husband's head to her brother's body and vice versa. When they came back to life, Madansundari realized her own mistake. Vetala's question is *who Madansundari's husband is?* The king answers, *Of course the person with Dhvala's head on his shoulders.*

Karnad's play in a characteristic way begins where the *Vetal* story ends. *How would the woman take it if it really happened and would it ultimately solve the problem for her?* are the fascinating problems the artist in him faces. In all his plays Karnad takes this kind of leap from the original story and develops it further. This further development is the play of the artist's imagination and it challenges the glib solutions offered in the original stories.

Now let us take up what actually happens in Karnad's play *Hayavadana*. It is a bold and successful experiment on folk theme. Karnad uses successfully the conventions and motifs of folk tales and folk theatre. Masks, curtains, dolls and the story

within a story have been deftly employed to create a bizarre world.

In the opening of Act I, the entire stage is empty except for a chair and a table at which the Bhagvata and the musicians sit. The mask of Lord Ganesha is kept on the chair. The Bhagvata sings verses in his praise:

O Elephant - headed Herembha
Whose flag is victory
And who shines like a thousand suns.
O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi,
Seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake.
O single - tusked destroyers of incompleteness,
We pay homage to you and start our play. (HN 1)

The Bhagavata evokes *Ganesha* as a destroyer of obstacles and problems to shower his blessings for the success of the play. But this is certainly ridiculous. Lord Ganesha himself is an example of imperfection.

An elephant's head on human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly - Whichever way he is looked at, he is the embodiment of imperfection, incompleteness. It is very difficult to believe that this 'Vakratunda

Mahakaya' is the lord and master of success and perfection. (HN 1)

The tale is set in the city of Dharampura. The city was ruled by Dharmshila. His fame had reached everywhere. There lived two bosom friends Kapila and Devadatta. The bond between them is personified as the bond between Lava and Kusha, Rama and Laxman, Krishna and Balram. Their friendship is an example for others to emulate.

Devadatta is the only son of a learned and wise Brahmin Vidyasagar. He is described as comely in appearance, fair in colour and unrivalled in intelligence. He is credited with defeating the mightiest pundits of the kingdom in debates on logic and love, and abiding the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit.

He has a great friend in Kapila. Kapila was the only son of an ironsmith named Lohita who was an important functionary in the king's army. He is dark and plain to look at but is unparalleled in drive and daring, in strength and physical skills. Despite belonging to different back grounds the two pull together very well.

All of a sudden, a cry is heard off the stage and an actor rushes to the Bhagavata in a nervous and very scared state. After a little admonishment, he reveals that he had seen a strange

creature, Hayavadana – a horse headed man who spoke human language. The Bhagvata is surprised and believes him only when he himself sees the strange creature. He feels that Hayavadana is playing some tricks and warns him of his pranks in front of the esteemed audience, who may not appreciate it. He asks him to throw the mask of the horse away and himself and the actor try to pull it off his head but fail. When the truth is out that it is a real horse-head, the Bhagavata asks Hayavadana who is he and several other questions, such as whether it is a curse of a rishi, or if he had desecrated a *Punyasthala* or if he had insulted a Pativrata. Then Hayavadana tells his sad story.

He says that it was his fate to be born with a head of the horse. His mother was a Karnataka Princess who fell in love with a Stallion of a prince who had come to marry her. After fifteen years of happy life, one morning the horse disappeared and in its place stood a celestial Gandharva. He was cursed by Kubera, God of wealth to be born as a horse for his misbehaviour, and after fifteen years he had become his original self again. He asked her to accompany him to his heavenly abode, which she declined. He cursed her to become a mare and himself went off. His mother ran away happily and he was left behind.

When Hayavadana asked Bhagavata what he should do to get rid of horse's head and become a complete man to enjoy being a member of society, Bhagavata advised him to go to the Goddess Kali of Chitrakoot, as she is ever awake to the call of

her devotees. Therefore, Bhagavata sent his actor to accompany Hayavadana to go there and blessed them, by saying significantly,

May you become successful in your
search for completeness. (HN 11)

After his departure, the play once again resumes its first theme. Devadatta is sitting on the chair in deep thought. Then Kapila enters and the conversation between the two beings. Kapila pesters him to reveal the cause of his distress but before that he feels tempted to manifest his guess – *It must be some girl*, he says, that bothers his mind as has happened on numerous occasions earlier. However, Devadatta is badly smitten this time with incisive and killing looks of a young maiden. He described her as the *Syamanayika* – born of Kalidasa's magic. Devadatta goes on to say that in the first glance, she became his teacher in the poetry of love. Devadatta's yearning for her is too much.

If only she could consent to be my
Muse. I will outshine Kalidasa. I'd
always wanted to do that - but I thought
it was impossible...But now I see it isn't
at all impossible. (HN 14)

Thus, Devadatta, the intellectual Brahmin falls in love with a pristine beauty and loses his heart to her. However, he

finds no means to win her as his soul mate. He cannot think of possessing her and in such intense moments, Kapila volunteers to become a messenger, a vehicle of expression and communicates the message of love of his friend. He successfully accomplishes the task at hand but ironically becomes the same person to cause dissensions between them. He perceives her to be as fast as lightning and equally sharp. Devadatta is too delicate a man to meet her requirement. What she needs is a man of steel. From here a new twist to the story is given. Padmini too gets deeply charmed by Kapila and finds his absence difficult to endure.

Kapila becomes a frequent visitor to their place and soon becomes a favourite of Padmini. Though there is no crack between two friends, yet Devadatta sometimes feels that Kapila is an intruder to their private moments. Padmini does not seem to mind and is perfectly at home in Kapila's presence. However, Devadatta wishes to spend intense moments with his wife in privacy.

Poor Kapila is fatally gripped in Padmini's charm. He has surrendered himself to the status of puppet being pushed and pulled by Padmini's charisma. Padmini, too, is losing the control over herself by the vigour and attraction of Kapila. Kapila's manly figure attracts after the Ujjain trip begins, she exclaims in one of her asides.

How he climbs - like an ape. Before I could even say 'yes', he had taken off his shirt, pulled his dhoti up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back - like an ocean with muscles rippling across it – and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless. (HN 25)

Padmini regards him as a celestial being reborn as a hunter. Devadatta could see Padmini's intense longing for Kapila and the flames leaping up from the depth of her eyes.

Then they pass through a wooded area. Near the Bhargavi River, there is a hermitage of Vyasa and a temple of Lord Rudra; and further there is a temple of goddess Kali on the top of the hill.

Padmini and Kapila go to the temple of Rudra and Devadatta stays back and waits near the cart. After they are gone, the storm that was blowing in Devadatta's mind is over and he bids good-bye to them. He goes to the temple of Kali and after addressing her with high sounding words and begging forgiveness for not fulfilling his promise made to her earlier, he hacks off his head with a sword kept there.

When Padmini and Kapila return to the cart and do not find Devadatta, Kapila leaves to search his friend. He reaches the temple of Kali and sees the agonizing scene. He feels guilty and holds himself responsible for his death. *If Devadatta was so angry with him that he left this world for him to live alone then Kapila abhors this world and he will follow him to the next*, he thinks ruefully. He also cuts off his head and sacrifices himself for his friend.

After waiting for him for some time, Padmini curses both of them. She is afraid, as it has started becoming dark. Therefore, she too goes to the Kali temple only to find the severed heads of Devadatta and Kapila. She yells out a cry. She blames them for killing themselves and leaving her in lurch. She is perplexed. *How could she go home? What will she say to the people there?* are the thoughts, which haunt her. They would certainly doubt her for this and believe that they two fought and died for her. She decides to follow Kapila and Devadatta. As she lifts the sword to make the offering, goddess' terrible voice is heard which freezes Padmini. The goddess is pleased and asks for a Varadan. Padmini asks to make Devadatta and Kapila alive. The goddess Kali asks Padmini to put the heads on their bodies and lay the sword on their necks and they will become alive again. Then there is a small conversation between the goddess and Padmini. Now the goddess asks her to hurry up. Padmini makes a blunder in her eagerness. Because of the darkness and excitement, she puts the wrong heads on wrong bodies. Both of

them come alive and all the three are greatly surprised. Now there is Devadatta's head on Kapila's body and vice versa. Thus, she has the pleasures of the best of both, in Devadatta's head and Kapila's body.

This joy is, however, short lived as when it comes to going back, Kapila with Devadatta's body claims Padmini. His contention is that it is with his body that Padmini took the vows of marriage before the sacred fire and the child that she was nursing in her womb is the seed of that body alone. Padmini and Devadatta are puzzled and agonized by it and Devadatta's explanation that it is the head that matters makes no difference to Kapila. Finally, it is settled that they would go to a wise saint whose words would be final and abiding on them. The sage announces that just as *Kalp-Vraksha* is supreme amongst all the trees in the same way head is supreme of all human limbs. There the man with Devadatta's head is indeed Devadatta. With this judgment, there is joy and laughter for Padmini and Devadatta while all is lost for Kapila. The parting of ways begins from here. Kapila leaves for the forest and the two returns to enjoy the marital bliss.

After the exchange of heads, Padmini's ideal and inner desire is realized. She is now having the best of both men. However, in the beginning, Devadatta-head-Kapila-body behaves differently from what he was before. However, slowly he reverts to his former self. So does the other. This makes

Padmini's position awkward, because Devadatta changes, Kapila changes but what about her? She is disillusioned. She has yearned for completeness but has failed to attain it. The fact is that it is not possible for a man to attain completeness. She understands but cannot control the situation in which she is placed. Her situation is beautifully summed up by the images of the river and the scarecrows in the choric songs.

The final solution comes from Devadatta that both of them should fight and must attack each other like lions and kill like cobras. A duel that leaves both the friends dead brings the puzzling story to an end. Padmini is the only one who is once again left alone. They lived together, fought, embraced and died but she was left out. She hands over her son to Bhagavata to put him in the care of the hunters and tell them that it is Kapila's son. They would bring him up until five and then the child is to be given to Devadatta's parents with the information that it is their grandson. She prepares herself for the *Sati*, sits on the large funeral pyre, and dies with the two bodies. Neither the death of the lovers, nor the subsequent *Sati* performed by Padmini is presented as tragic; the death serves only to emphasize the logic behind the absurdity of the situation.

The sub-plot of *Hayavadana*, the horseman, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. The horse-man's search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal

body triumphs over, what is considered the best in man, the *Uttam-Anga*, the head. Seeing a horse talk, Padmini's son burst into laughter and Hayavadana gets him on his back. Hayavadana story supplements the main story of Devadatta-Kapila-Padmini plot and unites it in the end.

