ANTIQUE MODES AND CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES
IN THE WORKS OF GIRISH KARNAD

ABSTRACT
OF THE
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BY
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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
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Abstract

There is a reason why people revisit the past. The past is seen as an upholder of traditions, of values which are considered antique. It becomes an experiment in nostalgia as well as a means of educating people about a lost tradition, a historical event or a forgotten hero. They are like lost treasures excavated and put on display for the present generation to admire, understand and even at times criticize. How it is received and interpreted today is what makes it contemporary. This thesis proposes to analyse how Girish Karnad uses drama as a medium to present the antique and the contemporary. Karnad’s dramatization of mythical stories, folklore and historical characters is notable for the dimensions and sub-plots that he weaves into his plays; adding layers of meaning, and expounding upon social and contemporary issues.

Digging out the lost identity of a colonised nation from its ruins not only requires a lot of effort, but also careful planning as it involves meticulous rebuilding of the nation’s culture, traditions and disciplines which had sunk into oblivion as a result of the coloniser’s bid to make the third and the fourth world perfect. Being a post-colonial writer, Karnad took up the task of ‘writing back’ about the identity and individuality of India. He belonged to a generation of playwrights who believed that Indian theatre should return to its roots in order to dismantle itself from the shadow of colonialism. Through his historical plays he shows that Indian history needs to be revisited and reassessed. He explores historical facts that were erased and twisted by the colonisers. Hindu myth, on the other hand, becomes a means to dissect human nature. He endeavours to find a solution to all the problems that plague the society.

In Yayati (1961), he conveys to the reader the necessity of self-control, the recognition of right and wrong, and the importance of determination and self sacrifice
as being relevant in today's materialistic world. The play is a representation of a human being’s desire for worldly pleasures and ambition. *Tughlaq* (1964), his first historical play, projects his ideas of secularism, unity and peace. At the same time, Karnad places Tughlaq in the post-colonial framework to reconstruct his image. History declared Tughlaq insane, but reassessment states otherwise. Karnad endows Tughlaq with humane aspects that invoke sympathy in the reader. By moving beyond the boundaries of historical records, chronicles and narratives about the despotic Sultan, Karnad provides some plausible rationale for this enigmatic individual.

Karnad employs the same strategy in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997). He uses Tipu Sultan’s dream register to humanize him. The dreams provide Karnad with a flexibility that permits him to comment on contemporary issues, alongside historical ones. Karnad pays tribute to a true patriot who gave his life for his country, but was unfortunately not given his due. He again uses history in *Talé-Danda* (1990) to explore the chasms that exist within religion as a result of division on the basis of caste. Set in the twelfth-century, the play revives the social upheavals of the period and connects them with contemporary Indian situations.

Karnad also voices his concern about the patriarchy in plays such as and *Bali: The Sacrifice* (1980) and *Nāga-Mandala* (1988), and wishes to see a society where men and women are treated as equal. He blasts the myth of the patriarchal concept of the perfect woman, for the perfect woman cannot exist. Like other feminist thinkers, he believes that the patriarchy is creating a degenerate society where both sexes suffer, and this results in a chaotic world. He dwells on the thought that magic is the only way to attain the state of perfection. Thus, in *Nāga-Mandala, Hayavadana* (1971), *The Fire and the Rain* (1994) and *Flowers* (2004) he blends magic and realism to comment on gender roles, religion, social and family structures, love and
lust, idealisation, power and morality. Karnad is also concerned about the destruction of the environment. An eco-critical reading of The Fire and the Rain suggests how forests are a life-saving force, and at the same time it portrays the richness and diversity in terms of the inhabitants’ beliefs, customs and values.

Karnad does not use only myth and folklore to comment on contemporary issues. By setting Broken Images (2004) and Wedding Album (2008) in the twenty-first century, he takes a giant leap and paints a picture of present-day India. While Broken Images explores the language debate and ethics of originality in the literary world, Wedding Album gives readers a slice of middle-class Indian life. He focuses on the tension and anxiety that prevail throughout the great Indian wedding and also highlights positive aspects like participation and unity, obedience and cooperation, importance of sincerity and true commitment in marriage. At the same time the play gives a microcosmic view of the damaged moral fabric of society. Both plays also show the important role technology plays in our lives today.

In Karnad’s plays we see the clash of desires, chaos prevalent in the world, fractured relationships dominated by destructive emotions like lust, incest, jealousy and rivalry. From powerful rulers to simple individuals, Karnad’s plays hold up a mirror to the society we live in today. In each of his plays there is an underlying moral message which is not just restricted to traditional Indian society, but rather it is immensely relevant in today’s strife-ridden and volatile world.
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This is to certify that Mr. Mohammad Yusuf Ansari has completed his thesis entitled *Antique Modes and Contemporary Narratives in the Works of Girish Karnad* under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge this is his original work.

(Dr. Seemmin Hasan)
Supervisor
For my parents. They built the road on which I walk.
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Mohammad Yusuf Ansari
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

THE GREAT STAGE: HOW IT ALL BEGAN
**Introduction**

There is a reason why people revisit the past. The past is seen as a reservoir of traditions, of values which are considered antique. It becomes an experiment in nostalgia as well as a means of educating people about a lost tradition, a historical event or a forgotten hero. They are like lost treasures excavated and put on display for the present generation to admire, understand and even at times criticize. How it is received and interpreted today is what makes it contemporary. ‘Antique’ and ‘contemporary’ are the two important keywords of this thesis and they establish the basis of the discussions that follow. This thesis proposes to analyse how Girish Karnad uses drama as a medium to present the antique and the contemporary.

Karnad’s dramatization of mythical stories and characters is notable for the dimensions and subplots that he weaves into his plays, adding layers of meaning and conveying several messages to the audience. He achieves several purposes at the same time: an exploration of Indian culture, history, tradition and folklore, and expounding upon social and contemporary issues such as gender and equality.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The present chapter traces the history of drama in Europe and specifically in India, and provides an overview of Karnad’s contribution to Indian English drama. The chapters that follow analyse each play in chronological order. The sixth and final chapter sums up the analyses of the study.

The first seed of drama was sown in ancient Greece in the fifth century B.C. Every year playwrights took part in festivals which were meant to honour the Greek god Dionysus. Of these, the most important was ‘City Dionysia’, which was held annually in March. These festivals became an integral part of Greek culture and established the important relationship people had with their gods. Lee A. Jacobus writes: “Theories that connect the origins of drama with religion consider one
function of the drama competitions within religious festivals to have been the ritual attempt to guarantee fertility and growth of the crops, upon which the entire society depended” (34).

Aeschylus dominated Greek drama with tragedies such as the *Oresteia* trilogy, *The Suppliants* and *Prometheus Bound*. Of about ninety plays that he wrote, only seven survive today. He introduced a second actor in plays, thus making way for action and dialogue. Another major dramatist was the Athenian, Sophocles, who brought major changes in the structure of drama by reducing the size of the chorus and by bringing in a third actor. His tragedies, the most famous of which is *Oedipus Rex*, abound with irony and puns. Euripides was another famous writer who experimented with a staging device called *dues ex machina*, which showed the entry of a god at the end of the play. His tragedies focused on women and their suffering. His famous works include *Medea*, *Elektra*, *The Trojan Women* and *Helen*. Greek drama also saw the flowering of comic writers such as Aristophanes and Menander. While Aristophanes wrote political satires which belong to the genre of Old Comedy, Menander’s comedies, for example, *The Grouch*, offered commentary on social manners. According to Lee A. Jacobus: “Instead of attacking individuals, as Aristophanes frequently did, Menander was more likely to attack a vice, such as vanity, or to portray foibles of a social class” (39).

Drama then travelled to Rome in the third century B.C. Though playwrights were influenced by Greek drama and the “very broad and sometimes coarse popular humor” (Jacobus 131) called Atellan farce, Roman drama did not acquire an important position as it did in Greece. People were more interested in other forms of entertainment which included sports involving wild animals and sacrifices. A slave called Livius Andronicus introduced Greek drama to the Romans through his Latin
translations. After being freed, he established himself as a major translator of Greek works. The Atellan farce portrayed stock characters which were later seen in the comedies of Plautus and Terence. Both these great writers based their works on Menander’s comedies. Terence’s comedies were better structured and more elegantly presented as compared to Plautus’s. Terence’s famous works include *The Woman of Andros*, *The Self-Tormentor* and *The Phormio*. Plautus’s comedies, like *Amphitryon*, *The Braggart Warrior* and *The Twin Menaechmi*, were “raucous, broad and farcical” (Jacobus 135). Seneca also emerged as a major writer of tragedies and had a deep influence on Elizabethan playwrights. His plays, such as *Mad Hercules*, *The Phoenician Women*, *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*, were meant to be recited rather than performed. His plays were gory and dealt with the theme of revenge.

After the Roman Empire collapsed in 476 A.D., European drama disappeared from the scene for about five centuries. It was reborn after the medieval church came into power and presented liturgical drama in the ninth century. This included tropes which were sung during the Mass. The most famous example of a trope is the Quem Quaeritis (“Whom seek ye?”), which showed the three Marys visiting Christ’s tomb. From the twelfth century these plays were no longer performed inside the church and provided greater scope to experiment and spread the word of religion. Plays were produced by members of the craft guilds and came to be known as ‘mystery plays’. These plays were based on stories of the Bible and were performed on wagons during the feast of Corpus Christi. Examples of mystery plays include *Noah*, *The Second Shepherd’s Play* and *The Slaughter of the Innocents*. The medieval period also saw the development of ‘miracle plays’. These plays “dramatized saints’ lives and divine miracles, and legends of miraculous interventions by the Virgin” (“Miracle Play”). Another genre which emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the
‘morality play’. These were basically allegories in which moral qualities and abstractions were presented as characters in order to show man’s inward struggle to stay away from sins and temptations and attain salvation. The most famous of these plays were Everyman, Wisdom and The Castle of Perseverance.

Drama got a new lease of life during the Renaissance when classical Greek and Roman texts were rediscovered by the Italians in the fifteenth century:

Among the texts that were discovered were some of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and the great Greek playwrights. These texts were immensely surprising to the Italians, whose medieval worldview had been shaped entirely by the church. The rediscovery of a pagan civilization that could produce such extraordinary texts, with such a deep understanding of human nature, had an overwhelming impact on the Italian worldview. (Jacobus 157)

Another important work was the design of Roman theatres by the Roman architect, Vitruvius. His work helped in the construction of Italian playhouses such as the great Olympic Theatre which was designed by Andrea Palladio. Though tragedies were written by Italian writers such as Pietro Aretino, Giovanni Giraldi and Torquato Tasso, comedies gained popularity in the form of commedia erudita and commedia dell’arte. While commedia erudita was performed for the learned gentry, commedia dell’arte, through its stock characters, slapstick humour and improvised scripts, enjoyed greater success all over Europe.

In England, drama flourished in the Elizabethan and the Jacobean period through the works of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson,
Thomas Kyd, John Webster and others. William Shakespeare, for instance, wrote thirty-seven plays and emerged as one of the most significant playwrights the world had ever seen. His plays, whether historical, comic or tragic, explore various themes which have stood the test of time. As Ronald Carter and John McRae point out:

Time and again, aspects of human vulnerability are exposed, examined and exploited for their theatrical possibilities. Love in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the same subject, in a comic vein, in *Love's Labours Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*; the theme of revenge and family duty in *Hamlet*; jealousy in *Othello*; sexual corruption and the bounds of justice in *Measure for Measure*; misanthropy and rejection of the world, in *Timon of Athens*; family rejection and madness in *King Lear*; the power of money and the vulnerability of the minority in *The Merchant of Venice*; the healing effects of the passage of time, and hope in the new generation, in the late plays – with a final return to historical pageantry in *Henry VIII*, the monarch with whose reformation it all began. (84)

The masque was another form of entertainment which was written and performed for the royal court. Ben Jonson and Indigo Jones dominated this genre by making it a grand affair: “They were held in private halls (such as the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall), and were vastly expensive to mount: lavish costumes, elaborate set designs and machinery, spectacular effects, laid on usually for one single performance” (Carter, McRae 103).
After the Puritan era in England (1649-1660), a new dawn came upon the theatrical stage in the form of a revival of drama and theatre by Charles II. This period is historically known as the Restoration. Most dramatic pieces in France during this period were written using classical techniques, such as Pierre Corneille’s *Le Cid*, Jean-Baptiste Racine’s *Phaedra* and Molière’s *The Misanthrope*, amongst others. England, on the other hand, saw a flourishing tradition of the popular ‘comedy of manners’ which satirised human fallacies. Some enduring plays during this period include William Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *School for Scandal* and Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer*. These works have an evergreen appeal and their popularity resounds with modern audiences as well. A most liberating feature was the success of female actors and playwrights, especially Aphra Behn, whose *The Rover* has undertones of gender discrimination in relation to female writers.

The nineteenth century was a highly exciting period with regard to the literary novel. Consequently, drama did not see any significant progress or evolution at this time. Theatrical plays during this period were produced with an eye on public demand. The audience consisted of the new urban society which lived in an age of commercialization and industrialization. Hence, melodramatic fare appealed to them. Some major works in this period were adaptations of novels, such as *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Sherlock Holmes* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. However, plays of Shakespeare and Moliere were also popular. Oscar Wilde’s witty comedies were in contrast to the populist fare and his plays, such as *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, have an enduring appeal.

The late nineteenth century saw the rise of a major revolution in the plays of August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen. They challenged society to concentrate on
deeper issues and afflictions. For example, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and *Hedda Gabler* were landmark plays which explored feminist themes. Anton Chekhov also created a deep impact with *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Through these plays he focused on the socialist changes in the Russian society at the turn of the century, and the difficulties in transition and adaption. Thus, the end of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of modern realism.