The stories of the plot and sub-plot lead thus to the same conclusion. Hayavadana's mother, the princess of Karnataka, sought to be a mare and galloped away without thinking in the least of Hayavadana, the product of her marriage with the white stallion. Padmini's act runs parallel to the story of Hayavadana's mother. Hayavadana is thrown into this world neither a beast nor a human being. Padmini's son becomes totally withdrawn from the world, "autistic". The inanimate "dolls" are his only companions – in fact, they are the ones he knows intimately in this world. When he meets Hayavadana, his innocent smile makes Hayavadana a complete horse and Hayavadana's laughter makes the boy forget his dolls and regressive tendencies. It makes the child's return to humanity possible.

They, thus, cease to suffer from the consequence of the act of their parents. But this happy conclusion of a comedy does not prevent the audience from thinking over the other existential problem presented through the story of Kapila, Padmini and Devadatta. Padmini asserts her choice through death, Hayavadana's mother asserts through becoming a mare. Both Padmini's son and Hayavadana do not have a choice in the matter. They are brought into this world and they suffer because of the parent's act. Is the act of their parents justified?

At this point Karnad makes a very significant change in the story he borrowed from Mann. In Mann's *Transposed Heads* Sita dies thinking that her performing Sati will improve the image of her son in society and the son does become a good scholar and a reader to the king of Benares, unlike Padmini's who is autistic and withdrawn.¹

Karnad has succeeded in creating a proper Indian atmosphere in *Hayavadana*. He has introduced a number of words from Indian languages into his English translations, and then suitably Indianized English. *Hayavadana*, the title itself is suggestive of this art; as *Haya* (Horse) and *Vadana* (faced) are both Sanskritised words. Moreover, words like *Vighneshwara*, *Vakratunda-Mahakaya* and *Mangalmurthy* for Lord Ganesha. He uses words like *Gandharva*, *Ganesha*, *Kali*, the names of Indian Gods and Goddesses, *Yakshagana* and *Kathakali* - the Indian dance style, *rishi*, *Kalpavraksha*, *Pativrata*, *Sita* and so on. As talented playwright, he has the knack to transform any fictional or mythological situation into an aesthetic experience as pointed out by Kirtinath Kurtkoti.

The elements of power politics are found in each successive line and in each dialogue of the play. The entire play reveals the story of the power politics whether it's the case of characters or the theme or the atmosphere. The writer has successfully interwoven the theme of mythology along with the power politics. It's the brightest and the most attractive side of the text.

Tughlaq

Girish Karnad uses mythical and historical episodes to highlight problems, which confronts the modern India at various

levels. In his first play *Yayati*, which is a story borrowed from the *Bhagavata*, he discusses the theme of responsibility. In *Tughlaq*, which came three years later, he has taken a chapter from the Muslim period of history and drawn striking parallels, between India then and India now.

Tughlaq is an abiding contribution to modern Indian English drama. It has been remarkably successful on the stage due to its appeal to audience and its dramatic excellence. The play deals with the life and turbulent reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq who ruled over India for about twenty-six years from November - December 1324 to 1351. For the sake of dramatic precision and brevity, Karnad spans only five years from 1327 to 1332. The action begins in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad.

To understand *Tughlaq* we must know some historical details of his reign.

The House of Tughlaq was the fifth Sultanate of Delhi. The founder was Ghazi Malik Tughlaq (1320 - 25). By dainty of merit, he rose to be the Governor of the Punjab under Ala-ud-din Khilji. The last of the Khiljis was succeeded by the slave, Khusru Khan, an immoral and faithless as a Muslim. With the war cry *Islam in danger* Ghazi Malik Tughlaq and his son, Malik Jauna, rallied a party of Turkish chief, defeated Khusru, and

executed him. He accepted the crown offered to him by the noble and began his reign in 1320 with the title of Ghiyas-ud-din. He combined the rare qualities of a General and for-sighted statesman. He re-established peace and order in the kingdom and expanded it. However, he and his second son died in an accident, which was said to have been engineered by Malik Jauna, who after a State mourning, proclaimed himself, Sultan with the simple style of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq.

Muhammad Tughlaq was an ambitious ruler and he had a fancy for new policies or innovations both in foreign and domestic affairs. In foreign affairs, he desired to conquer not only the entire Indian subcontinent including its hilly regions in the north but also Characin outside its boundary. In domestic policy, he tried certain innovations in different fields of administration, which, though attempted with best intentions, affected adversely the fortunes of his empire.

One of the earliest measures of Muhammad Tughlaq concerned revenue administration. He attempted to keep the records of income and expenditure of all the provinces with a view to introducing a uniform standard of land revenue throughout his empire. However, it seems that nothing came out of this scheme and it was abandoned. Besides, Muhammad Tughlaq established a separate department of agriculture and appointed a minister to look after it. He attempted state farming under the care of this department and a large tract of land, nearly

sixty square miles in area, was acquired for this purpose. Cultivation was carried on this tract of land on an experimental basis for three years and then, when no fruitful result came out of it, the scheme was abandoned. However, the most serious schemes of reforms of Muhammad Tughlaq were taxation in the Doab, transfer of the capital to Daulatabad and introduction of token currency, which have been described by some writers as 'mad schemes' of Muhammad Tughlaq.

Karnad seems to be indebted to contemporary historians Zia-ud-Din Barani's *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi*, Ibn Bututah's *Travels*, Badoni's *Tarikh-I-Mubarak Shahi* and Al-Marshi's. *The Maslikal-Absar*. To large extent, Karnad has been faithful to recorded history. Only for the purposes of dramatic effect has he telescoped certain events in order to fit the two time sequences in the play - 1327 in Delhi and 1332 at Daulatabad. This makes chronology of the play to fall into two natural parts - the ambitious planning at Delhi and the fiasco in the south. Karnad closely follows the traditional sources, which present Tughlaq as combination of opposites - a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and godless. Tughlaq, in both history and Karnad's Tughlaq is a great scholar, idealist and visionary. He stands for administrative reforms, for implementing the policy of Hindu-Muslim amity, recognition of merit, irrespective of Caste and creed; reorganization of administrative machinery and taxation structure; establishment of egalitarian society in which all shall enjoy justice, equality

and fundamental human rights. A rationalist and philosopher, Tughlaq radically deviates from the religious tenets in matter of politics and administration. This departure from the holy tenets enrages the orthodox people and they condemn, oppose and rebel against Tughlaq. They think him a non-believer in Islam because he abolishes the jiziya tax, treats Hindus and Muslims equally. The Sultan was misunderstood throughout his reign. His intellectual capacity and love of philosophy were thought as hostility to Islam. His friendship with Yogies and Jains and his participation in the Hindu festivals were seen as his being Hinduized. His efforts to break the power of Ulemas and Sufies were thought anti-Islamic. His ambition to establish political contact with the world outside India was thought as madness. The old political leadership called him tyrant. The Ulemas said that war against him was lawful.

An idealistic, humanist and visionary Tughlaq was a shrewd politician who is guilty of parricide and fratricide. He killed his father at prayer time. Karnad, a great and gifted dramatist, uses prayer as a leitmotiv in Tughlaq, which has not been so employed in history. It creates a vivid dramatic effect. U. R. Anantha Murthy writes:

Although the theme of the play is from history there are many plays in Kannada-Karnad's treatment of theme is not historical. Take for instance, the use

Karnad makes of the leitmotiv of the 'prayer', in the scene where the Muslims chieftains along with Sheikh Shams - ud-Din, a pacifist priest, conspire to murder Tughlaq at prayer. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer, which is most dear to Tughlaq, is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. The whole episode is ironic.¹¹

In 1326-27, Tughlaq decided upon a plan to make Devagiri the second administrative capital of his empire which was renamed Daulatabad. Different reasons have been given for this transfer. According to Ibn Batuta and Isami, the citizens of Delhi used to write letters containing abuses and scandals to the Sultan. Therefore the Sultan decided to lay Delhi waste in order to punish them. Sir Woolseley Haig has accepted the version of Ibn Batuta. Professor Habibullah has described that the motive of the Sultan was to provide incentive to Muslim culture in the South. Besides, the prosperity of the South and administrative convenience were also his motives. Dr. Mahdi Hussain has expressed the same view. According to Dr. A. L. Srivastava, the desire of safeguarding the capital from Mongol invasions from the north-west, the necessity of consolidating the empire in the

South and the temptation to utilize the rich resources of the South were primary considerations for the transfer of the capital. He was convinced that the Deccan kingdom could be controlled only from a capital near them. The Amira and Sayyids were against the Sultan and by transferring the capital to Daultabad, a Hindu dominated town, he wanted to weaken their power. The reasons, which Karnad's Tughlaq gives for changing the capital, are based on historical evidence. He explains in the first scene:

My empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital, which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well know, its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital, I will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom.¹²

The Ulemas and the Sufis refused to co-operate. The Sultan was adamant. He forced all under threat of penalty. All historians have called this a mass exodus. Barani, the court historian records that Delhi was completely evacuated, *not a cat or a dog was left*. According to contemporary historians, the

entire population of Delhi was ordered to leave it and it was laid waste. Ibn Batuta wrote:

A search was made and a blind man and a cripple were found. The cripple was put to death while the blind man was dragged to Daulatabad where only his one leg reached.¹³

Isami also has written: *Muhammad Tughlaq ordered that the city (Delhi) should be set on fire and all the populace should be turned out of it.* Several modern historians do not accept this view. According to Dr. K. A. Nizami, the entire population of Delhi was not asked to leave. Only the upper classes, consisting of nobles, Ulema, Sheikhs and the elite of Delhi were shifted to Daulatabad. But Dr. R. C. Majumdar, Dr. A. L. Srivastava and Dr. Ishwari Prasad have expressed the view that there is no doubt in the fact that the Sultan had ordered all citizens of Delhi to vacate it. Karnad's Tughlaq says,

Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately, every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I can see that now. They will only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should rise from its chimneys. Nothing

but an empty graveyard of Delhi will
satisfy me now.¹⁴

However, this seems an exaggeration because the Turkish historian, Ibn Batuta, declares that when he visited Delhi in 1334, it was as usual.

The Sultan arranged all possible measures for the comfort of the people during their journey from Delhi to Daulatabad. Shady trees were planted all along the route; free food and drinking water were supplied to the people after every three kilometers of journey, all were provided means of transport, all were compensated for the loss, which they incurred in leaving their assets at Delhi, and all were provided free residence and food at Daulatabad. Yet, there is no doubt that with all these comforts, the forty days' journey from Delhi to Daulatabad was an extremely tormenting experience for the people of Delhi. The march involved unspeakable sufferings to the unfortunate migrants. The forced exodus from Delhi to Daulatabad inflicted untold suffering, penury, hunger and starvation on men, women, children, young and old alike. Relief measures provided by Tughlaq were misappropriated by corrupt officers. The people, who had suffered hunger, starvation and other indignities for long, were rebellious and Tughlaq inflicted heavy punishment upon them. K. A. Nizami, a modern historian states in his famous book *Comprehensive History of India* - p. 528:

The Sultan began to punish both the guilty and the innocent on mere suspicion in the hope that bloodshed on a large scale would terrorize his officers and make them obedient; on the other hand, his officers, knowing his military weakness, preferred rebellion to punishment without trial.¹⁵

The experiment proved a dismal failure and after seven years, Delhi was restored as the capital. This scheme of Sultan failed completely. It failed due to various reasons. The Sultan committed a blunder when he asked the people or even the elite of Delhi to go to Daulatabad *en masse*. He ought to have shifted only his court and the rest would have followed themselves. The common people were neither prepared to shift themselves to an unknown distant place nor was there any necessity of it. Besides, Daulatabad was a distant city from the north-west frontier of the empire. It was difficult to resist invasions of the Mongols from there. Moreover, the consolidated north India provided better security to the empire as compared to the newly conquered South. Thus, the Sultan made a wrong choice of the place and adopted wrong methods to transfer his capital. Sultan's rash and reckless act of transferring the capital to Daulatabad made him very unpopular and he lost his people's sympathy.