The purpose of plays written in the realist vein was to depict everyday real-life situations and circumstances which affected people, thus replacing melodramatic episodes which the audience preferred and enjoyed. These plays shook people out of their comfortable, mechanical lives in order to make them realize what was happening around them. Playwrights in the early twentieth century experimented with realism by combining it with myth, as seen in the plays of Lady Gregory, John Millington Synge and Eugene O’Neill. In *Riders to the Sea*, Synge focused on an ordinary human being caught in a web of tragic events. In this way he contradicts the old notion of tragedy dealing only with those who belong to the upper strata of society. Expressionist techniques were also used by American playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. The purpose is to show the protagonist’s inner self, or in other words, what the person is thinking or feeling. Excellent examples of expressionist plays include Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* and Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. There were other writers who sought to dispel the audience’s expectations through the application of surrealist techniques, such as Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Bertolt Brecht was another playwright who changed the way people saw plays. He believed that plays should not be just a source of entertainment, but they should appeal to the audience’s intellect and make them think. For this purpose he
introduced the concept of ‘epic theatre’. Prominent examples include *Mother Courage* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*:

In epic theatre the sense of dramatic illusion is constantly voided by reminders from the stage that one is watching a play. Stark, harsh lightning, blank stages, placards announcing changes of scenes, bands playing music onstage, and long discomforting pauses make it possible for an audience to become totally immersed in a realistic illusion. Brecht wanted the audience to analyze the play’s thematic content rather than sit back and be entertained. Brecht offered a genuine alternative to realistic drama. His complaints about realistic drama were focused on the power of such drama to convince audiences that their realism described not just things as they are, but things as they must be. (Jacobs 622).

The ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ was another profound development which sought to explain that life is futile, irrational and meaningless. The term was used by Martin Esslin to describe the plays of Samuel Beckett and other playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s. Examples include Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Happy Days*. Harold Pinter is another modern playwright who relies on absurdist techniques in his works:

... Pinter is more concerned with the dangers inherent in the silences between characters, the menace in the meaning of what is said and not said. His characters do not have the capacity, that Beckett’s characters
have, to fill their time with memories, chat, tortured reflections. They are much less self-sufficient and more dependent on the unstable ties that bind them to each other. (Carter, McRae 421).

As the century drew to a close, playwrights continued to experiment and develop varied themes. An important change in the traditional structure was the attempts to draw the actors and audience closer and to lower the invisible barrier between them. Proponents of this form of drama included Richard Schechner’s ‘Environmental Theatre’ and Julian Beck’s ‘Living Theatre’. Popular works in these genres include Schechner’s *Dionysus in 69* and Jack Gelber’s *The Connection* respectively. Other modes of experimentation resulted in ‘Poor Theatre’, ‘Theatre in the Round’ and ‘Theatre of Images’. More recent playwrights have merged experimental forms with a more traditional structured approach, thus taking what is known as the middle path. This is seen in works of Marsha Norman who wrote plays like *Getting Out* and *Bent*.

The origins of Indian theatrical art forms, music and dance can essentially be traced back to the classical Sanskrit texts which document the history of theatre. Theatrical knowledge is said to be initially and minutely described in the *Natyasastra* which was laid down by the sage Bharata or Bharat Muni. The beauty of this work lies in the minute descriptions and directions on every facet of acting, music and dance. The treatise is divided into thirty-six chapters and contains around 6000 verses. It begins by giving an account of the birth of drama. According to the myth: “The gods, worried about human welfare, approached Brahma, the Creator, under the leadership of Indra and prayed to him to produce an object of sport (kridaniyaka) to give pleasure to the people’s eyes and ears” (Tripathi, *Theatres* 117). Since
knowledge of the Vedas was meant only for the upper strata of the society, Brahma combined the four Vedas and gave birth to the fifth Veda or *Natyaveda* which was accessible to the lower caste as well. It was then passed on to Bharata who staged the first play which showed the triumph of the gods over the demons:

It consists of four elements – *pathya* (text, including the art of recitation and rendition in performance) taken from the *Rig Veda*, *gita* (songs, including instrumental music) from the *Soma Veda*, *abhinaya* (acting, the technique of expressing the poetic meaning of the text and communicating it to the spectator) from the *Yajur Veda*, and *rasa* (aesthetic experience) from the *Atharva Veda*. (Tripathi, *Theatres* 317-318)

Bhasa is said to be the earliest known Sanskrit dramatist. His thirteen plays, which were discovered in the twentieth century, “embrace tales derived from the *Ramayana, Mahabharata*, Krishna lore, popular history, and love stories” (Tripathi, *Theatres* 121). Kalidasa is considered to be the finest ancient Sanskrit poet and playwright to ever grace the theatrical arts. His life is somewhat a mystery and his works cannot be dated with precision. His works are known for their poetic brilliance and minutely detailed beauty. Kalidasa’s *tour de force* is undoubtedly *Abhijnana-Sakuntala* (*Sakuntala Recognized*), which was among the first Sanskrit plays to be translated into English. His other works include *Malavikagnimitra* (*Malavika and Agnimitra*), *Meghaduta* (*Cloud Messenger*), *Kumarasambhava* (*Birth of Kumara*) and *Raghuvaamsa* (*Dynasty of Raghu*). Kamalesh Datta Tripathi writes:
Kalidasa excels over others in delineating the soft, delicate, and finer aspects of love and pathos. His deep understanding of the human heart is reflected in the vast panorama of life presented in his plays not only through his heroes and heroines, but carefully crafted minor characters as well. . . . His mastery over the poetic rendering of the tenderest emotions, sensitive handling of situations, powerful portrayal of sentient nature, highly refined humour, and insight into Indian ideals and values gave him his acknowledged place as the acme of Sanskrit theatre and the model for writers in all Indian languages. (“Kalidasa”, *Oxford Companion* 184)

Bhavabhuti, an eighth century scholar, is another prominent Sanskrit dramatist. His three major works are *Malati-Madhava* (*Malati and Madhava*), *Mahaviracarita* (*Exploits of the Great Hero*) and *Uttara-Ramacarita* (*Rama’s Later Exploits*). Of these, *Uttara-Ramacarita* is considered the finest with its exquisite poetic language. However, Bhavabhuti’s plays are marked by a conspicuous absence of humour. Other Sanskrit dramatists were Asvaghosha, Sudraka, Visakhadatta and Harsha, who authored three major plays. In the south of the country, Bodhayana and Mahendravikrama developed a unique form of comic humour and wit, as depicted in *Bhagvadajjukiya* (*The Sage and the Courtesan*) and *Mattavilasa* (*Intoxicated Delights*) respectively.

The pre-independence era or the colonial period in India gave rise to what is known as modern Indian theatre. Ananda Lal explains in “A Historiography of Modern Indian Theatre”:
Many people, even cognoscenti, use ‘modern’ very loosely to refer to post-independence developments, often unaware that those aspects that they associate with modernity had all appeared previously at different times during the course of the colonial period in India. In consonance with international consensus on world history and cultural studies, we must admit that modernism reached us on the coattails of the British Raj in the mid-nineteenth century. It effected sweeping changes in our theatre over the next hundred years, until 1947 and perhaps the subsequent decade, so that the only accurate adjectives for the following fifty years up till now can be postmodern, postcolonial or even contemporary. (31)

Lal considers Krishan Mohan Bannerjee’s *The Persecuted, or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* (1831) as the first modern play as it offered a social commentary on the orthodox Indian society (33). During this period playwrights like Rabindranath Tagore, Shri Aurbindo, T.P.Kailasam and Bharati Sarabhai made their mark.

The master poet, playwright and connoisseur of the arts, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), is a cultural icon and a colossus in the field of Indian art and literature. Indian theatre in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century is marked chiefly by his fine dramatic pieces. His plays dwelt on varied themes which included social concerns such as feminism, unorthodox beliefs, oppression of the poor and the relationship between man and nature. He incorporated beautiful verse, dance and natural acting to produce highly innovative and exquisitely designed plays. By following his own thoughts and ideas, he brought novel changes to traditional Bengali
theatre. According to M.U. Malkani, his excellence “lies in the poetic flight of his imagination and the depth of their philosophical content. Whether his plays represent the present age or the times of the Mahabharata the truths of life they convey are applicable to all times and all climes - their appeal is universal” (66). Some of Tagore’s best known plays are Rajo o Rani (Raja and Rani, 1889), Dakghar (Post Office, 1912), Muktadhara (1922), Rakta-karabi (Red Oleander, 1924). In 1913 he won the Nobel Prize in Literature for his collection of poems entitled Gitanjali.

Shri Aurobindo (1872-1950), was another noted Indian English playwright who wrote striking dramatic works which were characterized by their settings in different global regions and eras. There is a clear western influence, but an equally significant impact of traditional Sanskrit literature. This can be seen in the contrasting nature of Perseus the Deliverer and Vasavadutta. S.S. Kulkarni cites Aurbindo’s theory of drama:

. . . drama must have an interpretative vision; the vision must contain an explicit or implicit idea of life; the vision and the idea have to seem to arise out of the inner life of characters, and through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action; the true movement and result in all great drama is really psychological; action and events in drama have to be cast into a close dramatic form; and the essential purpose of drama is the presentation of the poet’s vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul. (14)
Apart from five complete blank verse plays, he wrote six incomplete plays. Some of his other prominent works include *Eric*, *Rodogune* and *The Viziers of Bassora*. Unfortunately, his plays were never staged.

Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam (1884-1946) was a very prominent Kannada playwright, poet, and writer, although he was a geologist by profession. He imbibed the spirit of western theatre but focused on writing in his native tongue. Most of his dramatrical productions were staged with the purpose of drawing attention to incumbent social evils: “He dealt with prominent problems like caste consciousness, especially Brahmanical hypocrisy, superstitions, dowry, widowhood, prostitution, women’s oppression, and the contrasts between rural and urban life, and between Hindu and Western culture” (Naikar, *Oxford Companion* 178). Their themes were serious, but the dramatizations were characterized by a fine blend of humour and witty satire. In contrast, Kailasam’s English plays are drawn from the *Mahabharata*. His best known English works include *The Burden* (1933), *The Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna* (1946) and *Keechaka* (1949).

Bharati Sarabhai is one of the first female playwrights of the pre-independence era. Her plays are marked by a prominent infusion of Gandhian ideals, religious consciousness and a subtle combination of the old and the new in India’s sociocultural and economic transition. She gave a new outlook to Indian English drama with her focus on women in her works *The Well of the People* and *Two Women*. S. Mokashi-Punekar sees *The Well of the People* as “the only articulate work of literary art giving expression to the Gandhian age” (139). It is a “lyrical, symbolic, dreamy verse-play, enacted with the human consciousness, the conflicts and consolations of an hour in historical time, as Bharati Sarabhai witnessed it” (Mokashi-Punekar 150).
The period after independence saw the revival of Sanskrit drama. A number of Sanskrit plays were staged in the decades that followed, but this revival was considered to be romantic. People like Suresh Awasthi realized that Indian drama needed to return to its ‘roots’ which was found in the traditional and rich folk culture of the nation. In his seminal essay “In Defence of ‘Theatre of Roots’”, Awasthi writes: “This interest in classics . . . was not inspired by a search of roots, or a creative urge. It was more a matter of orientalism in reverse gear. . . . So our interest in classics was largely romantic, and our approach to them was conditioned by the newly borrowed ideas and models of a decadent Victorian realistic theatre” (305). So the purpose of the ‘roots’ movement was to decolonise “our lifestyle, values, social institutions, creative forms and cultural modes” (Awasthi 295). It is during this period that Girish Karnad, along with other playwrights such as Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Habib Tanvir, Utpal Dutt, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani gave a new meaning to Indian theatre. Karnad explains in the introduction of Three Plays:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had to come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the
historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries. (3)

Dharamvir Bharati (1926-97) was a Hindi playwright, novelist and poet. He wrote just one full-length play, *Andha Yug* (*Blind Age*, 1954), which is considered a landmark in modern Indian theatre. Written in blank verse, the powerful play revolves around the last day of the Mahabharata war. Bharati’s purpose was to show the effects of war on humanity. He also wrote five one-act plays published under the title *Nadi Pyasi Thi* (*The River Was Thirsty*, 1954). Mohan Rakesh (1925-72) was another author who revived Hindi theatre in the 1960s. His major works include *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (*One Day in Ashadha*, 1958), *Lahron Ke Raj Hans* (*Swans of the Waves*, 1963) and *Adhe Adhure* (*Halfway House*, 1969) which is considered a classic. *Adhe Adhure* focuses on the chasms that exist within a middle-class family and how each member deals with it. Rakesh’s creativity lies in his use of silences, pauses and images, thus, not just focusing on words as a medium of communication. He won the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award in 1968.

Habib Tanvir (1923-2009) was a renowned theatre actor, director and poet. Deeply influenced by Bertolt Brecht, classical Sanskrit drama and folk theatre, he produced a number of plays in English, Hindi and Urdu. He formed his own theatre group called Naya Theatre in 1959 which used ‘Nacha’, a popular folk form of Chhattisgarh. Although he was exposed to Western theatre during his days in Europe, he ingeniously combined different forms of drama to create new ones. Tanvir is best known for *Agra Bazaar* (*Market in Agra*, 1954), and *Charandas Chor* (1975). *Agra Bazaar* is based on the life of the eighteenth century Urdu poet, Nazir Akbarabadi and was later revived by Tanvir in 1970 with folk artists from Chhattisgarh, combined
with song and dance. For *Charandas Chor*, his most successful and immensely popular comic play, he won the Fringe Firsts Award at Edinburgh International Drama festival in 1982.

Utpal Dutt (1929-93) was a revolutionary figure in post-colonial Bengali theatre. A convert to Marxism, Dutt’s aim was to send out powerful political messages through spectacularly staged plays, although his works became controversial in the eyes of the state. He formed the Little Theatre Group (LTG) which produced a number of Bengali and English plays. In 1969 he aptly renamed it People’s Little Theatre. His best known plays are *Angar* (*Coal*, 1959), *Kallol* (*Waves*, 1965), *Teener Talowar* (*The Tin Sword*, 1971) and *Duhswapner Nagari* (*Nightmare City*, 1974). Late in his career, he developed a keen interest in the folk theatre form called ‘Jatra’ which he later used in his plays in order to more effectively communicate with the masses at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, his interest in classical Shakespearean drama did not diminish with time. He was also a successful Bengali and Hindi film actor.

Although a journalist by trade, Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) took up writing as a full time profession and became one of India’s foremost playwrights of contemporary drama. He wrote twenty-eight full-length Marathi plays, each concerned with issues that affected him as an individual. Tendulkar prominently focuses on the use and abuse of power by society and social institutions and the expression of power in the form of violence, whether it was by physical force or by mental subjugation. In his own words he had acquired a curiosity regarding the nature of power and violence, and their modes of expression. His major plays include *Gidhade* (*The Vultures*, 1970), *Sakharam Binder* (1972) and *Gashiram Kotwal* (*Gashiram, The Constable*, 1972). Each of these plays stirred up a storm and faced
protests from the censor board, the law and the public. He also projects woman as a victim in plays such as *Shantata! Court chalu ahe* (*Silence! The Court is in Session, 1967*) and *Kanyadaan* (*Giving Away the Daughter, 1983*).

The ‘Third Theatre’, also known as ‘Anganmancha’, is an innovative mode of staging a play. It was pioneered in India by Badal Sircar (1925-2011), a towering personality in contemporary Bengali theatre. Sircar, an engineer by profession, began by writing successful comedies reflecting middle-class Bengal. He soon moved on to more serious works, starting with his highly original and thought provoking work, *Evam Indrajit* (1963). Although Sircar was educated on the lines of the British system, he rejected the westernized approach towards staging plays. Instead of using the proscenium arch, he tried to bridge the urban-rural divide by performing plays in areas ranging from a small bare room to an open park. Sircar’s efforts were aimed at drawing the audience into the play, and also attempted to reduce the commercialization of theatre. His major works include *Evam Inrajit* (1963), *Baki Itihas* (*Remaining History, 1965*), *Pagla Ghora* (*Mad Horse, 1967*), *Shesh Nei* (*There’s No End, 1969*), *Michhil* (*Procession, 1974*) and *Basi Khabar* (*Stale News, 1979*).

It is not just in regional languages that Indian playwrights succeeded. Mahesh Dattani, born in 1958 in Bangalore, is the first Indian playwright in English to win the Sahitya Akademi Award. He can be credited with bringing winds of change and infusing freshness into English Indian drama. Dattani focuses on socio-cultural issues which are traditionally treated as taboo, and are ignored deliberately by a society fettered by age-old customs. He studies these complex problems in the light of their adverse effects on families. The readers are left spiritually disturbed, their conscience awakened. Dattani believes that Indian theatre needs to be traditional, continual and
radical: “It is when we accept the need for all three in our theatre that we can truly have a theatre movement that is inextricably linked to the development of cultural, social and individual identities” (Dattani 472). Some of his prominent works are *Dance like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1993) and *30 Days in September* (2001).

Girish Raghunath Karnad is one of the most prominent names in Kannada theatre. Born in 1938 in Matheran, Maharashtra, Karnad did his graduation from Karnataka University, Dharwad and M.A. from Mumbai. He later went to Magdalen College, Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Though a student of mathematics and statistics, he took keen interest in literature. In his own words:

Strange as it may seem, mathematics gave me a sense of structure and the discipline to maintain the tension among the different parts of the play. Mathematics trains the mind to think logically. It imparts a sense of equilibrium very useful for a creative writer. Writing a play is like building a house. What happens to each unit affects the rest of the structure. I was fascinated to find that changing one half of an equation brings about a change in the other half too. (“Voice” 29)

After completing his education, Karnad returned to India in 1963 and worked for the Oxford University Press, Chennai for seven years. He then resigned and took up writing as a full-fledged career. He wished to be known as an English poet, but found his true calling in drama. At a very young age he was introduced to the world of theatre:
In my childhood, in a small town of Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by troupes of professional actors called *natak companies* which toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semipermanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps.

Once the harvest was over, I went with the servants to sit up nights watching the more traditional *Yakshagana* performances. The stage, a platform with a back curtain, was erected in the open air and lit by torches. (Karnad, *Three Plays* 3)

During his stay in Mumbai he watched a number of plays which shaped his career as a playwright. One such play was Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* which was directed by Ebrahim Alkazi:

It left a powerful impact. The experience was like a traumatic rite of passage. It wasn’t as though I wasn’t acquainted with western playwrights. But the violence of the human psyche laid bare in the play, left an indelible mark. Most of all, I was impressed by the way lights were used to determine the visual impact. . . . That lights could be used to manipulate story telling, with the focus and the fade out adding dimensions to the dramatic experience, was completely new knowledge for me. (“Voice” 29)
Kamad chose to write his plays in Kannada, his adopted language, rather than in his mother tongue, Konkani. He later translated his plays into English which were published by the Oxford University Press, India. Inspired by Western, Sanskrit and folk theatre, Kamad presented Indian culture and themes which reflected contemporary society.

Kamad also left an indelible mark on cinema. He not only acted in a number of Kannada and Hindi films, but also emerged as a successful director and screenplay writer. He made his debut in the Kannada film, Samskara (Funeral Rites, 1970). Other well known films include Vamsha Vriksha (Family Tree, 1971), Nishant (Night’s End, 1975), Manthan (Churning, 1976), Swami (Husband, 1977) and Iqbal (2005). He added another feather to his cap when he became only the second playwright to be awarded the Jnanpith Award in 1999, the country’s highest literary recognition. He was also honoured with the Padma Shri in 1974 and Padma Bhushan in 1992. He has served as Director, Film and Television Institute of India; Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi; and Director, The Nehru Centre, London. He was Visiting Professor and Playwright-in-Residence at the University of Chicago. He is also the World Theatre Ambassador of the International Theatre Institute in Paris.

Kamad’s first play, Yayati (1961), is based on the story of King Yayati in the Mahabharata who exchanged his old age with his son’s youth. The tale struck Kamad forcefully, as being a multilayered incident, replete with deep connotations and full of relevance to life. Though he admits that the play was part of his juvenilia, it begins his long relationship with Hindu mythology and folklore, which form the crux of most of his plays. The thesis will explore how Kamad uses myth and modifies the plot by introducing new characters who reveal the complexity of Yayati’s persona and, at the same time, addresses different issues that plague man in the postmodern world.
As chaos is a prominent theme in the play, the thesis will also explore ‘chaos theory’. Chaos theory or non-linear dynamical systems, is a mathematical concept which has had considerable influence on humanities and social sciences. A lot of work has been done to show the relationship between literature and chaos. One major work is Katherine Hayles’s *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* which explains that “both chaos theory and literary trends involve attempts to understand the variability of meaning in systems or texts and questions the traditional concept of chaos theory and the long standing viewpoint which equates it with disorder . . .” (Aman). Karnad’s *Yayati* is one such text. The protagonist through his choices invites unforeseen forces which create a chaotic atmosphere which he is unable to control. King Yayati’s decision to make Sharmishtha his queen proves fatal as it not only leads to the curse of old age, but also to the death of his daughter-in-law, Chitralekha. *Yayati* went on to win the Mysore State Award in 1962.

*Tughlaq* (1964), his second play, won him worldwide acclaim and has been staged a number of times. By placing the fourteenth century ruler, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, at the centre, Karnad defends him for the steps he took to build a secular nation. Karnad refutes the historical claim that Tughlaq was unjust and irreligious. In the beginning of the play Karnad makes his intentions clear by giving his protagonist a name which many can identify with peace and truthfulness. Karnad, revisiting a historical figure whom many have remembered for his hegemonic ways, opens an interesting field of research. Though Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq did not rule when the British usurped the nation, he played a vital role in promoting secularism and unity. Belonging to the pre-colonial era, Tughlaq had perhaps foreseen the threats of fissures developing within and was well aware that Hindu-Muslim unity was
paramount to overcome any danger. Karnad blends history and memory to create this
imposing figure.

Tughlaq’s character is humane; almost like an ordinary man burdened with a
crown on his head. He has to accomplish the task of building a new future for India
and cries out to his people to join hands and to be patient. Karnad uproots the
stepmother from the malicious stereotyping she was embedded in through fairytales,
fables and other narratives. Tughlaq’s stepmother provides him with a secure inner
world in contrast to the threatening outer world filled with horror, blood and death.
Zia-ud-din Barani is another historical character who spent seventeen years in
Tughlaq’s court and wrote Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi which contains a detailed account of
Tughlaq’s reign.

Karnad challenges the conventional notions of language, character and
history. Language is used as a tool that can not only express and reveal the truth, but
can also subvert and manipulate it. In spite of apparent simplicity, the dialogues
contain rhetorical devices that inflect them with symbolic meaning: “But for that I’ll
have to admit I’ve been wrong all along. And I know I haven’t. I have something to
give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history but I have to do it
within this life” (Karnad, Tughlaq 67).

In Hayavadana (1971), Karnad experiments with a traditional form of folk
theatre called ‘Yakshagana’. He paints a picture of India’s rich culture which was
buried deep under the debris after a new ‘civilised’ society was forced upon it. With
this technique the process of writing back begins. The play tackles the theme of
perfection versus incompleteness in man. He borrows this theme from a twelfth
century folktale recorded in The Kathasaritasagara, a collection of twenty-five
Sanskrit parables recited to a king by a demon. He also links it to Thomas Mann’s
novella, *The Transposed Heads* (1940). Both stories revolve around a woman who accidentally switches the head of her husband with another man’s head after both commit suicide in a temple, thus confronting the three with the problem of who the real husband is. In *The Kathasaritasagara*, there is a clear division between the functioning of the human body and the human mind. The traditional Indian principle is that the body has to be disciplined by the head in order to be prepared by spiritual growth. When the demon asks King Vikramaditya for a solution, he replies: “The one with the husband’s head is her husband because the head rules the limbs and personal identity depends on the head” (Mahadevan 24). Mann, however, takes the story forward by discussing the repercussions of the wife’s mistake which ultimately leads to the death of all three characters. His tale explores the themes of perfection, deceit and jealousy. While Karnad deals with the same plot he introduces an original subplot to tackle the problem of incompleteness.

Hayavadana, the eponymous character, has a horse’s head and a human body, but does not possess divine powers. He is portrayed as a patriotic Indian who sings the national anthem and is also concerned about the nation’s future: “So I took interest in the social life of the nation – Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist pattern of society . . .” (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 114). Karnad rarely examines ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. His narrative of power, authority, social customs, mythical and magical experience and nostalgia for the past ultimately connects with the grand metanarrative of universal knowledge. For the play Karnad was awarded the Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972 (Menon).

*Bali: The Sacrifice* was first written in 1980 in Kannada and then rewritten in 2002. It was produced by the Leicester Haymarket Theatre in England. Based on the
myth of the Cock of Dough, the play touches upon the issues of superstition and sacrifice which are prevalent even today. Karnad’s source for the play was the thirteenth-century Kannada epic, *Yashodhara Charite*. Through the play he explores Jean Jacques Rousseau’s views on women. Rousseau argues that women should not only try to please men, but should also be docile and obedient. Their only business is motherhood and they must be given limited freedom; this way they would be non-threatening (Darling, Pijpekamp 117-120). Karnad has Rousseau in mind while delineating the female characters in the play – the Queen and the King’s mother. While the mother is modelled on Rousseau’s principles, the Queen, Amritamati, challenges these notions and emerges as an evolved woman.

The King’s mother is portrayed as a stereotypical mother-in-law; a strict follower and an agent of the patriarchy. She is deeply religious and wishes to carry out her religious practices in peace. The peace is shattered by her son’s innovative ideas which she secretly attributes to his wife. Even though no grandchild exists, the king warns her not to carry out her sacrificial rituals on his birth as they are violent and disturbing. The Queen, on the other hand, desires a non-violent world for her child. She delineates the positive aspects of an existence without bloodshed: “I don’t want to hurt her. She can live by her beliefs. But we are Jains. Our son will be a Jain. He will have to uphold the principle of compassion for all living beings, of non-violence. Should we allow a blood rite to mark his arrival? It should be wrong. Terribly wrong” (Kanad, *Bali* 213). As the play progresses, differences between characters come to the fore as a result of their beliefs. This way Karnad takes up a dark chapter from the annals of history. Through the play he shows that the nation has hardly progressed when it comes to giving up superstitions and absurd religious practices. Animal and human sacrifice was carried out centuries ago and even today it
is common in some regions of the country. Karnad draws a line between violence and non-violence, between right and wrong.

Karnad received the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the ‘Most Creative Work’ of 1989 for his folk play, *Nāga-Mandala* (1988). It had its premiere in the University of Chicago in 1988 and was produced by the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis in 1993 to celebrate the theatre’s thirtieth anniversary season. The play is based on two folktales which Karnad heard from the poet A.K. Ramanujan – one about lamp flames who gather late at night in a temple to gossip, and the other about a cobra who visits a woman every night by taking the human form of her husband.

The Story, in the play, tells the playwright “a story” (Karnad, *Naga-Mandala* 251) on the condition that he will have to retell it. The fact that the story was imprisoned inside the old woman, refers to the hegemony of the colonisers, the patriarchy and the struggle of the indigenous people to seek freedom and to reconstruct their identity. It also points to the fact that stories “live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener” (Karnad, *Three Plays* 17). The story teller plays an important role in decolonising the established name and conventions of the coloniser. Gilbert and Tompkins see the story teller as “one of the most significant manipulators of historical narrative in colonized societies . . .” (126). Childhood stories carry with them wisdom and deep insight which stay with us as time passes. Often a story which is heard years ago makes more sense when we face a similar situation in our lives. Tales that children hear from their grandmother are loaded with hidden meanings. With time the plot might change when passed on, but the essence remains the same. Karnad believes that anyone can tell a story and leaves some conclusions to the audience. For instance, Kurudavva’s son plays an important role as he serves as his blind mother’s eyes. While Rani’s story has a happy ending,
Kamad gives the audience the freedom to decide Kappana’s fate. S.R. Jalote sees the play as a fine example of Brecht’s ‘Epic Theatre’. The mixing of folklore and magic keeps reminding the spectators that they are only watching a play. Instead of being “emotionally” involved they use their intellectual faculty to judge the events (Jalote 263-74).