Another important administrative measure, which Tughlaq implemented, was the introduction of Token currency, which was probably issued in 1330. A growing shortage of silver had led to the brain wave. According to Barani, the Sultan introduced token currency because the treasury was empty, while he needed money to fulfill his schemes of conquest. The Sultan had in mind the paper currency of China. His object was good. He issued the bronze coin, in place of the silver coin and demanded its acceptance as a token coin equivalent to silver tanka. But the new coins were immediately and successfully forged. According to Barani,

the house of every Hindu became a mint.¹⁶

However, there is no reason to believe that the Muslims resisted the temptation. Rather, whosoever could afford to imitate the coins did it and the market was flooded with spurious coins. The farmers paid their revenue in token currency, the people paid their taxes in it and the traders too desired to give token currency while each of them tried to hoard gold and silver coins in his house. The result was that the gold and silver coins disappeared from circulation and the practically valueless copper tokens flooded the economy. Trade almost came to a standstill. The Sultan says,

Only one industry flourished in my
Kingdom, only one and that's of making

counterfeit copper coins. Every Hindu home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me to close my eyes...¹⁷

The token currency was kept in the market only for three or four years. The Sultan had the courage to acknowledge his failure and the honesty to give good silver coin in exchange for the depreciated token. The prestige of the treasury was maintained, but with great personal loss to Tughlaq. The Sultan's experiment miserably failed as the minting of counterfeit coins became very common and consequently the national economy was shattered. Tughlaq's plans were frustrated by the unimaginativeness and non-co operation of his officers and subjects.

Tughlaq's policy of taxation was disliked by everyone and especially by the farmers in the Lower Doab, which had the famine. He had advanced ideas regarding land improvement, education, medical relief and other welfare measures. However, his aims were not realized in practice. Rebellions broke out. Amir II in Scene V of Karnad's *Tughlaq* scoffs at the Sultan's taxation policy:

Look at what's happening in Delhi. Just look at it. You can't take a step without paying some tax or another. There's ever

tax on gambling. How are we to live?
You can't even cheat without having to
pay tax for it.¹⁸

In 1353, Sayad Ahson, the trusted Governor of Malbar rebelled. This started a series of provincial revolts, which dismembered the empire. In 1338, Bengal became independent. In 1340 Ain - ul - Mulk, the governor of Avadh rebelled. In 1342, Sind revolted and in 1343, Vijayanagar broke away. The Amirs of Daulatabad revolted and in 1347, the whole of Deccan including Daulatabad broke away from the Delhi Empire and Hasan Gangu Bahmani proclaimed himself as Bahman Shah. The rebellion of Taghi in Sind in 1351 called the attention of the Sultan there. Pursuing the rebel, Muhammad died at Thatta. A later historian said, *The King was freed from his people and his people from the King.*

No ruler in our medieval history has aroused so much interest and controversy as that of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. He inherited a vast kingdom, which embraced not only the entire northern India but also the Dakhin. However, his achievements were negative. Therefore, when he died, the Sultanate of Delhi was reduced in size. The Dakhin was almost lost. Sindh was almost slipping away from his hand when he breathed his last. Some of the modern historians opine that Muhammad was not responsible for his failure, as a ruler he failed because circumstances were not in his favour. His failure was due to his

characteristic limitations and to some odd decisions. He had everything-intellect, power, and a kind heart too, but what he lacked was common sense and practical wisdom.

The entire play is a store house of power politics. It is perhaps the only play of Karnad that entirely deals with the theme of power politics. Right from the shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad to the token currency episode, the play is full of policies of so called mad Tughlaq and his saga of power politics.

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CHAPTER: 4

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POWER POLITICS IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *TALE-DANDA AND THE FIRE & THE RAIN*

Tale-Danda

Tale-Danda was written in 1989 in Kannada, translated by himself as usual, and published in 1994. The play is divided into three acts.

In the preface to this play, Karnad has stated that he was encouraged to write the play in 1989 when the *Mandir* and the *Mandal* movements were felt very strongly in India. At the time, the question of the caste system was beginning to show again that this question was very relevant. This ugly sore in the life of Indian social structure proved full of horrors as the problem was much dangerous and the thinkers of the nation have to pay real attention and not ignore the solution.

In the 12th century, from 1148 to 1168, the Saint poet Basavanna was active in the city of Kalyan. King Bijjal had appointed Basavanna as the Finance Minister. The poet was not interested in the political life; but as a true religious leader, he

was conscious of the then burning social problems of his age. He called the assembly or a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers. The year 1168 became an epoch-making event in the history of Kalyan. The participants were true thinkers who believed in creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment. The reformers talked of the religious matters and of God and Man.

For the first time, they emphasized the use of the mother tongue, the tongue of the common man instead of using Sanskrit, the language of the learned people. The new leaders condemned idolatry and temple worship, because they believed in the principle of kinetic and in the progress in human enterprise and rejected everything that was static. In addition, they emphasized in the equality of the sexes, and they dedicated themselves with devotion and hard work. Their outstanding work was to oppose the caste-system, not just in theory only; but also in practice. It brought tremendous opposition and the wrath of the orthodox Hindus of the society. Basavanna's movement ended in the terror and bloodshed.

The orthodox Hindus became violent when the reformers acted upon their age-old beliefs and traditions. A Brahmin girl married a low-caste boy. The orthodox people proclaimed *Tale-Danda* or *Death by Beheading*. *Tale* means *Head* and *Danda* means *Punishment*.

Basavanna had used the words, related with the offering of the head and the barbarous practice, when people in the unpleasant situation or accusation uttered the words - *May my head roll* or *I offer my head*. Basavanna disliked this practice and expressed outrage in his movement.

Close analysis of Karnad's plays reveals the spirit of his artistic creation, which conforms to notion that drama since its birth is meant for the demos i.e. common people. In Karnad's aesthetics the word 'demos' does not mean only common people in terms of social or economic status; rather it connotes all the human beings who are considered inferior and weak and whose images have been subtly constructed through social and cultural conditioning. Karnad's endeavor seems to break these age-old stereotypes in order to instruct, elevate and liberate ordinary humanity. As a dramatist he is well conscious of importance of theatrical devices in the plays and undoubtedly his theatre has been richer than that of any of his contemporaries, but his basic concern is human spirit. Indian drama through the centuries has been one of the means of finding out as how a human being can achieve an optimal human existence— cultural, social, political, material and spiritual. The enactment of patriotic plays in the modern Indian theatre boosted operative energy in the freedom movement. The spirit of freedom gave great impetus to the revival of various modes of performing arts. And after independence, along with other playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sircar, Karnad has made a

number of theatrical and thematic experiments in order to untie the individuals from the shackles of superstitiously internalized socio-cultural constructs.

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

of caste system. As a great humanitarian he is also called 'Vishwa-guru' whose teachings are for the welfare of all humankind. His divine experience was the basis of his social life that aimed at providing everyone with equal opportunity, regardless of gender, caste or social status.

The idea of treating history as a play occurred to Karnad through the contemporary tumultuous politics and consequent socio-religious turmoil. Though the idea of writing the play started operating in his mind from the time of 'Emergency', it received its ultimate form when the caste and community based movements were creating tension and tumult in the socio-political life of the country. He wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the 'Mandir' and the 'Mandal' movements were creating agitation and posing threat to the national life. So in order to suit contemporary contexts, Karnad has introduced some changes in the historical events. Though the Sharana movement was inspired by the religion-Lingayatism, Karnad has focused mainly on the caste politics and subsequent upheaval. Though the aim of the movement was to bring about a great social change by eradicating Casteism, Karnad emphasizes that this change, though welcome, can be only superficial and theoretical. Explaining and enumerating the changes made by Karnad, Dhanavel in his article "The History and Mystery of Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda*" observes:

.... Actually, King Bijala was interested neither in the sharana movement nor in the brahmins who opposed it. As the king of the country, he wanted to rule it without any trouble to himself. In course of time, the relationship between the king and Basavanna was deteriorating. When the matter of inter-caste marriage came up the sharanas "were jubilant over it." (Murthy, 1991, 89)

Dhanavel goes on to explain the changes made by Karnad:

Against this brief history may be placed Karnad's Tale-Danda. The play centers around a few major incidents: a] Sovideva's meddling with the treasury, b] Basavanna's resignation from the post of chief Treasury Officer, c] the death and funeral ceremonies of Jagadeva's father, d] the inter-caste marriage of Sheelavanta and Kalavati, e] Bijala's abdication and death, f] Basavanna's union with God, g] Sovideva's

coronation. Though the series of events look historical, it is not.¹

In the play Karnad has made the inter-caste marriage central issue of sharana movement. In the Vedic system and Hindu religion inter-caste marriage is not encouraged. However if such marriages sometimes take place, they are of two types, namely anuloma and pratiloma. Anuloma, marriage between a higher caste and lower caste woman, is permissible; but pratiloma, marriage between a lower caste man and a higher caste woman, is not tolerable at any cost. When the caste became a curse and an evil social element, many thinkers advocated the need of inter-caste marriages of all types. Modern thinker, champion of dalits' rights and an architect of Indian constitution Dr. B. R. Ambedkar included inter-caste marriage in the Hindu Code Bill as Hindu marriages rather than as civil marriages registered under the Special Marriages Act. He not only advocated the need of inter-caste marriage but also put it into practice. Himself a dalit he married a Brahmin woman. In the heyday of dalit mobilization, Ambedkar wrote that inter-marriage was the most important way of annihilating caste, since it alone acknowledged the relationship between the maintenance of caste purity and the control of women's sexuality. He noted:

There are many Castes, which allow inter-dining. But it is a common experience that inter-dining has not

succeeded in killing the spirit of Caste and the consciousness of Caste. I am convinced that the real remedy is inter-marriage. Fusion of blood alone can create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount the separatist feeling& the feeling of being aliens& created by Caste will not vanish. Among the Hindus inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need be in the life of the non-Hindus. Where society is already well knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. However, where society is cut asunder, marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste. [Emphasis in the original] (Moon, 1979: 67)²

In the ancient India varna of an individual was decided on the division of labour and profession of the person. It gave every

member of society a place, a function and support. Thus, division of labour soon degenerated into caste-system. The Brahmins proclaimed their superiority and established a patterned hierarchy in the society. The people of the low caste were not only disdained but they were also politically and economically underprivileged. And their subjection legitimated the subjugation and secondary position of the women. Sharanas demolished the boundaries of caste and class for the sake of equality, humanity and social change. Their firm faith in Lord Shiva inspired them to believe in the equality of sexes and hard, dedicated work. Their decision to solemnize an inter-caste marriage proved that they opposed the caste system not just in theory but also in practice.