Karnad went on to write the historical play *Talé-Daṇḍa* (1990) which deals with the seriousness of intra-religious and inter-religious conflicts. The title of the play means ‘death by beheading’ and Kamad indeed shows a metaphorical beheading of values that destroy the moral fabric of society. Karnad wrote the play during the Ayodhya controversy and the Mandal Commission regarding caste reservation. The protagonist, Basavanna, leads the ‘Virasaiva’ movement, the members of which call themselves ‘Sharanas’, and aims to eradicate the caste system that threatens equality. Unlike Tughlaq, who is a king and a symbol of power, Basavanna of *Talé-Daṇḍa* lives by his beliefs. He serves as the author’s mouthpiece. For the play Karnad received a number of awards – , ‘Writer of the Year’ award from Granthaloka in 1990, Karnataka Nataka Academy Award for the best play of 1990-91 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994 (Menon).

The division of caste also highlights the superiority of one language over another and this Karnad highlights through the clash between Sanskrit and Kannada. The Queen’s priest, Damodara Bhatta, condemns his mother tongue as it does not convey a sense of royalty which suits his community and constructed identity. Language becomes a tool of pushing people back. Damodara and other characters in the royal court use Sanskrit as a means to dominate and vanquish the Sharanas. Karnad defines the process through which identities and relationships are constructed. The power negotiations resulted in Sanskrit functioning as a controlling device that...
deliberately silenced Kannada. Today Sanskrit is considered a dead language while Kannada is still spoken predominately in Karnataka. Girish Karnad writes:

In Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his geographical origins, even his economic status. In the original Kannada version of *Tale-Danda*, the language of the play engages with implications of this fact for a situation in which a group of people are trying to fight caste and social inequality. (*Talé-Daṇḍa* 3)

The play ends with Sovideva being made the new king of Kalyan, an image which reflects a bleak future. He gives orders to kill all the Sharanas and emerges as a tyrant. His monologue delinks him from the group and highlights his own consciousness. His speech is addressed directly to the audience and thus brings in the metatheatrical techniques.

In 1994 Karnad again took up another episode from the *Mahabharata* and wrote *The Fire and the Rain*. The dramatist explores different themes such as the clash of desires within the self, chaos prevalent in the external world, fractured relationships dominated by destructive emotions like lust, incest, jealousy and rivalry. Karnad takes up a lesser known myth from the *Mahabharata* which “occurs in Chapters 135-8 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto)” (Karnad, Appendix 289). The myth revolves around Yavakri who offered penance to the gods in order to obtain universal knowledge. However, his way of acquiring knowledge was not considered proper by the gods for he wished to obtain it directly from them. He returned after ten years only
to molest Raibhya’s daughter-in-law, Vishaka. Enraged by this sinful act, Raibhya conjured a spell to bring forth a spirit to kill Yavakri.

This thesis proposes to conduct an eco-critical reading of the play. ‘Eco-criticism’ or ‘green theory’ is concerned with the relationship between “literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities” (Abrams 81). The purpose of revisiting nature from an eco-centric point of view is not to bring back the romantic ideals of the nineteenth century, but to create awareness in the post-colonial era of the dangers the environment is facing.

Karnad’s tryst with historical plays continued when the BBC commissioned him to write The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (1997), a radio play broadcast on the fiftieth anniversary of India’s independence. As the title suggests, the focus is on certain dreams that the Tipu Sultan had and the record of which he kept in a secret diary. Through the play the playwright pays tribute to a true patriot who gave his life for his country, but was unfortunately not given his due. In Karnad’s own words: “He was a thinker and a visionary, who represented the best of Karnataka. Unfortunately he has been misunderstood by the people of his own country and a lot of untruths were spread about him. . . . For me, he is the greatest Kannadiga” (“Greatest”). These untruths were spread by the British who came up with their own “version of history” (Karnad, Dreams 182), as pointed out by Mir Hussain Ali Kirmani to Colonel Colin Mackenzie. Kirmani, who was Tipu Sultan’s courtier, acts as Karnad’s mouthpiece as he tries to reconstruct Tipu’s image.

The dreams selected by Karnad and the Sultan’s own interpretations are fine examples of how a dream’s latent content gives way to its manifest content through Freudian concepts of ‘displacement’ and ‘condensation’. Freudian Psychoanalysis
also provided the basis for the Trauma Theory which gained momentum in the 1990s. The theory takes into account psychological, moral, ethical and personal questions regarding traumatic experiences and how they figure in personal, public and historic memory. Kirmani voices his trauma when he says: “There’s no healing. True, the blood and tears dried up a long time ago. But the wound remains fresh” (Karnad, Dreams 181).

Karnad proved that myth is not his only forte in Two Monologues: Flowers and Broken Images (2004). Flowers is based on a folktale from the Chitradurga region in Karnataka, which was used by the Kannada writer T.R.Subbanna in his 1952 novel, Hamsageethe (Swan Song). Subbanna’s protagonist is a temple priest named Veeranna, who falls in love with a courtesan. Unable to control his desire, he visits her every evening with the payer offerings. This continues till the village chieftain discovers a strand of hair in the prasada. The priest lies that the hair belongs to the god and accepts the chieftain’s challenge to prove his claim. After a day’s meditation, Veeranna is surprised to find the shivalinga with long hair. The linga starts bleeding when he breaks a strand to check whether the hair is real. Filled with guilt, Veeranna beheads himself as an act of retribution. Like Veeranna, the priest in the monologue finds himself in a dilemma when the god forgives his immoral act. After the whole village witnesses “waves and waves of jet black hair” (Karnad, Flowers 258) sprouting out of the linga, the priest is made the state saint, “to be prized, protected and shown off to visiting envoys” (Karnad, Flowers 259). Unable to understand the way the god governs right and wrong, he commits suicide.

Flowers even recalls the film version of U.R. Anantha Murthy’s novel Samskara (1965). In the on-screen adaptation of the novel (1970), Karnad himself essayed the role of Praneshacharya, a religious Brahmin leader who spends a night
with a prostitute. Filled with guilt, he is unable to decide whether he should hide his sin or tell the villagers. The film won the President’s Gold Medal for the best Indian film.

Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar opines that the play offers an “ironic variation” of the ‘whore-madonna syndrome’ for “the priest’s voice has an endearing innocence and honesty rather than an alienating arrogance” (xxxiii). According to the whore-madonna complex a man would refrain from having sexual relations with his wife for he sees her as caring and saintly figure. To fulfill his sexual needs he would turn to woman who has fallen in the eyes of society; an impure, tainted woman. According to Sigmund Freud, a man who has a cold, dysfunctional relationship with his mother develops this condition. He sees his wife as a mother-figure and would consider the act of lovemaking incestuous. Indeed the priest reveals the existential angst that he goes through after his illicit affair. He not only loves the linga which he had known and worshipped since childhood, but also his wife and the courtesan.

**Broken Images** deals with the dominance of the English language in the field of Indian writing. It was Shashi Deshpande’s comments that inspired Karnad to write the play. She pointed out that “Indian writers in English who are published in India get a step-motherly treatment compared to those published on foreign shores” (John). The monologue also exposes a complex relationship ruled by jealously and bitterness. Manjula’s envy of her sister goes back to their childhood and was compounded in adult life when Malini came to live with and monopolised her husband’s attention all day. Manjula’s repressions are rooted in her low self-esteem. Malini is portrayed as the younger, attractive woman who suffers from meningomyelocele. While Manjula wishes to “live in the heart of Kannada culture” (270), her younger sister “breathed, laughed, dreamt in English” (Karnad, **Broken** 271).
The theory of sibling rivalry has also been touched upon by psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. Adler discusses the importance of equal treatment of siblings in the family. He believes rivalry between siblings is grounded in each child’s need to overcome potential feelings of inferiority. Freud too talks about rivalry between siblings in terms of hatred and jealousy.

According to Karnad, the play’s relevance “is self-evident to anyone who knows what is happening in India’s literary landscape where vernacular writers feel they do not get the attention that writers in English get, that there is a definite ‘class system’ operating here” (John). Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker points out that while writing the monologue Karnad is aware that novels enjoy greater popularity compared to plays. Hence, he portrays a novelist:

Karnad could have chosen to portray a fellow playwright in *Broken Images*, but he is well aware that a *play* in English, however successful its author, cannot compete with a *novel* in English, because of the qualitative differences between novels and plays as literary artifacts. Fiction in English by Indian and Indian diaspora authors now commands a global readership and appears in academic curricula around the world; Indian plays in English occupy a distinctly subservient position, not only in reaction to print genres such as fiction, non-fiction, and criticism in English, but also in relation to plays in Indian languages . . . (xxx)

*Wedding Album* (2008) is set in present day India and paints a realistic picture of contemporary Indian society. The play revolves around the Nadkarnis – a typical
South Indian Brahmin family – who are looking for a suitable bridegroom for their youngest daughter, Vidula. Karnad shows two schools of thought – one belonging to an age which believes marriage to be a sacred bond and requires proper planning, the other sees it as a mere agreement between two parties; a deal which could be simply called off if things do not work out: “We live in a modern world. A divorce is okay. It’s no shame” (Karnad, Wedding 86). The thesis proposes to conduct a study of perversions of middle-class Indian society. Vidula, for instance, has an affair with a “voice” whose name is “Kuchla the Jezebel” (Karnad, Wedding 64), while her family members think she visits the café everyday just to play video games. Then an old skeleton tumbles out of the closet when her birth certificate mentions her uncle, Ramdas Nadkarni, as her father. Ramdas’s invisible presence haunts the entire play. The playwright also delineates the precocious thirteen year old neighbour, Vivian, who has read Madame Bovary and Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Hemakka is shocked to read his personal letters addressed to her, but at the same time enjoys the attention.

According to a newspaper review the play is “a fitting tribute to the family drama that revolves around every Indian wedding and proves that modernity and social class have little to do with the universal concerns and drama of the Great Indian Marriage” (Acharekar).

Karnad’s latest play, Benda Kaalu on Toast (2012), focuses on the city of Bangalore or Bangaluru, and recalls the myth regarding its foundation. According to the myth, an eleventh century King was offered boiled beans by a woman when he was in need of food. To express his gratitude the King named the spot Bendakalooru, which later on came to be known as Bangalore. The Kannada term ‘Benda Kaalu’ means ‘boiled beans’ in English. According to Devina Dutt:
This is a masterfully structured play that makes the city of Bangalore and its explosive growth in the last two decades its subject. . . . It avoids the prevalent clichés of its image as an IT city or a city of numerous call centres. Instead, it presents the stories of a cross section of those who live in Bangalore, and whose expectations, survival techniques and disappointments are all coloured by it. (1)

The play has not yet been published in English and will be taken up in later research.
Works Cited


Chapter II

A CROWN OF THORNS

A Study of *Yayati* and *Tughlaq*
Yayati (1961)

Yayati marks the beginning of Karnad's journey as a playwright. A young Girish Karnad was preparing to travel to England as a Rhodes Scholar, much against the wishes of his parents. In the midst of this personal upheaval and mental turmoil, Karnad discovered his true calling. A chance reading of the tale of Yayati in the Mahabharata struck him forcefully, as being a multilayered incident, replete with deep connotations and full of relevance to life. Karnad decided to re-write the story of King Yayati in Kannada; and thus was born the most mythical of Karnad's plays. Incidentally, V. S. Khandekar had written a novel named Yayati in 1959. The two works are different, yet similar. The novel deals with the modern man, his weaknesses and aspirations. In the play, Karnad uses the exploits of King Yayati and other characters to investigate issues like gender, identity crisis, pressures of patriarchy and alienation of contemporary man. It combines the indigenous and the contemporary and thus furnishes the age-old myth with new meanings.

The play was first translated into English by Priya Adarkar and was published in the journal Enact, but Karnad did not come out with his own translated version before 2008. Though he admits that the play was part of his juvenilia, it begins his long relationship with Hindu mythology and folklore which form the crux of most of his plays. In the Preface to his translation he expresses his anxiety of revisiting the play:

Confronting the play again, the temptation to tinker with it has been irresistible. But it would not be just silly but disastrous to tackle at the age of sixty-nine a play I had written at twenty-two. I would have to
He borrows the myth of Yayati, a character from the *Mahabharata*, who was struck by the curse of old age as a result of his infidelity. Yayati, the son of King Nahusha, married sage Shukracharya’s daughter Devayani and was warned to stay away from her maid Sharmishtha or he would suffer the consequences. Yayati, unable to control his carnal desires, married Sharmishtha who gave birth to three sons. When Shukracharya came to know about Yayati’s betrayal he cursed him with decrepitude, but declared that he could exchange it with anyone who was willing to accept it. No one except his son Pooru stepped forward to bear on his shoulders his father’s punishment. For a thousand years Yayati enjoyed his regained youth, but soon realised the futility of his desires and wishes. He thus returned his son’s youth and retired to the forest to lead the life of a hermit. Using the myth Karnad modifies the plot by introducing new characters who reveal the complexity of Yayati’s persona and at the same time addresses different issues that plague man in the postmodern world.

Through this mythical fable, Karnad conveys to the reader the necessity of self-control, the recognition of right and wrong, and the importance of determination and self sacrifice as being relevant in today’s materialistic world. Karnad was greatly influenced by the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and the concept of existentialism at the time of writing this play, and the influence of the Existentialists add rich meaning to the work. In his own words:

I was excited by the story of Yayati, this exchange of ages between the father and the son, which seemed to me terribly powerful and terribly
modem. At the same time, I was reading a lot of Sartre and the Existentialists. This constant harping on responsibility which the Existentialists constantly indulge in suddenly seemed to link up with the story of Yayati. (*Enact*)

Karnad also depicts the age-old relationship between father and son, which in a traditional Indian setting, has always meant the son’s unwavering obedience and support towards his father, even with the suppression of the son’s desires and dreams. Karnad may be rebelling against this ingrained way of life and reflecting on his own personal situation, for when he was opting to study abroad his parents did not encourage it.

In the Prologue, Karnad makes it clear that it is he who will control the play. He is the ‘Sutradhara’, the “holder of strings” (5). He has the right to make changes to this old tale which has been passed on from generation to generation:

In effect, I am the person who has conceived the structures here, whether of brick or mortar or words. I have designed and consecrated the stage. I am responsible for the choice of the text. And here I am now, to introduce the performance and to ensure that it takes place without any hindrance. (5)

The Sutradhara promises an oral narrative “handed down by our grandmothers” (6). Orality is a feature of ancient societies. Memory is considered the chief source of history and wisdom. The old man or the old woman, who may be the narrator, is treated with deference. The word of the narrator is final. Folk narratives like fable,
myth and legend contain uncontaminated components of culture. The presence of the Sutradhara relaxes the audience and provides easy entry into the overwhelming Puranic world.

The play revolves around five principal characters, King Yayati; his wife, Devayani; his clandestine mistress, Sharmishtha; Yayati’s son, Pooru, and Pooru’s wife, Chitralekha. Devayani and Sharmishtha’s enviable friendship comes to an end when Devayani reminds Sharmishtha of her low-caste roots: “You poor people. You only have get into a piece of Arya attire. And you start fantasizing” (20). The vitriolic comment stings Sharmishtha like a poisonous dart and she reacts by pushing her into a well. Yayati rescues Devayani from the well, on account of which she is attracted towards him and desires to marry him. The liaison is approved by Devayani’s father, Shukracharya, and Sharmishtha is punished by being sent along with the bride as her maidservant. Filled with bitterness and spite, Sharmishtha and Devayani constantly bicker with one another. Sharmishtha declares that Yayati only married Devayani in order to learn the secret of immortality from Shukracharya. Devayani, despite her deep offence, continues to be influenced by her:

SHARMISHTHA. I know how it goes after that. You forgot the oath you had taken after Kacha’s betrayal, never to love a man. It was love at first sight. Once again.

DEVAYANI (triumphantly). Yes. And, as it transpired, for him too. We stared at each other. And then I spoke: ‘Sir, I am a maiden. And you have held me by my right hand.’ That’s it. Only two sentences. Fourteen words. I should know. How often have I counted them, coercing myself to believe that mere fourteen words
could actually so completely change my life. It was only later that, when I tore away the blouse, that he asked why.

*(Pause.)*

He didn’t even know who I was when he accepted me.

SHARMISHTHA. Very nice. Actually, I was discussing the story with one of the palace concubines the other day. And you know what she said? ‘The King was no doubt in a hurry to have some quick fun and go,’ she said. ‘Even with prostitutes picked off the street, the first thing a man does is ask her name.’ And you say with you, the King dispensed with even that formality? You knew what would happen if you didn’t act quickly. I mean you didn’t want the Kacha experience again! So while he was locked in your embrace, you quickly told him you were Devayani, daughter of et cetera et cetera.

DEVAYANI *(flaring up)*. . . . I’ll kill you. I’ll feed you to the . . . *(12-13)*

Yayati is drawn towards Sharmishtha and enjoys a liaison with her. He decides to marry her as he cannot bear to lose her. On discovering this Devayani is filled with hatred and anger. She asks him why he wants her:

DEVAYANI. Sir, I have never asked any favour of you in these two years. I implore you now. I too can bare my fangs. I too can draw blood. Don’t provoke me on account of this woman.

*(Suddenly, with vehemence,)*
Why? Why do you want her?

YAYATI (calmly). Because I feel bewitched by her. Even now, at this moment, I want her. I have never felt so entranced by a woman. What is it? Is it some spell she has cast? Some secret sorcery? I can feel youth bursting out within me again. Her beauty, her intelligence, her wit, her abandon in love. Not to marry her is to lose her, don’t you see? I must have her. I have to keep her with me. Please try to understand. (30)

When she appeals to her father, Yayati is cursed with old age and loss of his vigour and manhood. The only way out is if someone agrees to take the curse upon himself and lends his youth to the king. The king assumes that all his subjects would willingly do so and is devastated when there is refusal by one and all. His son Pooru, takes pity on him and looks upon it as his duty to help his father, and agrees to give his youth and take the curse upon himself. In doing so, he disregards the future of his newly-wed wife. Chitralekha is a young girl of fourteen. She is overwhelmed with her husband’s idealism and attempts to support him. She valiantly declares: “Pushpa, my personal maid from my mother’s house, found out and told me about it. I was distressed of course. But not for long. After all, I belong to the Bharata family now. Their problems are mine too” (53). However, when she sees Pooru in his old and fragile form, realization dawns upon her like a thunderbolt. She realizes that she has been robbed of her right as a wife and a future mother. She is an educated woman and refuses to abide by the rules set by Yayati. She challenges Yayati and proposes a potential solution to her dilemma:
CHITRALEKHA. I did not know Prince Pooru when I married him. I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He doesn’t possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But you do.

YAYATI (flabbergast). Chitralekha!

CHITRALEKHA. You have taken over your son’s youth. It follows that you should accept everything that comes attached to it.

YAYATI. Whore! Are you inviting me to fornication.?

CHITRALEKHA. Oh, come sir. These are trite considerations. We have to rise above such trivialities. We have to be superhuman.

Nothing like this has ever happened before. Nothing like this is likely to . . .

YAYATI. Where did you learn such filth, you beast?

CHITRALEKHA. It’s the price I have paid for my education.

Chitralekha’s reasoning appears offensive to Yayati’s conservative, patriarchal modes. Yayati ultimately faces the truth after Chitralekha commits suicide and returns Pooru’s youth:

I thought there were two options – life and death. No, it’s living and dying we have to choose between. And you have shown me that dying can go on for all eternity. Suddenly, I see myself, my animal body frozen in youth, decaying, deliquescing, turning rancid. You are lying on your pyre, child, burning for life, while I sink slowly in this
quagmire, my body wrinkleless and grasping, but unable to grasp anything. (68)

Chaos is a prominent theme in the play. ‘Chaos theory’ or non-linear dynamical systems, is a mathematical concept which has had considerable influence on humanities and social sciences. A lot of work has been done to show the relationship between literature and chaos. One major work is Katherine Hayles’s *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* which explains “both chaos theory and literary trends involve attempts to understand the variability of meaning in systems or texts and questions the traditional concept of chaos theory and the long standing viewpoint which equates it with disorder . . .” (Aman). Karnad’s *Yayati* is one such text. The protagonist through his choices invites unforeseen forces which create a chaotic atmosphere which he is unable to control. His decision to make Sharmishtha his queen proves fatal as it not only leads to the curse of old age, but also to the death of his daughter-in-law.

There are several pointers to the male dominated patriarchal system that is ingrained, not only in the Indian social setup, but throughout most of the world. Yayati disregards Devayani as he promotes his relationship with Sharmishtha. Pooru, in his self-sacrificial endeavor, gives no thought to his wife, Chitralekha. She faces the situation with high ideals and fortitude. However, she questions Yayati’s selfishness and tries to reason with him. Yayati’s treatment is determined by patriarchal norms. He is unembarrassed by his own debauchery represented by being ensconced in his wife’s chamber with Sharmishtha rather than welcoming the newly wed couple. However, he tries to rule over the women with stringent authority. Each of the women tries to break through in her own way. Devayani leaves her husband,
Sharmishtha defies the bondage of caste and creed and Chitralekha looks for an educated solution. Society, steeped in redundant beliefs and customs, thwarts their attempts and each one meets a tragic end. As Sharmishtha says: “So here is the foundation of your glorious future, Your Majesty. A woman dead, another gone mad, and a third in danger of her life. Goodbye, sir” (68).

Another character who represents the subdued female is Swarnalata, maidservant to Chitralekha. She is subjected to unjustified suspicions of a pre-marital dalliance, by her husband. To give her husband peace of mind she lies to him:

I described the scene in convincing detail. My husband smiled at me, turned on his side and for the first time in many years, fell into deep sleep. With that, Swarnalata’s story too ended. But not Swaru’s private hell. He disappeared next morning. I haven’t seen him since. I still deck myself up as a married woman. Our house awaits his return: every one of his possessions in its place, exactly as he left it. But if he doesn’t return, I hope at least he found peace in death. That is the great thing about death, isn’t it? The assurance of peace, the deliverance from uncertainty? (60)

The entire action takes place in a single chamber which belonged to Yayati’s former queen. Though dead, she controls and haunts the characters through her memories. Pooru is possessive about his mother’s chamber and is unhappy about sharing it with his wife on the first night:
POORU. . . . What I wanted to know was: can Chitralekha use the other room while I use this one – for just one evening?

YAYATI (scandalized). What are you talking about? Do you want to keep your bride away from you?

POORU. No, I don’t. But just now – when she stepped in here – suddenly it was like violation of this air. Desecration. This room is mine. It’s a sanctum that belongs to me – only me and my memories. I don’t want a third person to come in. At least, not today. (39)

Pooru, though the future ruler, has no ambitions and takes no interest in the affairs of the kingdom. He simply wishes to lead the life of a “worm” (37). “. . . I just want to go somewhere where I can sit quietly and ask myself questions. Not seek answers. Ask questions of myself. I should be quite content if I found the right question. Just one” (38). In the end he finally finds a question and even finds the right answer as he emerges as a successful ruler: “What does all this mean, O God? What does it mean?” (69). On the existential element of the play, Karnad comments:

. . . My attempt was to emphasise the calm acceptance of grief and anguish. Puru’s old age is a sudden transformation and not the eventuality of life. It brings no wisdom and no self-realization. It is a senseless punishment for an act he has not committed. . . . Every character in the play tries to evade the consequences of their actions, except Sharmishtha and Chitralekha. (“Voice” 31)
According to Jyoti Gupta and Sushma Sharma:

Karnad’s Yayati reveals the afflicted consciousness of a broken man like Yayati who tries to find a meaning in existence. Out of sorrow and humiliation Yayati is unable to find the meaning of life till he is rid of old age. But contrary to his expectation Chitralekha’s suicide leads him to expiate his desire. He projects the image of an existential character and shows that no man has the courage to choose whole-heartedly either right or wrong. He is himself an amalgamation of self-evasion and vanity, self-condemnation and humility. Thus, there is an eternal quest for meaning and value, freedom and truth that can sustain us in this chaotic and apparently meaningless world. (36)

Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker finds the women characters in the play extremely powerful. She opines:

... the most memorable feature of Yayati – and a striking accomplishment for a twenty-two year-old author – is its quartet of sentient, articulate embittered women, all of whom are subject in varying degrees to the whims of men, but succeed in subverting the male world though an assertion of their own rights and privileges. Devayani the Brahmin queen and Sharmishtha the slave-princess are caught in a fierce rivalry that allegorizes the hierarchical divisions of caste while also visiting upon both women the destructive effects of Yayati’s amoral desire. Such a triangulation, between two men and one
woman or one man and two women, reappears so consistently in Karnad's myth and folk-based plays as to constitute a basic plot device as well as central thematic. (xvi-xvii)

Caste becomes an important theme in Karnad's future plays. He shows that the caste system places people on an unequal plane and hinders the development of a nation. Dharwadker further says: "Yayati establishes at the outset of Karnad's career that myth is not merely a narrative to be bent to present purposes, but a structure of meanings worth exploring in itself because it offers opportunities for philosophical reflection without the constraints of realism or the necessity of contemporary setting" (xvii). K.M.Trivedi observes: "Karnad knows that by linking the present to the past, a kind of continuity can be ascertained and human predicament, in the light of the present, in the lap of the past, can be established. The myths, legends and folk forms are reflectors of the racial and cultural unconsciousness and all ritualistic performances" (160).

King Yayati is a powerful and majestic figure at the outset of the play. He crushes those who are weaker than him. The entire clan is bruised and sickened by his arbitrariness. Caught in the dizzy spiral of ambition, greed and temptation, he crumbles when he realises acquisitions bring no fulfillment. *Yayati* can be thus considered as a representation of the human being's desire and craving for worldly pleasures and ambition. Man has inherent weaknesses and while some achieve self-control and success, others give in to greed and fail to realize their wrongdoings. Karnad conveys to his audience the need for self-control, responsibility, the need for careful and socially and morally correct decisions, and the acceptance of one's mistakes. Herein comes the impact of the Existentialists on Karnad's thoughts. Man's
existence, his loneliness, his passivity in the face of upheavals, and his efforts to overcome them through correct choices and responsible behaviour, are issues dealt with the existential stream of thought and shades of their influence are seen in the play.

Karnad presents a chaotic family, grappling with frustrations and unfulfilled desires. The characters find themselves in a void, a meaningless existence, and each tries to cope with it in a different way. Karnad is a master story teller, who weaves mythical magic on stage to confront his audience with complex issues of life. It is true that he twists the tale to suit his needs, but the end result is multidimensional, deep and effective, providing food for thought and enhancing our outlook.

\[ \text{Tughlaq (1964)} \]

For a nation to maintain peace and prosperity, it is necessary to strike a balance among its different governing bodies marked by social customs, religion, cultural values and languages. If any one of these pillars is weakened, the whole edifice starts to crumble. When the British stepped on Indian soil to pursue their mission of ‘the white man’s burden’, they left no stone unturned to dismantle all that the nation had achieved in its glorious past. Religion, for example, was seen as a sensitive target which could be manipulated by their hegemonic strategies in order to create deep fissures. With Muslims and Hindus making up most of the population of the country, unity was an essential factor to drive the coloniser out where Indians themselves were being treated as the ‘other’ in their motherland. One such ruler who believed in the idea of a secular nation was Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Girish Karnad in \text{Tughlaq} places this fourteenth century ruler within the postcolonial framework to
project his ideas of secularism, unity and peace. He wrote the play as a response to the Kannada critic Kirtinath Kurtkoti who believed that there were no historical plays in Kannada “which could appeal to modern sensibilities” (Karnad, “Voice” 35). Through *Tughlaq*, Karnad writes back to reclaim the past which had fallen prey to historical amnesia of the occidental historians.