The economic strategy of the city of Kalyan also influenced the Sharana movement. Though King Bijala was approved of sincerity of Sharanas, he was not interested in the success of the movement. As a ruler of the country, he was only concerned with his business of administration. He neither gave support to the sharana movement nor opposed it. Though the traditionalists endeavored to incite him against sharanas, he was not in favour of meddling with the shranas' enterprise because sharanas' way of life was quite congenial to the economic health of the state. When the brahmin advisor, Machanna Kramita tried to prove him against Basavanna and Sharanas, he gave a quite pragmatic answer:

Every sharana seeks only to earn the day's keep, makes no extra demands, and 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 sharans for their beliefs need them for their economic enterprise& as indeed I do& and so they pour money into the sharana coffers.³

The play has a humanistic approach with an appeal of social justice. The playwright emphasizes the need of accepting human beings as human beings and rejecting the division of society on the basis of caste and creed. There are many scenes in the play that highlight the pitiable condition of socially inferior people. The playwright also emphasizes the absurdity of observing the age-old rituals by the Brahmins and their maintaining distance from the untouchables. Because of their low caste the famine-stricken people in Andhra were restricted from going to the other side of the river in search of food and shelter. Malliboma, the son of a tanner, is humiliated by Brahmin women at the door of Jagadeva's house. The Brahmin society is so orthodox that it forces a committed sharana Jagadeva to

observe the brahmanical rituals at the death of his father. The playwright exposes the hollowness of rituals of organized religion:

Priest: (relieved): Well, the rest is easily attended to. Nothing utilized in today's rituals may be put to use again. Not the wood, not the pots, not the left-overs. Burn what you can. Consign the rest to the river. Everything should be disposed of.
Jagadeva: But I too was used in the rituals. So what do I do with myself? ⁴

Even the king Bijala is not free from the painful experiences inflicted by his caste and lowly origin. He is not Kshatriyas by birth, but barber by caste. He is soothed by Basavanna's ideas that a king is king, not by birth but by merit and noble qualities of head and heart. Though he is reluctant to the consequences of sharana movement, he has sympathy for sharanas; though he is detached from their movement, he has a good opinion regarding their aims and ideals. Despite of being the supreme power in Kalyan, he cannot help reminding himself his humiliations suffered because of his lowly birth. He identifies himself with sharanas because of their humanistic and secular outlook. His afflicted emotions are best expressed in his conversation to his queen Rambhavati:

Your family and the Hoysalas, you may be Kshatriyas. But I am a Kalchurya. Katta churra. A barber. His Majesty King Bijala is a barber by caste. 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 generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so they could have the caste of Kshatriyas branded on their foreheads. And yet you ask the most innocent child in my Empire: what is Bijala, son of Kalachurya Permadi, by caste? And the instant reply will be: a barber! One's caste is like the skin of 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!

(Pause)

In all my sixty-two years, the only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly

birth lurking deep in their eyes are
the sharanas: Basavanna and his
men. They treat me& as what?
(Almost with a sense of wonder.) as
a human being.⁵

Power-politics and orthodox religion affected the radical movement of sharanas. The traditionalists were quite hostile to the prospect of the marriage between a cobbler boy and a Brahmin girl. Damodar Bhatta, the queen's priest, sees this proposed marriage as a great blow to the Vedic civilization and an audacious attack on Hindu religion. He holds the opinion that inequality is inherent in nature itself and therefore hierarchy is fundamental necessity of human existence. He remains adhered to the age-old notion of Vedic Dharma that one's caste is one's home and it is meant for one's welfare. In order to oppose this radical change Damodar Bhatta plans to hold over the power of kingdom. He arouses the anger of king's reckless son Sovideva against the king. The power seeker and opportunist Manchanna Kramita joins hands with him. Thus the conspiracy of priest Damodar, politician Manchanna and the imprudent heir Sovideva dethrones Bijala from his kingship. After gaining power, they mercilessly use violence to thwart sharanas' plans and efforts to attain their objectives. The fathers of bride and groom are caught and brutally murdered. Sharanas get dispersed and at the behest of politician Manchanna new king Sovideva orders his soldiers to kill each and every sharana in sight. The

failure and bloodshed of sharanas draws our attention to the troubled state and chaos of our contemporary India. As Prof. Vanashree writes in her book *Three Plays of Girish Karnad; A Study in and Poetics Culture*:

From the volcano of Mandal Commission to the sporadic violence unleashed by Ranvir Sena in Bihar, and events of atrocities and caste wars across India and in remote regions of Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, our country is redolent with the evils of monstrous and exploitative caste system. All laws ensuring equality of mankind fail to redress its tyranny constantly challenged.⁶

The playwright has not only exposed the exploitative, diplomatic and orthodox nature of Brahmins but also analyzed minutely the pride and self-righteousness of Sharanas. Though the playwright has sympathy with the principles of Sharanas, he does not fail to recognize their conscious and covert intentions which proved to be main obstacles in their ways. At the prospect of an inter-caste marriage Sharanas became over enthusiastic and they vehemently supported it to propagate their principles and prove their superiority over Brahmins and non- sharanas. Their

sole concern was the propagation of their ideology; their overbearing zeal forbade them to pay any attention to the unwillingness of bride and groom and their future life. Thus it was not a marriage of individuals but of ideologies. Both guardians Madhuvarsa, father of Kalavati and Kalyani, mother of Sheelavanta were ready to sacrifice the lives of their children for a perverse desire of personal victory and self-aggrandizement. They were eager to prove their superiority, their commitment and sincerity to the movement in order to highlight their own personalities. Basavanna and the untouchable saint Kakkayya tried to make them understand that their basic needs should be attended first and it was too early to take such bold steps. But Sharanas were uncontrollably ignited with inflamed passions that needed to be tempered with some rationality. Jagadeva, a young Brahmin converted to Sharana, hankers for leadership and publicity. He suffers from identity crisis and pangs of jealousy for his renowned Guru Basavanna. Ultimately he killed unarmed and helpless King Bijala only to get his name written in the pages of History. Sharana's fanatic imaginings and their propagation of false rumors that Basavanna was performing miracles were tactics of claiming their superiority. Moreover Sharanas were not content within their own religion and their faith in Lord Shiva; their attack on Jain temple and followers of Jain proved their dogmatism. No doubt Sharanas were striving to annihilate traditional set-up of social hierarchy but they were not forming a classless society. Their religious ego and

unacknowledged pride divided the city of Kalyan into superior Sharanas and inferior Non-Sharanas i.e. another hierarchy.

Moreover Shranas, who professed equality of all types, never had equality of sexes among themselves. In the leadership of Basavanna the principles of Vairasaiva Bhakti cult in Karnataka were also meant for equality of sexes. But in practice, as Karnad shows it, the passionately dedicated male Sharanas never cared to give their women equal status in society. The most neglected and victimized woman in the play is Jagadeva's wife Savitri. In his eyes she does not have human stature; she is just a commodity which can be packed off and sent to her parents any time. Jagadeva is so possessed by the desire to set himself as an example in History that the sufferings of his lonely wife and ailing mother do not appeal him at all. Madhuvarsa, one of the most dedicated and vociferous Sharanas, is bent on sacrificing the life of his daughter Kalavati to forward the cause of Sharana movement. He does not pay any attention to the objections of his wife Lalita who is not in favor of getting his daughter married to a cobbler boy. Her objections are practical and justified but her resistance fails to have any impact on her husband. The domineering and haughty Madhuvarsa forces his wife to comply with him in the name of their new Sharana religion. The character of Mahuvarsa reminds us Nath Devlalikar, a Brahmin of Vijay Tendulkar's play Kanyadaan (1983) who supports and encourages his daughter Jyoti to marry a socially inferior and dalit boy Arun. In his opinion this

marriage will work as an experiment in his lifelong campaign to mitigate the differences between high and lower caste people, differences between middle and working class people and the differences that separate man from man. But like Madhuvarsa he also fails in his endeavour. Reflecting the contemporary context the play affirms that Feminism in India is yet to take roots. One major obstacle in India is its caste-system. Indian caste system is again rooted in Hindu religion, which suppresses women in the name of divinely ordained scriptures. Great personalities have fought for the abolition of caste-system, but most of them have failed while only a few like Periyar E V Ramasamy Naikar and Ambedkar have made with moderate success. Ambedkar suggested inter-caste marriages as one solution to eradicate castes. But how far this has been helpful in abolishing caste system is a point to ponder.

Language of the play is rooted in socio-political contexts of the time. Sharanas failed to recognize the tacit and inherent connection between language and culture. It was not possible for them to lose their caste without losing their language because caste, occupation and language are interconnected. As Karnad writes in preface to the play, "In Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his Kannada version of Tale-Danda, the language of the play engages with the implications of this fact for a situation in which a group of people are trying to fight caste and social inequality."⁸ Brahmins and priests like Damodara Bhatta

glorify the relevance of Sanskrit and condemn the tongue of common people in order to subjugate them linguistically and culturally whereas Basavanna and Sharanas defend Kannada and other common languages declaring them their mother tongue and means of democracy and social justice.

The Fire and the Rain

The Fire and Rain (1998) is first written in Kannada and Girish Karnad has himself translated the play in English. The title in Kannad - *Agni Mattu Male* clearly shows that the word *Agni* is with all the connotations of the word in Sanskrit; the second word *Mattu* means *and* and the last word *Male* means *Rain*.

While studying in his college, Karnad read the abridged legend of *Yavakrit* from the *Mahabharata*, which was translated into English by Chakravarti Rajgopalachari. For 37 years, the story was stored in one corner of his mind by Karnad; but he was ever fascinated by the dramatic intensity. Then in 1993, Karnad was assigned to write a play by Gruthie Theatre of Minneapolis, U.S.A. and that old legend took the shape of *The Fire and the Rain*. The story is deeply implicated in mythological, ritualistic matrix and psychological significations. Karnad's rebuilding of the past liberates the contemporary consciousness from the shackles of the present. We find over selves set free into the

primordial soil of the great epic the *Mahabharata*: the deep forests in which the hermits, the demons lived in joys and sorrows. The play invokes a remote world of ancient India - the flora and fauna, deities and demons and the demons of the pre - *Mahabharata* period. In terms of its content, it serves as a parable of the story of the *Mahabharata*. The volcanic world of the *Mahabharata* is fraught with demonic desires, pent-up secret rivalries, themes of incest and murders in a world where innocence is made the scapegoat and where both the evildoers as well as the virtuous are made to suffer and die. What it means to be a human being, or what human civilization means, must be explained in its total context: all of history, not just that of modern man. This does not mean that the religious cultures were flawless or perfect, some of which the modern culture has corrected. There was something extra ordinary in them, which we people have lost. We must try to preserve and protect the quality culture before it declines with the passage of time.