While writing the play Karnad was influenced by Albert Camus’ *Caligula*, Bertolt Brecht’s *Galileo*, Jean Anouilh’s *Beckett* and Shakespeare’s history plays. He chooses a ruler from the pages of history who had inherited a vast empire. History declared him insane, but reassesment states otherwise. Tughlaq was a visionary who lived in the future rather than the present, and this became the reason of his downfall from the first to the last scene of the play. It is Tughlaq ‘the man’ that we see working selflessly for his people. He pleads for their support and trust, but each time they conspire and rebel against him. He too fights back, but at the end finds himself lonely at the top to witness the ruins. It is his alterity that results in the destruction of his kingdom. Karnad reconstructs and restages medieval India from the postcolonial perspective in order to fill in the yawning gaps that were left open a long time back.

The play opens to a mixed crowd of Hindus and Muslims gathered outside the the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi. An old man of an undetermined age comments:

OLD MAN. God, what’s this country coming to!

YOUNG MAN. What are you worried about, grandfather? The country’s in perfectly safe hands – safer than any of you’ve seen before.

OLD MAN. I don’t know. I’ve been alive a long time, seen many Sultans, but I never thought I would live to see a thing like this.
YOUNG MAN. Your days are over, old man. What’s the use of Sultans who didn’t allow a subject within a mile’s distance. This King now, he isn’t afraid to be human. (5)

The Old Man, in the oral tradition, is the preserver of ancient wisdom and knowledge. He represents the established and conservative point of view. The historical view is juxtaposed with Karnad’s own vision of the much maligned character.

The play opens in AD 1327. Tughlaq ruled over India from 1324-1351. Karnad, however uses five years of Tughlaq’s reign i.e. 1327-1332. Karnad refutes the historical claim that Tughlaq was unjust and irreligious. The very first scene introduces us to the “human” Sultan (5) who is ready to provide compensations when accused of illegal appropriation of land, thus showing that his ways are just and partial:

My beloved people, you have heard . . . and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or caste. May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life. (7)

He also declares his plans to shift his kingdom to Daulatabad, hoping that it would strengthen “the bond between Hindus and Muslims” (8), whom he sees as the two religious pillars of his empire. The people see this move as complete madness and an act to gain greater power; power that came into his hands after his father’s and brother’s death. His father’s death is seen by many as act of patricide, while some look at it as an
unfortunate accident. However, he admits that he killed them: “I killed them – yes – but I killed them for an ideal . . .” (77). He makes the announcement:

(The crowd reacts in bewilderment. Muhammad smiles.)

Your surprise is natural. But I beg you to realize that this is not a mad whim of a tyrant. My ministers and I took this decision after careful thought and discussion. 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, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom. I invite you all to accompany me to Daulatabad. This is only an invitation and not an order. Only those who have faith in me may come with me. With their help I shall build an empire which will be the envy of the world.

(Exits with the retinue.) (8)

His subjects have conflicting views about the state of affairs in the kingdom. While the older citizens are conservative and against change, the younger feel that change is necessary as it would pave a better future for the country. These opposing and varied views are representative of a chaotic world. There is complete disorder and failure to achieve a unanimous viewpoint which is indicative of the undercurrents of tension in the kingdom. Though identities of the people in the crowd are not revealed,
Karnad uses the Expressionist technique to give them different titles—“Old Man”, “Young Man”, “Third Man”, “Hindu” (5-10) – thus giving a universal appeal to the characters. Karnad throughout the play refers to the Sultan as “Muhammad”, thereby attempting to project him as a reformer who tries to spread the message of a better tomorrow. The very name refers to the last Messenger of Islam (Peace be upon him). By using this folk theatre technique Karnad tries to redeem the Sultan by clearing his name as recorded in the annals of history. In the beginning of the play Karnad makes his intentions clear by giving his protagonist a name which many can identify with peace and truthfulness. Karnad revisits a historical figure which many have remembered for his hegemonic ways and makes an effort to reclaim a lost hero. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in *Post-Colonial Drama*:

A specific strategy of revisionist histories in both settler and occupation colonies has been the reclamation of subversive figures to make them into heroes. The Leader of a rebellion against colonial forces or someone generally historicised as villainous is often reconstructed in post colonial theater to play a highly prominent role in the struggle for freedom from imperial rule. (116)

Though Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq did not rule when the British usurped the nation, he played a vital role in promoting secularism and unity. Belonging to the pre-colonial era, Tughlaq had perhaps foreseen the threats of fissures developing within and was well aware that the equality of the two religions was paramount to overcome any danger. Karnad blends history and memory to create this imposing figure.
For crooks like Aziz and Aazam religion does not exist. Aziz, who is an opportunist, takes advantage of the Sultan’s generous nature and dupes him by disguising himself as a Brahmin whose land had been usurped:

AAZAM... Couldn’t you have come like a proper Muslim?

AZIZ... A Muslim plaintiff against a Muslim king? I mean, where’s the question of justice there? Where’s the equality between Hindus and Muslim? If, on the other hand, the plaintiff is a Hindu... well, you saw the crowds. (12)

He not only wins the case but is also offered a post in the civil services. However, he does not stop there. As Aziz day dreams of his position in the Sultan’s court he accidentally runs into a person who claims to be Sultan’s guest, Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid. Aziz grabs the opportunity and kills him to take his place.

Through the eyes of Aziz and Aazam, Karnad presents an unfortunate event during Tughlaq’s reign which had disastrous consequences. His decision to move his capital to Daulatabad proves to be an error of enormous magnitude. On his part he made all necessary arrangements that the people may bear the hardship of the long and tedious journey. However, many people perish on the way.

Karnad portrays Tughlaq as a hard working ruler who cares for his subjects like a parent and wishes to solve all their problems so that they can have a future full of peace and hope:

... I want to climb up, up to the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: ‘Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me
your worries. Let me share your joys. Let’s laugh and cry together and then, let’s pray. Let’s pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. . . . Come! I am waiting to embrace you all.’ (16)

He experiences the same fears, anxieties and joys as would any ordinary person. We can understand the joy that he has in solving a famous chess problem. When his stepmother enters he gleefully announces his triumph: “I have just solved the famous problem in chess. Even al-Adli and as-Sarakhi said it was insoluble. And it’s so simple” (14). At another level, Tughlaq is trying to find a solution to deal with his friend, and now rival, Ain-ul-Mulk who is preparing to wage a war against him. According to a legend that comes from al-Adli, the game of chess was invented to help a young prince to refine his strategies and become an efficient commander (Wall). The game of chess symbolizes the complex nature of human existence. Tughlaq’s primary drive is to succeed and chess intrigues him because of its manipulations of pawns. He uses the game to remain awake and also to refine his strategies. At a stage he tells Barani: “Forgive me if I let you down, Barani, but I must play this game my own way . . .” (22).

The game also recalls the second part of Eliot’s The Waste Land, titled “A Game of Chess”, in which Eliot describes the relationship between a man and a woman. In the same way, the scene shows the kind of relationship that exists between Tughlaq and his stepmother. Being the only woman character in the play, she is deeply concerned and worries about Tughlaq like a biological mother. She can even go to the extent of killing the Sultan’s accomplice, Najib if he misguides him. She tells Barani, “. . . If he goes on like this I won’t wish his fate even on a dog” (23). Zia-ud-din Barani is another historical character who spent seventeen years at Tughlaq’s
court and wrote *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* which contains a detailed account of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq’s reign.

It is not only Ain-ul-Mulk that the Sultan is worried about, but also Sheikh Imam-ud-din who is quite vocal in his disapproval of the Sultan. The meeting that Tughlaq arranges turns out to be a disappointment for the Sheikh, for there is only one person present – the Sultan himself. He seizes this opportunity to clear any misunderstandings the Sheikh has about him. He tells Sheikh Imam-ud-din that he has always been a true follower of Islam and has never desired to go against it:

... I have never denied the word of God, Sheikhsahib, because it’s my bread and drink. I need it most when the surrounding void pushes itself into my soul and starts putting out every light burning there. But I am alone in my life. My kingdom has millions – Muslims, Hindus, Jains. Yes, there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean up the dirt deposited by men? (26)

The Sayyids and the Ulema, who according to the Sheikh are the true followers of Islam, indulge in politics and this is the reason Tughlaq imprisons them. Religion and politics for the Sultan are two different sides of a coin which should be mutually exclusive. While religion ensures peace and guidance in life, politics is a means of vanquishing the opponent and ensuring greater power and control. It is a game which has been played for centuries and is also an obstacle in Tughlaq’s path to glory. It has resulted in filth in his kingdom and it is his duty to clear all unwanted elements who try to threaten his people and endanger his hopes for a better tomorrow. He then leaves Sheikh Imam-ud-din with no option but to accept his request of meeting Ain-
ul-Mulk and convey the message of peace. The Sultan’s sole purpose in sending the Sheikh as a peace emissary was to get him killed and also to defeat Ain-ul-Mulk. Tughlaq takes advantage of the fact that Sheikh bore a striking resemblance to him and thus sets a trap. As Ratansingh tells his adopted brother, Shihab-ud-din:

RATANSINGH. The Sheikh is delighted about being the Sultan’s peace emissary. He looks gorgeous – all dressed up in royal robes, a royal turban, even royal slippers, and sitting on the royal elephant. In fact he looks exactly like the Sultan.

SIHAB-UD-DIN (suspicious). And the Sultan? What was he doing?

RATANSINGH. I didn’t know it then, but he was hiding behind some hills with the rest of the army. Laying a trap. (36)

The Sultan’s modus operandi was simple. He planned to kill two birds with one stone. Not only does he succeed in getting rid of two of his enemies, but also restores peace. Sheikh Imam-ul-din’s bitter comments about the Sultan only resulted in riots and mass killings in Kanpur and there was danger that Delhi would meet the same fate. Similarly, Ain-ul-Mulk’s plan to wage a war would have only shed more blood. Sultan Muhammad had no choice but to take this extreme step. His worries are however far from over, as Ratansingh informs Shihab-ud-din of a clandestine meeting where nobles of the kingdom and “prominent citizens of Delhi” (37) would gather to decide the Sultan’s fate.

Politics is a strategic tool which in this case is used as a means of internal colonialism. In Tughlaq we find a nation divided into different groups where one tries to dominate the other. Tughlaq’s originality is far beyond the understanding of his
adversaries and this is the reason they treat him as the ‘other’. In danger of being colonised he does not allow them to impose their supremacy and to subjugate him. The coming together of the nobles of the court to bring down Muhammad bin Tughlaq once again shows how internal colonialism works. In this case the people involved are not outsiders but those belonging to Sultan Muhammad’s court. This shows that his followers were always doubtful about his ways.

Sheikh Imam-ud-din’s sudden death acts as a catalyst and gives them a reason to believe that their Sultan would only lead the people to destruction. They are judgemental and do not pause to verify the facts. They finally hatch a lethal conspiracy and decide to carry out their plan during prayers as at that time all the Sultan’s soldiers would be unarmed and would give them a chance to attack. When Shihab-ud-din and the Amirs get ready to strike, to their surprise they find themselves surrounded by Hindu soldiers. Tughlaq tells Shihab-ud-din that it was Ratan Singh who had warned him about the attack and them stabs him to death. The Sultan is horrified at his own act, but circumstances leave him with no other option: Why must this happen, Barani? Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors? What is happening? Tell me, Barani, will my reign be nothing more than a tortured scream which will stab the night and melt away in silence? (52)

The only thing he asks for in return is trust and that too is replaced by hatred and repulsion in the hearts of his subjects. He not only wishes to leave an indelible mark on the sands of time for his innovative thinking, but also wishes to be remembered as a common man who, though having greater power and resources, always cared for his family represented by his kingdom. This is evident when he asks his noblemen whether he has done justice to his title of a Sultan:
Am I a king only because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? I ask you -- all of you -- what would you have me to do to become a real king in your eyes? (47)

He is ready to hear out their grievances and correct flaws if any, but begs them not to turn their backs on him:

... Laugh at me if you like, criticize me, but please don’t distrust me. I can order you all to obey me but tell me, how do I gain your full trust? I can only beg for it. (Pleading.) I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don’t understand me, ask me to explain myself and I’ll do it. If you don’t understand my explanations, bear with me in patience until I show you the results. But please don’t let me down, I beg you. I’ll kneel before you if you wish, but please don’t let go of my hand. (49)

Karnad’s character is humane; an ordinary man burdened with a crown on his head. He has to accomplish the Herculean task of building a new future for India and cries out to his people to join hands and to be patient. While many are against his decision of shifting the capital to Daulatabad, his plans of introducing copper currency also does not find any takers. Yet Tughlaq hopes that things will change in the time to come for “it’s a question of confidence, of trust” (48). He finally gives orders to vacate Delhi and even bans prayers till the visit of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, since “our prayers too are ridden with disease and must be exiled” (53). Prayer is a recurring
motif in the play. First he makes prayer compulsory in his land and then goes to the extent of banning it when his noblemen try to kill him during prayers. This becomes a classic case of politicizing religion. It is ironic that he even killed his father and brother while they were offering prayers. Prayer is meant to purify the soul and bring man closer to God, Tughlaq, as well as his noblemen, use it as a means of controlling others.

As Tughlaq realizes that all his hopes and dreams are being shattered one by one, he feels marginalized in his own kingdom. His search for eternal peace seems to be endless and futile. Though a large number of people rebel against him he refuses to give up his throne and emerges as an existential hero, alienated from the society and fighting a lonely battle against time and place. He takes full responsibility for his actions and sees them as necessary steps. His anguish and frustration is a result of the failure of his subjects to understand and comprehend his vision and ideas that are beyond ordinary thinking. He refuses to bow down to the forces that oppose him and is determined to fight his adversaries who want “to dig into you and tear a muscle out” (66). Barani persuades him to return to his idealistic ways, but he wishes to continue treading the same path with the hope that he would succeed: “But for that I’ll have to admit I’ve been wrong all along. And I know I haven’t. I have something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history but I have to do it within this life. I have got to make them listen to me before I lose even that!” (67).

His step-mother also pleads with him to stop his brutal ways, but he refuses to do so. He is shocked to find out that his step-mother too fails to understand him. When she admits that she poisoned Najib he sentences her to death and prays for guidance:
God, God in Heaven, Please help me. Please don’t let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don’t know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started in Your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of You. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud? Raise me. Clean me. Cover me with Your Infinite Mercy. I can only clutch at the hem of Your cloak with my bloody fingers and plead. I can only beg – have pity on me. I have no one but You now. Only You. Only You . . . You . . . You . . . You . . .

(79-80)

A parallel can be drawn between Tughlaq and the philosophy of the Christian existentialists. According to *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, “through God and only in God man may find freedom from tension and therefore find peace of mind and spiritual serenity” (“Existentialism”).

His prayers are answered in the final scene when he discovers the true identity of Aziz when he enters the kingdom disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid. He admires Aziz for his cleverness and quick thinking and makes him an officer of his state. In Aziz he sees a ray of hope after roaming in the darkness for so long. However, the scarcity of food drives the people into a frenzy and a riot breaks out that burns down the whole city. He gets another blow when his most trusted servant, Barani, also abandons him. The final image of the Sultan falling asleep on his throne conveys a sense of failure on his part. For years he avoided sleep and worked hard for his people, but in the end loses everything. A reason why he avoided sleep was that he wished to escape his “unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events . . . (Barry 97), but they all return to him: “(. . . Muhammad suddenly opens his
eyes. He opens his eyes. He looks around, dazed and frightened, as though he can’t comprehend where he is.” (99).

In Karnad’s own words, “the play reflects the slow disillusionment that my generation felt with the new politics of independent India, the realpolitik, the cynicism, the gradual erosion of ethical forms . . . ” (“Voice” 36). Aparna Dharwadkar also writes that Tughlaq “certainly expressed the disenchantment and cynicism that attended the end of the Nehru era in Indian politics. A decade later, the play appeared to be an uncannily accurate portrayal of the brilliant but authoritarian and opportunistic political style of Nehru’s daughter and successor, Indira Gandhi” (xx). Basvaraj S. Naikar sees Tughlaq as an experimenter “who is forced to revise his philosophy as a desperate measure to answer the demands of time. He is not driven by any selfish motive yet is never thought of as a selfless man” (90). According to Christine Gomez he is an alienated protagonist who fails to establish meaningful communication with his subjects. He fails to attach himself emotionally with his people and treats them as “objects to be used and discarded” (115). Veena Noble Dass opines:

Tughlaq with his self-knowledge and self-awareness creates a world for himself in which he has the freedom to choose, the freedom to act on his own impulses. It is a world in which one finds the centrality of ‘angst’ as experience and in which one makes choices that ultimately alienates one from the environment. (93)

M. Sarat Babu uses the concept of the “Rescue Triangle” or the “Karpman Drama Triangle” to analyse Tughlaq. This triangle has three main components- the rescuer,
the prosecutor and the victim, and throughout the play Tughlaq’s role keeps shifting among these three. (70)

Christine Gomez compares Aziz and Aazam to Valdimir and Estragon in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (124). Like Tughlaq, Aziz too is aware of the absurdity of life and commits crimes to assert his identity. Gomez further comments on the game of chess and the rose garden as two recurring images. While the game of chess symbolises “Tughlaq’s game-approach to life wherein he regards other people as pawns to be manipulated for his own advantage”, the rose garden “is a perfect objective correlative of Tughlaq’s idealistic aspirations meeting with defeat, frustration and disillusionment . . . an image of the absurd . . .” (125)

Karnad presents the ruler as an isolated individual battling for idealism incomprehensible to contemporary society. He is alienated and psychologically punished for remaining firm. Karnad views a despot from a twentieth century viewpoint and asserts a certain protection to his hero by naming him after the last Messenger of Islam (Peace be upon him). By moving beyond the boundaries of historical records, chronicles and narratives about the despotic Sultan, Karnad provides some plausible rationale for this enigmatic individual. Historically, this character was been referred to as Tughlaq, but by calling him ‘Muhammad’ Karnad redeems him and absolves him of historical charge. The post-colonial depictions offer a counter discourse to conservative historical representation. The audience is, thus, witness to both narratives.
Works Cited


Chapter III

ONCE UPON A TIME

A Study of Hayavadana, Bali: The Sacrifice and Nāga-Mandala
Hayavadana (1971)

Digging out the lost identity of a colonised nation from its ruins not only requires a lot of effort, but also careful planning as it involves meticulous rebuilding of the nation’s culture, traditions and disciplines which had sunk into oblivion as a result of the coloniser’s bid to make the third and fourth worlds complete. The quest for completeness is indeed a tricky one and could lead to further destruction. Every individual is incomplete and perfection is a state which cannot be attained; though there is always room for improvement. The colonisers projected themselves as crusaders who would pave the way for improvement and perfection, and in the process they erased the identity and individuality of the colonised peoples and nations.

After employing myth in Yayati and history in Tughlaq, Karnad experiments with a traditional form of folk theatre in Hayavadana (‘Haya’ means horse and ‘vadana’ means head) called Yakshagana, in order to revive the colonial past through indigenous theatrical modes. As the title suggests the play deals with the functions of the head, the supreme part of the human body. Without the head the body is incomplete and without control. The balance of the head determines the sanity or lunacy of an individual and gears him to either fight destiny or be overpowered by it. With this argument Karnad tackles the theme of perfection versus incompleteness in man. He borrows this theme from a twelfth-century folktale recorded in The Kathasaritasagara, a collection of twenty-five Sanskrit parables recited to a king by a demon. He also links it to Thomas Mann’s novella, The Transposed Heads (1940).

Both stories revolve around a woman who accidentally switches the head of her husband with another man’s head after both men commit suicide in a temple, thus confronting the three with the problem of who the real husband is. In The
Kathasaritasagara, there is a clear division between the functioning of the human body and the human mind. The traditional Indian principle is that the body has to be disciplined by the head in order to prepare for spiritual growth. When the demon asks King Vikramaditya for a solution, he replies: “The one with the husband’s head is her husband because the head rules the limbs and personal identity depends on the head” (Mahadevan 24). Mann, however, takes the story forward by discussing the repercussions of the wife’s mistake which ultimately leads to the death of all three characters. His tale explores the themes of perfection, deceit and jealousy. While Karnad deals with the same plot he introduces an original sub-plot to tackle the problem of completeness in man. He begins as per the conventions of Yakshagana which K.V. Akshara explains in Theatres of India: A Concise Companion:

A typical performance opens with the Bhagavata’s (narrator) invocation and his duologue with the hasyagara (comedian), followed by ornate dance pieces by Balagopala (child Krishna) and the female characters. Then the particular prasanga (script) begins with the oddolaga and moves from one episode to another, mingling songs and dances with improvised dialogue. (447)

Following these rules Karnad paints a picture of India’s rich culture which was buried deep under the debris after a new ‘civilised’ society was forced upon it. With this technique the process of writing back begins. The theme of imperfection and incompleteness is introduced right in the beginning of the play with a description of Lord Ganesha:
May Vigneshwara, the destroyer of all obstacles, who removes all hurdles and crowns all endeavours with success, bless our performance now. How indeed can one hope to describe his glory in our poor, disabled words? An elephant’s head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly – whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Vakratunda-Mahakaya, with his crooked face and distorted body, is the Lord and Master of Success and Perfection? (105-06)

George M. Williams gives a description of Lord Ganesha in Handbook of Hindu Mythology:

Ganapati has a prominent place among Hindu deities as the god who removes all obstacles. This is a natural extension of his strength as an elephant. He is worshipped as Vignesvara, the remover of all obstacles. . . . The form of Ganapati with his huge ears, trunk, and big belly is philosophically interpreted by Hindus as symbolizing openness of mind for acute receptivity and alertness.

In temple images, Ganapati (Ganēśa) is most often found in ensembles with Śiva and Parvati. He has a large rat for his vehicle and, in many images, one broken tusk. His image is almost obligatory for businesses, since he has become the god of wealth. (135)
Like Ganesha, Hayavadana has a horse's head and a human body, but unlike the mythological figure he does not possess divine powers. He is an ordinary human being who strives to become a complete man, something that was denied to him after his human mother married a white stallion which was in reality was a celestial being, a "gandharva". According to Encyclopedia Mythica:

The Gandharvas were spirits of the air, forests, and mountains. . . . They are all male, and had differing descriptions. Sometimes they were seen as shaggy, damp, and dirty creatures who were part man and part animal; other times they were men with birds' legs and wings; they could be centaur-like, half man and half horse; or they sometimes were seen as fair men who had effeminate features. They were known for their musical skills, their power to cast illusions, and their skill with horses. ("Gandharvas")

The gandharva, happy to be released from his curse, requested his human wife to accompany him to his celestial dwelling. She resisted with tantrums and he changed her into a horse. Stripped of her human identity she galloped into the forest leaving Hayavadana behind.

Hayavadana is portrayed as a patriotic Indian who sings the national anthem and is also concerned about the nation's future: "So I took interest in the social life of the nation - Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist pattern of society . . ." (114). After being abandoned by his parents, Hayavadana begins his quest for completion. His unsuccessful attempts bring him to the Bhagavata who directs him to the goddess Kali of Mount Chitrakoot. There his wish is granted.
and he becomes a complete horse rather than a man. The image of the goddess forms an important part of the play as it brings together the other three principal characters – Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini.

Hayavadana symbolizes the alienated or misunderstood being. While the others chatter about the ‘talking horse’, he identifies the power of the primeval force in the horse and prioritizes it over crude intellect spent in quarreling over jealous rivalries. In the course of the play, he realizes that it takes the best of the two men i.e. Devdatta’s head and Kapila’s body to make a perfect man. Karnad also highlights that man’s efforts to control his bestial instincts are often futile.

Karnad renames the characters but borrows the same plot from Mann’s *The Transposed Heads*. When the play commences, Bhagavata eulogises on the extraordinary friendship of Devadatta and Kapila. Devadatta is the thinker whereas Kapila is muscular. Though Padmini marries Devdatta, she is attracted to Kapila. This way the play deals with the power of the gaze from the male and female perspectives. It is not only the woman who is objectified, but it is also the male body. Devadatta falls in love with Padmini and wishes to make her his muse, an object to derive pleasure from the act of seeing. Even Kapila cannot help but agree when he first sees her. His words once again define the male gaze: “I give up Devadatta. I surrender to your judgement. . . . You are right – she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati – all rolled into one” (123). While the male gaze is seen as a tool of subjugation of women, Karnad defies this patriarchal notion by portraying Padmini as a dominating character. Karnad makes way for a female discourse by bringing forth the unconscious desires of Padmini. On their way to Ujjain, she cannot help praising Kapila’s physique in an aside:
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. (134)

It does not take long for Devdatta to realize this and the seeds of jealousy are sown in his mind:

No woman could resist him – and what does it matter that she’s married? What a fool I’ve been. All these days I only saw that pleading in his eyes stretching out its arms. Begging for a favour. But never looked in her eyes. And when I did, took the whites of her eyes for their real depth. Only now I see the depths. Now I see these flames leaping up from those depths. Now! So late! Don’t turn away now, Devadatta, look at her... (134)

In Kapila’s presence he becomes a mere spectator, only hoping he would be the object of desire. He had vowed that if Padmini marries him he would sacrifice his arms and head. Devadatta goes to the temple of Kali and beheads himself. Kapila too kills himself out of fear of being charged with murder, but both are brought back to life by Padmini as per Goddess Kali’s instructions. Kali is portrayed sleepy and lethargic unlike her spirited mythological image:

PADMINI. Mother – Kali...
KALI (sleepy): Yes, it’s me. There was a time – many years ago – when at this hour they would have the mangalarati. The devotees used to make a deafening racket with drums and conch-shells and cymbals. So I used to be wide awake around now. I’ve lost the habit. (Yawns.) Right. What do you want? Tell me. I’m pleased with you.

PADMINI. Save me, Mother . . .

KALI. I know, I’ve done that already.

PADMINI. Do you call this saving. Mother of all nature? I can’t show my face to anyone in the world. I can’t . . .

KALI (a little testily): Yes, yes, you’ve said that once. No need to repeat yourself. Now do as I tell you. Put these heads back properly. Attach them to their bodies and then press that sword on their necks. They’ll come up alive. Is that enough?

PADMINI. Mother, you are our breath, you are our bread – and – water . . .

KALI. Skip it. Do as I told you. I’m collapsing with sleep. (141)

Kali, inebriated with sleep, revives the dead men and leaves the task of attaching the severed heads to the bodies to Padmini. Padmini wishes to have the best of both worlds – a man with brains and a powerful body to fulfill her needs. Unconsciously she switches the heads at the temple resulting in a perfect partner – “Devadatta’s clever head and Kapila’s strong body” (140). She happily returns home with Devadatta while Kapila takes refuge in the forest.
Padmini’s happiness is however shattered as Devadatta’s personality transforms the body into a delicate and lean being. On the other hand, Kapila’s new body returns to its previous self. The head and body dynamics may well be seen in terms of a post-colonial framework where the head having greater power tries to dominate the body. The head stands for the coloniser and the body is the colonised and suffers marginalization. As Kapila says:

... One beats the body into shape, but one can’t beat away the memories trapped in it. Isn’t that surprising? That the body should have its own ghosts, its own secrets? Memories of touch – memories of a touch – memories of a body swaying in these arms, of a warm skin against this palm – memories which one cannot recognize, cannot understand, cannot even name because this head wasn’t there when they happened. (171).