In rediscovering myths Karnad makes us journey into the ancient world, not viewing the ancient from the outside but from inside. We confront in the play an interesting aspect of the complex mythology – the legacy of the ancient world to us.

Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* dramatizes a story from the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata*, an epic story of 100,000 verses, is attributed to a sage named Vyāsa and considered to be the longest poem in the world. It traces the descendants of two

sets of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pāndavas, whose disputes eventually lead to the Mahabharata war. Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, is central to the story. Like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata addresses many questions related to dharma and the actions of individuals and society. These discourses have provided inspiration for Hindus in many areas of life.

In the preface to the play, Karnad comments on the origin of the plot.

The myth of Yavakri (or Yavakrita) occurs in Chapter 135-138 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto) of the Mahabharata. It is narrated by the ascetic Lomasha the purohit of Yudhistir to the Pandavas as they wander across the land during their exile.⁷

Lomasha's objective was to impart the teaching regarding the dangers of false knowledge and the evils resulting from lust, pride, jealousy and anger. Karnad presents this myth with new dimensions, which are related to our lives. Thus the play, emerging from a minor myth in the *Mahabharata*, examines some dominant rituals of Hindu religion:

The basic metaphor of the play is of a Yajna, the fire sacrifice, exposing them

inside out: for the sake of rain. The complicated plot is one of the subsidiary stories of the Mahabharata. It does not have the main characters. It delves upon Lomashatya - one of the Rishis the Pandavas came upon during the Vanavasa... It is probably my most complex to date. What interested me were the norms of Hindu religion like tapas, doing penance or the fire sacrifice to please gods.⁸

The main theme of the play revolves round the chain of murder, revenge, and jealousy within the learned families of Raibhya and Bharadwaja. The chain is finally broken into pieces by the nobility and generosity of Nittilai, a low caste *Shudra* girl, and her lover Arvasu. The play discusses the motif of revenge, futility of superficial knowledge and the frailty of human nature. In the play, Karnad tries to fathom the mystery of evils residing within human beings. The playwright is not interested in the external evils, but in the evils residing within man himself. The problem of evil is one of the major concerns for theologians, mystics and philosophers. The best thinkers, philosophers and poets of all ages have been trying to solve this mystery. They generally adopt the medium of argument to prove the futility of evil. However, Karnad successfully and even artistically presents

the full concretization of truth through the help of his intuition and superb imagination.

In the play, the myth of Yavakri is contemporized to communicate an aesthetic experience of salvation. It is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual of self-discovery. Myth and ritual cohere to unfold the deeper meaning of life. The irony of life itself is woven into the moral fabric of the play. One assumes that love is the only principle that can help one to transcend the limitation of the Self.

As stated above, Lomasha tells the story, at the bank of the river into which Indra bathed to expiate for the sin of Brahmanicide. The occasion was the night-stay of the Pandavas at Sage Raibhaya's ashram; at that time, they were forced to live in the jungle for a period of twelve years, as it was one of the conditions. After Yudhisthir's defeat in the game of dice against Shakuni, and then there arrives Maharshi Lomesh, who informed the eldest Pandava, Yudhisthir and his family about the sacredness of the ashram and how it came to be reversed as a holy place. Lomesh narrates the detailed story of Bhardwaj, his son Yavakri, the sage's another sage friend Raibhya, his two sons Arvasu and Parvasu, the family relations between the two sages, Yavakrit's lust for fame and status, his jealousy, malicious behaviour and the resultant downfall and the death; on the other hand, how Arvasu achieved rebirth of Yavakrit by very strict penance. Yavakrit's story is an instance of a lesson how to lead life in the situation and circumstances that were before

Yudhishthir, as also how Yavakrit lived a hero's life. In the preface to *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad narrates the original text:

There were two sages, Bharadwaja and Raibhya, who were good friends. Raibhya was a learned man who lived with his two sons while Bharadwaja concentrated on his aesthetic practice. Yavakri, Bharadwaja's son, nursed a grievance against the world for he felt his father did not receive the respect and recognition he deserved.

He further went off to the forest and did 'tapasya' (Penance) so that he could obtain the knowledge of the Vedas from the gods direct. The rigours of his ascetic practice were such that Indra, the lord of gods, appeared to him, but only to persuade him that there were no such short cuts to knowledge. Knowledge has to be obtained by studying at the feet of a guru. However, Yavakri was so adamant that Indra ultimately relented and let him have his wish.

Bharadwaja, being a wise man, was anxious lest the triumph turn his son's head and cautioned Yavakri against delusions of omnipotence. However, his fears unfortunately proved well founded. For one of the best things Yavakri did was to corner Raibhaya's daughter-in-law in a lonely spot and molest her. Yavakri's misdemeanor incensed Raibhaya. He invoked the 'Kritya' spirit. He tore a hair from his head and made an oblation of it to the fire. From it sprang a woman who looked exactly like his daughter-in-law. From another hair, he similarly brought forth a Rakshasa (demon). Then he sent the two to kill Yavakri.

The spirit in the form of the daughter-in-law approached Yavakri seductively and stole the urn that contained the water that made him invulnerable to danger. The Rakshasa then chased him with a trident.

Yavakri ran toward a lake in search of water, but the lake dried up. Every spot

with a bit of water in it dried up at his approach. Finally, Yavakri tried to enter his father's hermitage. But a blind man of the Sudra caste, who was guarding the gate, barred Yavakri's entry. At that moment, the Rakshasa killed Yavakri.

When Bhardwaja learnt from the Sudra how his son had died, he was naturally distressed. Although he knew his son was to blame for all that had happened, he cursed Raibhya that he would die at the hand of his elder son. Then shocked at his own folly of cursing a friend, he entered fire and immolated himself.

Raibhya's two sons, Parvasu and Arvasu were conducting a fire sacrifice for the king. One night when Parvasu was visiting his home, he mistook the black deerskin, which his father was wearing for a wild animal and unintentionally killed him.

When he realized what he had done, he cremated his father and returned to the sacrificial enclosure. There he said to

his brother Arvasu: 'Since you are not capable of performing the sacrifice alone, go and perform the penitential rites prescribed for Brahminicide. I'll carry on with the sacrifice.

Arvasu did his brother's bidding. When he returned to the sacrifice-ceremony, Parvasu turned to the king and said, 'this man is a Brahmin-killer. He should not be allowed to enter the sacrificial enclosures.' The King promptly ordered his servants to throw Arvasu out, although the latter kept protesting loudly that he was innocent.

Arvasu retired to the jungle and prayed to the Sun God. When the gods appeared, he asked them to restore Yavakri, Bhardawaja and Raibhya back to life and make Parvasu forget his evil act. The gods granted him the boon. When Yavakri came back to life, the gods reprimanded him on his folly and asked him to pursue knowledge in the right manner.⁹

The genius of Karnad lies in the fact that he uses these myths and weaves them into a spellbinding modern play. Along with myths and folk tales, he mixes issues relating to human existence. Love and hate; trust and treachery; penance and unethical conduct; power and weakness; sacrifice and murder are juxtaposed to each other in the play. There is fire of jealousy, lust and incest in the play *vis-à-vis* the rain of pure love. Nittilai represents pure and sterling qualities of human life – love, sympathy, sacrifice, giving and sharing. Whereas Gods and Brahmins represent treachery and evil. Nittilai, though an outcaste, is full of human attributes and beauty – in figure, spirit and action. She sacrifices herself for the love of Arvasu. She serves him at the risk of her life. Hers is the true Yajna. She becomes the sacrificial goat. The dramatist himself comments:

...she lies there, her eyes open,
bleeding, dying like a sacrificial animal.
(FR 58)

The play *The Fire and the Rain* is divided into three Acts. It begins with the ritual of a seven-year long fire sacrifice. Sacrifice played a central role in many ancient religions. The ancient Greeks sacrificed animals (such as goats, sheep, horses, dogs, and cattle), sometimes consuming part of the offerings in a celebratory meal as a way of establishing communion with the

gods. During the earliest period of Hinduism, the Vedic period, Hindu priests offered humans, animals, and plants in sacrifice at certain stipulated times. The ancient Chinese also practiced human sacrifice and made offerings of domestic animals and of food to gods and to ancestors. Sacrifice has never been practiced in Buddhism, although devotional offerings of incense, lighted candles, and flowers are made to the Buddha.

The sacrifice in this play is held by the King to propitiate the god of rains Indra. Indra, in Vedic myth, is the god of the atmosphere, storms, rain, and battle. Indra is the most celebrated Vedic god (more than 250 hymns of the Veda are addressed to him). Ancient legends depict him as the most powerful foe of various demonic powers preventing the rain and the dew from fructifying the earth; of these evil beings the demon Vritra, who imprisons the waters before Indra slays him, is foremost. Parvasu is the chief priest who conducts the entire ceremony. At this point, a very important character of the play Brahma Rakshasha is introduced. He is a supernatural element. The history of Brahma Rakshasha is very interesting. He is a cursed Brahmin soul. He is caught in the emptiness between death and rebirth. If he is not redeemed from this situation, he is certainly doomed to wander painfully through eternity.

Arvasu, the brother of Parvasu, requests him to allow staging a play. He needs Parvasu's permission because acting was considered frivolous and not appropriate to the dignity of Brahmins. Arvasu in a message to his brother Parvasu writes,

...today I am a criminal. I have killed my father, a noble Brahmin. I already stand tarnished. I may now become an actor. This follows from your own words. So please do not bar the way now. (FR 3)

Parvasu agrees in spite of opposition from the king. He tells the king that a fire sacrifice is not enough to placate Indra. A play has to be performed along with it. Arvasu's happiness knows no bounds at the thought of Parvasu being there to watch the play because he thinks,

Brother knows, and I know that this isn't the real thing. This is a fiction, borrowed from the myths. The real play began somewhere else. A month ago. A month?... was it really that recent? It seems ages and ages of darkness ago... (FR 4)

Here the term *Darkness* is very significant from so many points of views. It recalls the never-ending saga of conspiracies within conspiracies, which form the content of the next three Acts. The ritual and tradition the fire sacrifice has connotations of similar rituals taken from myths and legends and histories.

The popular myth of the Fisher King in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the riddle-asking Sphinx of Oedipus Rex, the sacrifice of the king for the benefit of the community in ancient times – all have one underlying theme. It is a universally accepted and popular belief that redemption of mankind from greater evil requires the sacrifice of virtue and innocence. Good and evil go side by side. They are just like light and darkness. The light represents knowledge or virtue while the darkness stands for ignorance or vice. Good and evil co-exist. Without the death of innocence, there can be no death of vice. Without destruction of ignorance or darkness or vice, there is no generation of knowledge, light or virtue. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that when evil dies, good is also sacrificed. Nevertheless, death is not the ultimate end. *Fire* is a metaphor used in the play for destruction while the metaphor of *Rain* is not only of generation but also of redemption.

In Act I, two very important young characters Arvasu and Nittilai are introduced. Arvasu, the brother of chief priest, Parvasu and the younger son of Raibhya, is prepared to sacrifice his caste and community to marry the low-caste Nittilai, a young girl belonging to the hunting tribe. The play also explains Yavakri's return after ten years of rigorous penance to seek the gift of Universal Knowledge from Indra, when he

stood in the middle of a circle of fire
and started offering his limbs to the

fire-first of his fingers, then his eyes,
then his entrails, his tongues, and at
last, restored his limbs, and granted him
the boon. (FR 9)

It is whispered that though he coerced Indra to grant him a
boon for knowledge, what he has actually received in his thirst
for 'knowledge' is very 'little wisdom'. At least he now knows

what can't be achieved. (FR 14)

Yavakri's fame as an ascetic has earned him the awe and
respect of people. We discover however that the awe and respect
of people. We discover however that the knowledge he has
gained has not liberated him from *Kama* (lust), *Krodha* (Anger),
Lobha (greed) and *Moha* (desire), Yavakri's sole purpose is to
destroy the happiness and reputation of Raibhya and his son
Parvasu. He is constantly burning in the furnace of jealousy and
hatred. Like Milton's Satan, he carries his inward hell
everywhere. Yavakri's egoism and his carefully orchestrated plan
of vengeance are well exemplified in the next incident. He
deliberately seduces Vishakha, once his beloved but now his
cousin Paravasu's wife, and makes sure that Arvasu and Raibhya,
Vishakha's father-in-law and his uncle, are aware of the fact. He
tells Vishakha,

I cried at the humiliations piled on my
father. He was one of the most learned

men in the land. Probably the most brilliant mind. However, he was scorned while this unscrupulous brother of his grabbed all the honours...What matters is that I hate your husband's family. My father deserved to be invited as the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. However, that too went to Parvasu, your husband... He (Parvasu) was one of the reasons I fled to the jungle. (FR 22)

It seems Yavakri's search for knowledge was more intent on begetting greater power to himself. His hard penance may be awe-inspiring to the world. Vishakha puts it:

Nevertheless, today your name is on every tongue in the land they pronounce with awe (FR 23).

Yavakri dismisses her, saying that others do not matter, except as witness.

He scorns Indra's injunction that knowledge involves control of passions, serenity and objectivity. Instead, he retaliates angrily,

No, that's not the knowledge I want.
That's not knowledge. That's suicide!
This obsession. This hatred. This
venom. All this is me. I'll not deny
anything of myself. I want knowledge
so I can be vicious, destructive (FR 23)

Even after receiving knowledge, Yavakri cannot free himself from the bondage of falsehood. His knowledge makes him even more miserable and wretched. Like a coward, he averages Raibhya and his son Parvasu by seducing Vishakha, the wife of Parvasu. His superficial knowledge does not help him. On the contrary, his knowledge inflames his passion and boots his pride and desire for revenge. Vishakha rightly points out:

I can't believe it: The whole world may
be singing your praises. But you haven't
grown up! These ten years have not
made any difference to your teenage
fantasies. That's all gone, Yavakri. (FR
14)

Yavakri's loneliness, relentless self-introspection, full-blooded jealousy and warmth are the aspects of a man who is not deficient in courage and ascetic will. The words of Yavakri reminds one of the words of Milton's Satan who says,

Evil be thou my good.¹⁰

God grants Yavakri his desire. He becomes vicious like a fierce beast. The evil lying within him does not allow him to enjoy his reputation and life. He becomes restless. His knowledge does not help him to get rid of his evil nature. He lives in perpetual hell created by him and carries hell everywhere. His only aim is to bring about the disaster of Raibhya and Paravasu. He is possessed by evil desires. He has given up his pretence to good and has degraded himself.

There is beauty in his passion and cruelty in his desire and hatred. Karnad's uncanny insight into the dark regions of human psyche humanizes the world of the past. Possessed with the vicious power, extremities of anger, Yavakri conceives the prospects of a confrontation with Raibhya to be a challenge from God.

After seven years of separation from her husband, Vishakha falls an easy prey to Yavakri's sweet talk. Raibhya is incensed when he comes to know of Yavakri's seduction of Vishakha. The supernatural power, Brahma Rakshasa conjured by him is sent after Yavakri to destroy him. Raibhya's magic invokes a look-alike Vishakha who mesmerized, as if in a trance, a start pouring the sanctified water - the magical power, from the Kamandala of Yavakri and when he screams in realization it is

too late. A strange wail is heard from a distance, the Brahma Rakshasa appears.

(Yavakri runs. Vishakha stares after him then heaves a sigh and turns. The Brahma Rakshasa has entered and is standing behind her. She sees him, gasps, and falls down in a faint. The Brahma Rakshasa runs after Yavakri. Yavakri stops now and then, desperately digs for water, then not finding any runs on. He comes to the hermitage, which is still being guarded by Andhaka. As Yavakri comes running and is about to step the hermitage, Andhaka jumps up and grabs him. Doesn't let him move.)

Andhaka : Who's that? Who –

Yavakri : Let me go! Let me –
(The Brahma Rakshasa comes and spears him. Yavakri collapses in Andhaka's arms. The demon pulls out the trident and goes away.)
(FR 25)

The multiple irony of fate describes the terrible ending of Yavakri. Vishakha is made an instrument of destruction directed by some supernatural agency, Andhaka; the man having an uncanny gift of recognizing people by their steps also fails.

In Act II, the imminent betrothal of Arvasu and Nittilai does not take place. Parvasu returns to the hermitage 'unexpectedly'. In Parvasu, Karnad has sensed a lively representation of arid intellectuality. The subtle and underplayed and yet secretive obsession of Parvasu with self-exaltation leads an opaque character to his persona. Even in the ascetic world, the atmosphere is changed with natural suspicion and hatred between father and son, brother and brother. Parvasu returns to the hermitage at the end of night and conveys to his father that the fire service was still on. The news of his wife's seduction, as he puts it has not brought him ignominy. He puts it blatantly,

However, they haven't chased me out (FR 29)

Parvasu is egoistic. He states:

One can practice austerities like your fool, Yavakri, to coerce the gods to bend to one's will. Stand in a circle of fire. Torture one self. So many techniques, all equally crass, to make the gods appear. And when they give in,

what do you do? Extend the begging bowl: 'Give us rains. Cattle. Sons. Wealth.' As though one defined human beings by their begging – I despise it. I went because the fire sacrifice is a formal rite. Structured it involves no emotional acrobatics from the participants. The process itself will bring Indra to me. And if anything goes wrong, there's nothing the gods can do about it. It has to be set right by a man. By me. That's why when the moment comes I shall confront Indra in silence. As an equal. For that, it is essential that one shed all human weakness. Be alone. Absolutely on one's own to face that moment. Become a diamond. Unscratchable. (FR 31-32)

Parvasu's venom is within him Hearing the sounds of footsteps, in the dark and mistaking them for wild animal, Parvasu kills Raibhya with his arrow in cold blood. He kills Raibhya intentionally:

He deserved to die. He killed Yavakri to disturb me in the last stages of my sacrifice. Not to punish Yavakri, but to

be even with me. I had to attend to him
before he went any further. (FR 33)

Vishakha refuses to collude with the ruthless and sinister plot of Parvasu. Arvasu however is intimidated by his brother's injunction. Vishakha admonishes him:

Refuse. He killed his father. Let him
atone for it. Don't get involved in it.
(FR 35)

The Brahma Rakshasa appears now. The spectacle of Parvasu's encounter with the Brahma Rakshasa is apparently comic but it loaded with grim tragic implications. The Brahma Rakshasa begs Parvasu to release him from his torment.

Parvasu : What do you want?

Brahma Rakshasa : Free me from this pain.
Liberate me I want to
fade away. To become
nothing –

Parvasu : (Laughs) Yavakri
asked for 'all
knowledge' in a
begging bowl. You ask
for the final release

Moksha! The demands
seem to be escalating!
I am not interested in
your final release. I am
not even interested in
my final release. (FR
36)

Parvasu seems to be an empty shell from within. In his refusal to release him, the playwright seems the dangerous demon like potential in Parvasu's dedication to an idea about himself above mortals. The remark of Brahma Rakshasa when Parvasu finally goes into the sacrificial precincts,

It is not easy to get rid of a brother-
Brother! (FR 37)

is redolent with sinister meaning – Parvasu's pietistic quest and the meaning actions to which he has been driven him a demon – a life in death. The Act ends with Parvasu accusing Arvasu of Patricide and refusing to allow the latter to enter the ritual precincts.

In Act III Nittilai gets married to a boy of her tribe. However, the news of mortally wounded Arvasu makes her rush to him and to nurse him. In Act II, she emerges as a simple yet deep, loving woman who has no complaints with life – one who

has no desires either. The spirit of *Maitri* (friendship) and love has enveloped her. She has not run away nor does she dislike her husband, but because Arvasu could have died without her.

Nittilai : I've run away.

Arvasu : From your husband?

Nittilai : From my husband.
From my family.
From everything
(Pause)

Arvasu : Oh! (Pause) why?
Didn't you like him?
Did he beat you?

Nittilai : I liked him. Very
much. He's always
smiling. I might
have been happy
with him. (Pause). If
any other girl had
done what I have
done, I'd be the first
to thrash her in the
Village Square. But
when I heard what'd
happened to you –

Arvasu : What?

Nittilai : We heard terrible stories.

Arvasu : (Remembering) yes, yes.
Nittilai : I almost died when I
heard they'd
thrashed you. I got
up and ran all the
way here.
Parvasu : (pause) and how did
you find me –
Nittilai : I didn't take much
searching. Every
stray pup here
knows about you.
(Long pause) (FR
40-41)

Nittilai is the gentle counselor who restrains Arvasu from seeking vengeance against Parvasu. She says,

Leave that to the gods, Arvasu. Look at your family. Yavakri avenges his father's shame by attacking your sister-in-law. Your father averages her by killing Yavakri. Your brother kills your father. And now you in your turn want vengeance – where will it all end? (FR 43)

In Nittilai, Actor Manager sees a dominant maternal principle. Like a mother, she would serve, nourish and feed all those who are needy and starved. Arvasu is thrashed brutally and his pleading for justice has no sympathizers. On him is the false charge of patricide that he could not defend. Actor Manager tells him:

...But your name's on every tongue in this town and they are mostly trying to spit it out. I didn't save your life. She did. I only found you. You were lucky that she turned up soon after and it's she who's been nursing you. Mopping up your vomit, wiping your bottom, like a baby. (FR 45)

The Act ends with Arvasu putting on the mask of Vitra, the demon, to be enacted at the precinct of the fire sacrifice.

The final act, *Epilogue* approaches the final moments of revelation. It subsumes ritual into mythical enactment of the universal theme of treachery and final redemption through sacrifice and thus creates the impression of events piling up. The myth is that of conflict between Indra, the god of rain, and the brothers Vishwarupa and Vritra. Indra, the King of Gods, vows vengeance against Brahma, the Father of All Creation, for preferring Vishwakrupa to him. He talks to audience:

...After all, I am Indra, the King of Gods. Should I then not be Supreme in the three worlds? Should not Brahma, the Father of All Creation, who gave me birth, have ensured that I stood unrivalled in all these domains? But alas! He fell in love with a mortal and produced a son by human womb, whom he crowned the King of Men. Vishwarupa! Everyone admires Vishwarupa. Everyone sings his praises. His wisdom and gentleness and mastery of the loves inspire a love, which makes me feel like the eclipsed moon. It threatens my sovereignty of the worlds. However, how can I destroy him? (FR 53)

Indra's plan is to kill Vishwarupa through fair or foul. Killing Vishwarupa is next to impossible because he is guarded by Brahma's third son, Vritra, a demon. It is now Vritra's duty to protect Vishwarupa from Indra, laying down his own life if necessary. Indra's plan is to invite Vishwarupa to a fire sacrifice to be held in the honour of Brahma. The occasion suggests to him the means to isolate Vishwarupa because Vritra being a demon would not be allowed into the ritual enclosure as per the *Saastras*.

Indra : ...Come, enter this
sacrificial
enclosure.
(Vishwarupa tries to
enter, followed by
Vritra.)
No, Vishwarupa.
You are most
welcome, but Vritra,
who is
accompanying you,
may not enter the
sacrificial precincts.

Vishwarupa : And why is that?

Indra : Because he is a
demon, a Rakshasa.
(FR 54)

Despite Vritra's warnings, the innocent Vishwarupa
accepts Indra's invitation saying that,

One must obey one's brother. (FR 55)

Indra, who moves behind him, takes up his thunderbolt and
plunges it into Vishwarupa's back treacherously kills
Vishwarupa. The analogy is not lost on Parvasu, who has been
an impressive spectator until then. With guilt and fear he utters,

They understand nothing, the foods. Indra didn't mean to kill him
– Even the Brahma Rakshasa despises him now and rejects his offer to help.

Brahma Rakshasa : I see. Well,
then. I must
go.

Paravasu : (Startled) Go? Where?

Brahma Rakshasa : I had better look
elsewhere
for help. You've
enough
problems of your
own,
brother.

Paravasu : I will help you. I can.

Brahma Rakshasa : Goodbye.

Paravasu : Trust me. I'll help you –
(The Brahma
Rakshasa
disappears,
Paravasu shorts)
Come back –
come back,
Demon! (FR 56)

Parvasu's shout acts as a catalyst for Arvasu. The symbolic mask of Vritra slips and he cries out to Indra.

Another treachery! Another filthy death! How long will these rats crawl around my feet vomiting blood? I must put an end to this conspiracy – wait, Indra – (FR 56)

With these words, he attacks Indra. When the Actor - Manager dressed as Indra runs, Vritra pursues him shouting,

You can elude me Indra. But you can't escape me. Even if you fly like a falcon across ninety-nine rivers, I'll find you. I'll destroy you. I'll raze your befouled sacrifice to the ground. I'll burn down the sacrifice - (FR 57)

The last few lines of the play give a totally different look to it. The action takes a different vengeance. The sacrificial fire is desecrated by the hungry Villagers. They greedily snatch the food and drinks offered to the gods. Parvasu is totally confused. He walks calmly into the blazing enclosure and immolates himself. Arvasu feels that Parvasu has finally won and he tells Nittilai,

I lost, Nittilai. And Parvasu won. He went and sat there in front of the altar, unafraid and carried on with the sacrifice. I couldn't destroy him... He went up in flames while I stood watching, untouched. (FR 58)

After this incident in the play, we come across Nittilai's death at the hands of her brother and husband. Arvasu is totally broken from within and decides to commit suicide so that he can go with Nittilai into the other world where nothing or no one can come between them. But Indra stops him and grants him a boon. Indra says that the favour could also be the result of the god's pleasure with Parvasu's sacrifice and Nittilai's humanity. The crowd screams for rain:

Rain! Arvasu, ask for the rains! Water -
(FR 59)

However, selfish Arvasu only wants that Nittilai should come back to life. This creates great complication. Indra explains:

It's no great matter to bring Nittilai back to life. But once the wheel of Time starts rolling back, there's no saying where it'll stop. Along with Nittilai, others too may return to life - your

brother Parvasu, your father, even
Yavakri - (FR 59)

The intervention of the Brahma Rakshasa resolves the complication. The dialogues between Arvasu and the Brahma Rakshasa take place. The Brahma Rakshasa begs Arvasu to free him from his torment. He states,

Your father invoked me. He ordered me
to kill Yavakri and I did. I have done
my duty and now I wander lost, and in
torment. Help me Arvasu. (FR 60)

Since Arvasu's father had given him life, Arvasu and he were now brothers, and it was Arvasu's duty to complete what his father could not. Arvasu finally chooses to release the Brahma Rakshasa. He decides to do so because according to the Brahma Rakshasa, if Nittilai lived again she would be tormented by the knowledge that her resurrection would have condemned the Brahma Rakshasa to a life beyond salvation. Mercy triumphs at the end. It is the victory of love. Indra releases the Brahma Rakshasa. With this comes the longed for rain. Everyone sings and dances.

Crowd : What's that? – You smell that? –
Yes, yes. The smell of wet
earth. Of fresh rains. It's

raining. Somewhere. Nearby.
The air is blossoming with the
fragrance of earth. It's raining
– It's raining – Rain! The rain!

(Wind blows! Lightening,
Thunder. People shout 'Rain!
It's raining!' Suddenly the
Brahma Rakshasa roars with
laughter and melts away. Only
his laughter can be heard for a
few moments, reverberating
mixed with the rolling
thunder. It pours. People
dance with joy. They roll in
the mud. Arvasu sits clutching
Nittilai's body) Arvasu: It's
raining, Nittilai! It's raining!
(FR 62)

Thus, Karnad does not blindly follow the mythological story; he deviates from it and manipulates it according to the need of the story. The myth says that Paravasu – Raibhya's eldest son and the chief priest of the Fire sacrifice unintentionally killed his father, taking him to be a wild animal, but in the play Paravasu kills his father intentionally. He believed that his father was responsible for the poor condition of

his wife. The dramatist also insinuates that Raibhya had sent his son for the rituals of Fire sacrifice for several years intentionally.

Yajna or Fire sacrifice is a traditional belief. A fire sacrifice is organized to please the god of rains. The king gets a platform built which is called the sanctum sanctorum and nobody except a Brahmin or an upper-caste is allowed to enter the holy area. It is believed that priests do not leave the holy precincts, do not talk to the Shudras, and do not indulge in sensual pleasures.

The dramatist, through the play, hits at the prevailing social conditions of the period. Society, it is seen, was suffering from the crises of moral values. Caste system was prevalent. The traditional caste system of India developed more than 3000 years ago when Aryan-speaking nomadic groups migrated from the north to India about 1500 BC. The Aryan priests, according to the ancient sacred literature of India, divided society into a basic caste system. Sometime between 200 BC and 100 AD, the *Manu Smriti*, or *Law of Manu*, was written. In it, the Aryan priest-lawmakers created the four great hereditary divisions of society still surviving today, placing their own priestly class at the head of this caste system with the title of earthly gods, or Brahmans. Next in order of rank were the warriors, the Kshatriyas. Then came the Vaisyas, the farmers and merchants. The fourth of the original castes was the Sudras, the laborers, born to be servants to the other three castes, especially the Brahman. Far lower than

the Sudras—in fact, entirely outside the social order and limited to doing the most menial and unappealing tasks—were those people of no caste, formerly known as Untouchables. Knowledge of Vedas and other scriptures was denied to *Shudras*. The courtier, who comes as messenger of the actor-manager, says:

He'll make submission from a
distance. (FR 2)

The characteristics of an Indian caste include rigid, hereditary membership in the caste into which one is born; the practice of marrying only members of the same caste; restrictions on the choice of occupation and on personal contact with members of other castes; and the acceptance by each individual of a fixed place in society. The caste system has been perpetuated by the Hindu ideas of *samsara* (reincarnation) and *karma* (quality of action). According to these religious beliefs, all people are reincarnated on earth, at which time they have a chance to be born into another, higher caste, but only if they have been obedient to the rules of their caste in their previous life on earth. In this way, karma has discouraged people from attempting to rise to a higher caste or to cross caste lines for social relations of any kind.

The four original castes have been subdivided repeatedly over many centuries, until today it is impossible to tell their exact

number. Estimates range from 2000 to 3000 different castes established by Brahmanical law throughout India, each region having its own distinct groups defined by craft and fixed by custom.

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CHAPTER - 5
CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

Girish Karnad is hailed as one of the leading lights of *The New Drama* in India. He is a film producer, an actor and a TV artiste and a playwright all in one. This versatility has come in the way of his composition of plays. He is a household name for his acting performance, and understanding of culture and folk arts. He has become one of India's brightest shining stars, earning international praise as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, and translator. He has appeared on the literary scene with the genius and ability to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience. Of course, his association with the theatre must have worded in this direction considerably. He has brought to Indian drama a first hand knowledge of the practical demands of the state, and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique. As a dramatist, he has moved away from the tradition, which provided Kannada literature its identity. He is pre-occupied with the re-telling of Indian myth and history. Myth, history and folk-tale form the basis of all his plays. He is fascinated with Indian mythology, not only because the western audience likes to see Indian myths; but because he feels that drama should be rooted in the Indian soil. The most important reason for this enchantment is the advantage of theatrical devices. His plays open up new vista to look at the glorious heritage of myths, legends and all such precious pearls that India possessed.

Power politics simply means political relations based on power: political relations and actions based on an implied threat of the use of political, economic, or military power by a participant. Studies show that the major themes of Karnad's all plays reveal the elements of power politics, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes the theme of power politics remains hidden but a close reading of the text would clearly indicate the traces. Moreover, the power struggle indicates the parallelism between the ancient and the modern world. It throws light how even in the past the struggle for power was at its summit as it is today.

Power politics has always had a very significant position in human psychology and society from its beginnings as primitive religious narrative to its recent adaptation as an aid in the exploration of the unconscious mind. The universal human practice of power politics making appears to be the earliest means by which people interpreted the natural world and the society in which they lived. Thus, power politics has been the dominant mode of human reflection for the greater part of human history.

The play *Hayavadana* is a bizarre tale coming from the wonderland of magic and mythical world. The reality is suspended and the audience is expected to *exercise the willing suspension of disbelief* to enjoy the tale. The myth of

Hayavadana found in *Kathasarita Sagar*, Thomas Mann has given a further mock-heroic dimensions in his version *The Transposed Heads* from which Karnad borrows the theme. According to him, man should strive to achieve the unity of body and mind within the limits imposed by Nature. The images of the river and the scarecrows in the choric songs fully describe Padmini's helplessness. The playwright seems to present the death of all three characters only to show the logic behind the absurdity of the situation and not to strike a tragic note.

Though the play underlines the fact that the head is supreme and body is incapable of the fulfillment of human destiny and Padmini is given to Devadatta on this ground but the two instances are there in the play, which confirms that body could also work independent of mind. Devadatta after acquiring Kapila's body jumps into the wrestling pit and knocks his opponent down in a matter of few seconds. He does it a few times and even goes to gymnasium. Had he not been occupied with his reading and writing work, he would have continued with the requirement of the body. Kapila too reveals to Devadatta in the forest that after he received his body he began to write poetry though not good one. When Padmini reaches there after a time Kapila protests her intrusion once again in his life.

The problem of *Hayavadana* can be understood at a higher plane. He finds himself an incomplete being but is actually the possessor of an intelligent head. He dislikes his head but it is this

actually, which has placed him higher among other characters. He is intelligent, aware of the topical problems and has a will to correct others. That is why he scolds Actor I when he relieves himself on the roadside. However, his search for completeness is also fleeting. As stated earlier pursuit for perfection is only ephemeral. 'It may land one in greater troubles instead of providing succor' seems to be the message.

The Fire and the Rain brings out Karnad's genius. It is the play par excellence. Karnad almost revises the whole myth; altering it to suit his requirements; adding several characters and situations and deleting some of the unnecessary complications and incidents. What he does with the myth is that he contemporizes it; filling it with modern ideas and modern significance. Casteism becomes a major theme of the play, just as it happens to be of all his major works. Even the ten-year long draught and seven years long Yajna to propitiate Indra seem to be Karnad's addition. The basic framework of the myth has been changed, however, is the basic nature and atmosphere of the myth. The world of Karnad's play is replete with Brahma Rakshasa, gods, curses, prophecies, penance and demons. The make belief in the fantasy world is as strong as in the original myth.

Regardless of its complexities, Indian as well as Western readers/audience amply enjoys the play equally. Every reading unveils the layers of life, its value and morals. The play deals

with a range of human emotions. It has many great ideas latent within it. Apart from evil like jealousy, hatred and lust, he puts life and soul in the play by placing love story in it, which has been main subject of the great writers of all ages. Two absolutely contrast emotions are put together in the play – love and hatred. Both of them have their own values, intensity and climax. Love is, in fact, life-giving force of human beings. Karnad has depicted genuine love between Arvasu – a Brahmin and Nittilai – a tribal girl.

In *The Fire and the Rain* Karnad sharply criticizes our notion of Casteism, which is spread all over the nation. The vain knowledge of Brahmins and their notion of possessiveness for it are also criticized. In this way, Karnad directly or indirectly criticizes the false notions of our so-called modern society.

This beautiful and suggestive play attracted Bollywood director Arjun Sajanani, who made a movie based on it called *Agni Varsha*. He has translated almost all dialogues and has convincingly brought out essence of the play in its film version. Watching *Agni Varsha* is like reliving the age-old myths as its multifaceted characters, which transcend time, play out its inexorable end. The characters of the film/play are complex but Sajanani has brought out many latent talents of the actors. The film was shot in 62 days, largely start-to-finish schedule in Hampi, Karnataka. The aim of the director was to expose the

film on the international festival circuit as well as a full-fledged theatrical release nationally and internationally.

Karnad explores Indian mythology at its best in his *Naga-Mandala*. It delights all because it has a beautiful story as well as the Indian mythology at its best. The readers/spectators are transported to the world of fantasy. The title itself is full of mythical connotations. The play is magico-religious ritual invoking Naga, the snake-god of Hindus, who grants the wishes of his devotees. In the Indian society, the myth of Ichchadhari Naga is very popular. In India, people strongly believe that Naga can assume any shape of his or her desire. This popular belief is taken as the main theme of the play. In *Naga-Mandala*, Naga assumes the shape of Rani's husband in his disguise and deceives her. The actual husband Appanna comes only at midday takes lunch and at evening goes to her concubine's house. The disguised Naga comes to her at nights and the disguise is broken only in front of the mirror, where Rani sees his true shape.

Thus, *Naga-Mandala* highlights the polyglot-cultural narratives ingrained in our folk tradition and figures as a discourse on story telling. Like his predecessor playwrights of regional languages, Tagore and Kailasam, folklore and myths have energized and stylized Karnad's story-telling and contributed immensely to the aesthetics of cotemporary drama and the modes of performances.

It is true that the playwright has made a beautiful and effective use of the Naga myth but it should also be noted that there are several aspects of the snake-myth, which he has not touched upon. One of them is the concept of Nagamani. The Nagas acknowledge Vasuki as their king. On his head shines a gem called Nagamani. It is believed that the gem is capable of curing all diseases and bestowing good fortune. Nagas are supposed to live in Patala in their palaces studded with jewels. Surely, this myth has developed because snakes live underground and jewels are hidden underground. One more important thing regarding Nagas has also been ignored. Normally snakes live in pair, but Karnad's Naga is shown to be living alone. Then there is a belief that if Naga is killed, the murderer's image is photographically captured in its eye, and the surviving partner takes revenge on the murderer after seeing that image. This is the reason why Naga is properly cremated and burnt to ashes to safeguard the murderer. This myth is well used by Bollywood producers and directors in so many box office hit movies.

Yayati, Karnad's first play, published in 1962, was written and produced in Kannada and it was a great success on the stage. The famous myth of Yayati is taken from the *Mahabharata*. Karnad's favourite text, the *Mahabharata*, about 3500 years old in its origin, in Sanskrit language, runs to hundred thousand stanzas in verse. By far the largest of the world epics, along with the *Ramayana* it embodies the very essence of Indian culture and

heritage laying down values of India life and society, which have shaped the texture of Indian life. Numerous intersecting stories of the epic have served as parables revealing the secrets of human nature and have explained the need for ethical life.

The presentation of the famous myth of Yayati no doubt irritated the orthodox viewers but the more enlightened critics appreciated the new approach of the play. What impresses us the most is the reinterpretation of the ancient myth in the light of the modern context. For that, Karnad takes liberty with the original myth and invents some new relationships to make it acceptable to modern sensibility.

As stated earlier in the thesis, Karnad's greatest achievement as a playwright is his art of converting the old and out dated stories in modern context. When we read the play *Yayati*, we realize that Yayati still exists in all of us because we too keep on longing for worldly pleasures. We all have eyes but very few have the vision. We are always busy fulfilling our worldly desires keeping internal eyes closed. We never realize the fact that fulfillment does not diminish or finish desire. Happiness seems to be the goal of all other goals, and yet most people seek happiness in a roundabout way. We have material goals, such as wanting a better house, a better automobile, or items of luxury. We have goals that deal with relationship. We want to feel safe; we want to feel that we belong. Some of us might want wealth or power; others might seek fame. However,

if we ask people why they want these things, the ultimate answer remains the same: they believe that if they attain these things, *then* they will be happy. In this play, however, Yayati recognizes the horror of his own life and assumes his moral responsibility after a series of symbolic encounters. He realizes the fact that happiness for a reason is a form of misery because the reason can be taken away at any time. *To be happy for no reason is the real happiness.* The key to lasting happiness is to identify the unchanging essence of our inner self, our source. Then we no longer look for happiness because we know that we already have it.

Genuine myths concerning kings are found only in traditions that know a form of sacred kingship. From ancient Babylon come preserved temple records concerning offerings to kings who were considered divine. The king's role of mediator and protector brings royal mythologies close to myths cultural heroes. Solemn procedures on which kings become divinized occur relatively late in history. A great many myths have accumulated around the figures of kings, rulers, and emperors and Tughlaq is one such ruler.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* is a fantastic historical play but it is no less than a mythology. History has nurtured in Karnad a dominant will for social justice, a sincere compassion for the socially oppressed and the down trodden. It should also be noted that Karnad has transformed the metaphysical into the

contemporary dimensions and history into trans-historical perspective. The content of the play testify to the playwright's understanding of a long tradition of humanism in India. A tradition is traceable since the earliest Upanisadic-Vedic, Pauranik period – from the 10th century emergence of Jainism, *Bhakti* cult in 12th century, to the late 19th century Indian renaissance and the 20th century movements of social reformation. It is worth noting that equality of all human beings, and the necessity of inculcating noble human qualities for the formation of a democratic society where the themes that already anticipated in our cultural history of the 6th century BC.

The play was originally written in Kannada in 1964 and Karnad was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee. The English version of the play was first staged at the Bhulabhai Auditorium, Bombay, in August 1970.

Tughlaq resembles to particular phases in the political experiences of India. The twenty-year period of Tughlaq's decline offered a parallel to the first two decades of Indian independence under Nehru's idealistic but troubled leadership and that Nehru was remarkably like Tughlaq in the propensity for failure despite an extraordinary intellect. Yet the play was neither meant to be an obvious comment on Nehru nor an exact parallel of the present. The play offers a psycho-political study of the protagonist of the play – his vision, motives, insane policies, eccentricity, and struggle to assert himself as the Sultan,

as also how he takes his own downfall. It is also a study of the conflict between the old and the new. The Old represents the Orthodox Muslims, who does not stand with Sultan, whereas the New upholds the Sultan's viewpoint. Therefore, *Tughlaq* can be interpreted in two opposite value sets. This dualism has attached a new dimension to the character of Tughlaq in particular and the play *Tughlaq* in general.

Thus, it can be said for sure that all the plays of Girish Karnad have a remarkable contemporary social relevance, though he has invariably looked back to the remote past for the themes. He is attracted to the myths, legends, histories and folk stories for personal reasons. This dimension is as clear as the day light in all the plays selected for the research purpose. Next, he is excited by the universal characteristics of certain recurrent archetypes - problems, situations, characters, themes and so on and so forth. Hence, the personal and the social, the past and the present, commingle in all his plays, which will ever remain relevant to mankind.

Girish Karnad is an outstanding Indian dramatist who has carved a niche for himself by depicting both myths and Power politics in an equally balanced way in his major plays. Power politics emerges as his prime concern in his plays like *Hayavadana*, *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*. The way one tries to dominate the other and the way some of Girish Karnad's characters struggle to dominate, shows his interest

in the matter of power politics. The way he deals with the theme of Power politics is superb and it leaves an indelible impression on the minds and hearts of the readers and the spectators both. Its beyond doubt that no other Indian English dramatist can surpass Girish Karnad in depicting the power politics as a major thematic concern.

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