The dolls comment every now and then on Padmini’s psychological state. They decode and predict her actions:

DOLL I (in a hushed voice). Look.

DOLL II. Where?

DOLL I. Behind her eyelids. She is dreaming.

DOLL II. I don’t see anything.

DOLL I. It’s still hazy – hasn’t started yet. Do you see it now?

DOLL II (eagerly.). Yes, yes.

(They stare at her.)
DOLL I. A man.

DOLL II. But not her husband.

DOLL I. No, someone else.

DOLL II. Is this the one who came last night?

DOLL II. Yes – the same. But I couldn’t see his face then.

DOLL II. You can now. Not very nice – rough. Like a labourer’s.

But he’s got a nice body – soft. (160)

With her son, Padmini goes in search of Kapila. Devadatta also finds them and the two friends decide to end everything by killing each other. Padmini commits *sati* and before the immolation she hands over her child to Bhagavata and leaves instructions:

... My son is sleeping in a hut. Take him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in the forest and tell him it’s Kapila’s son. They loved Kapila and will bring the child up. Let the child grow up in the forest with the rivers and the trees. When he’s five take him to Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapura. Tell him it’s Devadatta’s son.

(176)

Padmini’s *sati* is performed for two men. The paternity of her son is controversial. At a stage she laments: “Kali, Mother of all Nature, you must have your joke even now. Other women can die praying that they should get the same husband in all the lives to come. You haven’t left me even that little consolation” (177).
Padmini’s child, like Hayavadana, is abandoned and neglected. Actor I finds him loitering and brings him along:

BHAGAVATA. Who are you child? What’s your name? Where are your parents?

ACTOR I: You see? Not a word. Children of his age should be outtalking a dictionary, but this one doesn’t speak a word. Doesn’t laugh, doesn’t cry, doesn’t even smile. The same long face all twenty-four hours. There’s obviously something wrong with him.

(Bends before the child and clowns a bit.)

See? No response – no reactions. When he grows up, he should make a good theatre critic. (180)

The play ends with Hayavadana and Padmini’s son making an appearance on stage. Hayavadana in the end is finally granted his wish and becomes complete. Padmini’s son finally finds his voice which is symbolic of the new generation and also of India finding its voice after independence. The patriotic Hayavadana is the nation’s past. His knowledge and wisdom now has to be passed on to the boy. The play finally ends with a prayer for the nation’s prosperity and welfare: “Grant us. O Lord, good rains, good crop, prosperity in poetry, science, industry and other affairs. Give the rulers of our country success in all endeavours, and along with it, a little bit of sense” (186).

In Three Plays, Girish Karnad points out:
... the story initially interested me for the scope it gave for the use of masks and music. Western theatre has developed a contrast between the face and the mask – the real inner person and the exterior one presents, or wishes to present, to the world outside. But in traditional Indian theatre, the mask is only the face ‘writ large’; since a character represents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype, the mask merely presents in enlarged detail its essential moral nature. (This is why characters in Hayavadana have no real names. The heroine is called Padmini after one of the six types into which Vatsyayana classified all women. Her husband is Devadatta, a formal mode of addressing a stranger. His friend is Kapila. Simply ‘the dark one.’) Music – usually percussion – then further distances the action, placing it in the realm of the mythical and the elemental. (13)

Erin B. Mee comments on the postcolonial element in the play, thus showing how it breaks away from the western theatrical form:

Karnad begins to decolonize a way of seeing when he begins Hayavadana with a Ganesh puja. . . . By opening his play with a Ganesh puja, Karnad instantly locates his play within the tradition of Hindu performance and within a particular tradition of seeing . . . Ganesha appears not as a character, or a representation of a deity, but as a deity himself. In this way Karnad plays with the way Hindu audiences (or audiences who experience darshan) perceive, interpret, and relate to the levels of “reality” on stage . . . (153).
Erin B. Mee further says: “The female Chorus provides a contrast to the Dolls’ vituperative condemnation of Padmini, and introduces a more mature and sympathetic view of her . . . reminding us that she is not interested in being like Sita (the long suffering heroine of Ramayana, often held up as a model of correct female behavior). The chorus tells us not to judge Padmini according to the orthodox social conventions” (151-52). On the Bhagavata, M.K.Naik comments:

The Bhagavata’s role is crucial in the play, since he performs a great variety of functions. He is the narrator who introduces the major characters in the story and later supplies the connecting links in the action, informing the audience about major developments . . . Occasionally he is the vehicle for the revelation of deepest thoughts of a major character . . . The Bhagavata indeed out-Bottoms Bottom, but in a far more constructive way than Shakespeare’s comic weaver.

(141)

Gauri Shankar Jha argues: “In Hayavadana we find diametric shift in Karnad’s critical strategy that we know as ‘subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement’ (Bhabha); as a result Kapila is marginalised and his marginality is valorised. If mode of post-colonialism is ‘the operation of hearing oneself speak’ (Derrida) it happens with almost all the characters of the play” (74). A.Vanitha opines:
The nucleus of the play Hayavadana is emblematic of the predicament of the rift between mind and body. In the framework of post-colonial India, with its diversity and marginalisation, this fracture has become a societal crisis. As the colonisers have elevated and strewn their experiences and ideologies in the Indian soil it is mandatory for the Indians to live two spaces – the superficial world they are forced to inhabit by the European hegemony and the indigenous legacy of the past and the collective unconscious they are made to ignore. The nexus between these two spaces of the mind and the body comprises the preferences, the aspirations, and the dreams, the desires and disillusionment of the hitherto marginalised. (81)

M. Sarat Babu interprets the play in terms of Apollonian and Dionysian egos:

In the primitive man, the body and the mind are in perfect harmony. . . . As man has been vainly striving to be above biological principles for ages, he has evolved Apollonian culture which causes alienation. Devadatta and Kapila, like the people of modern society, victims of self-alienation while Hayavadana, his mother and Padmini’s son attain Dionysian ego (the undifferentiated body-mind). (230)

Hayavadana, the half-horse and half-man signifies the inherent bestiality of man. The passive Kali had her tongue lolling because she yawned, contradicting her traditional blood-thirsty depiction. Padmini blunders her way to a liberation which proves too much for her. Devadatta and Kapila, after the transpositioning of heads,
Kamad explores the dilemma of the newly liberated who have not yet come to terms with their new-found liberty. He thus takes up the question of identity in *Hayavadana* from the post-colonial perspective and shows the battle between the coloniser and the colonised in the form of mind and body, strength and weakness, reason and emotion. At the same time, he analyses Indian society through the use of myth and tradition ingrained in Indian culture.

**Bali: The Sacrifice (1980)**

Girish Karnad’s *Bali: The Sacrifice* digs deep into the issues of superstition and sacrifice which were prevalent not only in the pre-colonial times, but continue to dominate the psyche of the individual even today. At the same time, Karnad takes up the subject of traditional gender roles assigned by the patriarchy to men and women. Karnad questions the social construct and attacks the principles put forward by Rousseau in the eighteenth century.

Karnad’s primary source for the play comes from “the thirteenth-century Kannada epic, *Yashodhara Charite*, by Janna, which in turn refers back to an eleventh-century Sanskrit epic by Vadiraja to the ninth-century Sanskrit epic *Yashatilaka*, by Somadeva Suri” (Karnad, *Two Plays* 70). In one of the stories of *Yashodhara Charite*, which forms the crux of Karnad’s play, Janna narrates the affair between a Queen named Amritamati and an ugly Mahout, who pleases the Queen with kicks and lashes. The King’s mother then orders her son to perform a symbolic sacrifice of a cock made of flour to expiate the Queen and appease the gods, but at the time of sacrifice the dough figurine suddenly comes to life. The King and his mother are punished for their act of violence and they are reborn as animals, and subjected to
much suffering. *Karma* ordains that the good as well as bad deeds of an individual in one life are inherited in the next.

Animal sacrifice has been carried out for centuries and people have been raising voices to put an end to this practice. Women, too, sacrifice themselves and bury their hopes and desires because that is what the patriarchy demands. In the eyes of the patriarchy, women are inferior beings and the only place fit for them is the hearth. Their only job is to live and serve indoors, rather than participate in the public sphere. They are considered as ‘man’s Other’. Simone de Beauvoir writes: “Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being . . . she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beavoir xxii)

Jean Jacques Rousseau’s views on women have been a political debate. Rousseau argues that women should not only try to please men, but should also be docile and obedient. Their only business is motherhood and they must be given limited freedom; this way they would be non-threatening (Darling, Pijpekamp 117-20). Karnad has Rousseau in mind while delineating the female characters in the play – the Queen and the King’s mother. While the mother is modelled on Rousseau’s principles, the Queen, Amritamati, challenges these notions and emerges as an evolved woman.

Karnad provides commentaries on the play though two songs. The Queen, in the opening song, had predicted the events to come. The “blood and gore” (189) would drive” her to the “human soul” (189) that belonged to “the other, hid in the shade” (240). The King sings of his glory when he appears in public with the Queen
and also of his humiliation in waiting for his wife trapped “in her lover’s thighs” (190). The complications that ensue govern the entire play.

When the play opens we find the Queen in a ruined temple in the arms of a Mahout. The Mahout, unaware of the Queen’s true identity, fails to understand why a woman would leave her husband in the middle of the night even though he is “affectionate, gentle, trusting” (195). The betrayal takes place in a common place and in an easy manner and Karnad does not give it any kind of dramatic accompaniment. However, the absence of drama highlights the significance of the betrayal.

The Queen’s betrayal defines her first step towards gaining an identity. Her sexual adventure is symbolic of her freedom and is the recognition of her sexuality. She is aware that she has committed a sin, but does not regret her actions. She tells her husband: “I want to come back to you. I feel fuller. Richer. Warmer. But not ashamed. Because I didn’t plan it. It happened. And it was beautiful” (235). Her attraction to the Mahout’s heavenly voice and her bold decision to go to the temple is a result of her “bodily drives” (Tyson 103) which Julia Kristeva explains in her concept of the ‘semiotic’. ‘Semiotic’ comprises intonation, rhythm, assonance and sound play which reveal certain bodily drives and one’s hidden feelings surface. The Queen’s actions, however, is considered a violation of patriarchal ideology, for according to the patriarchy, it is considered unnatural for a woman to have sexual desire. Patriarchal dictates for women cut across class, caste and creed. The punishment for adultery is same for all women including the Queen. When the King’s mother learns about the Queen’s adventure, she considers it revolting and unacceptable:
MOTHER. Has she fallen so low? . . . How can you stand here like this? I should cut her to pieces . . . feed her to the wolves and vultures. Do it, son, now!

KING. Don’t be hysterical, Mother. (223)

This is a patriarchal assumption that women are considered hysterical and behave irrationally in certain situations. The King’s mother is portrayed as a stereotypical mother-in-law; a strict follower and an agent of the patriarchy. She is deeply religious and wishes to carry out her religious practices in peace. The peace is shattered by her son’s innovative ideas which she secretly attributes to his wife. Even though no grandchild exists, the king warns her not to carry out her sacrificial rituals on his birth as they are violent and disturbing. His mother is also disappointed by his decision to change his faith:

MOTHER. You were not born a Jain. You were born my son. But you betrayed me and my faith. Instead of choosing the woman and bringing her to your faith, you chose hers. (214)

The patriarchy expects men are to take control if a situation goes out of hand, and if they are unable to do so it implies failure of manhood. Penny A. Weiss sums up the expected role of men: “Men are trained in craft, taught to judge independently, prepared to be citizens and soldiers in a participatory democracy, and allowed to express their thoughts and desires openly” (81). The King in spite of rigorous training fails to do this. He becomes an anti-hero as he is passive and unable to commit himself to any ideal. When he comes to know of his wife’s affair with the Mahout, he
waits for directions from his mother who is very thorough in her knowledge of patriarchal conventions. The King is oppressed and is unable to take action on his own:

But

Woe betide the times

Where the King sits alone

Outside on the steps

Racked by sighs . . . (190)

Karnad presents a solitary figure bowed with grief. The grandeur conventionally associated with the ruler of the state fades away at the betrayal of his wife. The King’s inactivity represents the dysfunctionality of patriarchal dictates. He finds himself caught in the web of religious commitments and traditions. He practices the patriarchal policy of keeping women apart. For the Queen’s sake he gives up his religion and converts to Jainism. The dramatist uses the flashback technique to narrate the particular incident that changed the King’s attitude towards violence. When still a prince, he brags about his hunting skills and knocks down a bird to impress his future wife. The young Queen is horrified:

Oh God! Blood. Poor birdie! It’s bleeding.

(The Queen kneels down and gently picks up the bird. She keeps caressing the bird and whispering to it. The King watches, almost mesmerized.)

Poor baby! . . . Please fetch some water. Please. (208)
The Queen believes in non-violence and her influence reforms the King. Even at this point, it is clear that she firmly stands by what she believes:

QUEEN. . . Because of me, you deserted her faith – her Mother Goddess.

(The Queen moves to the window. Looks out.)

I’m afraid.

KING. Of what?

QUEEN (points out). That bit of thatched roof there. You have considerately built a wall round it to hide the shed. But the roof shows. As though it refuses to be dismissed.

KING. The earth there couldn’t take a higher wall.

QUEEN. It’s the shed in which your mother keeps her animals.

(Pause.)

All these years I have been pretending that it doesn’t exist. That I can’t hear the bleat of sheep being taken out at night.

(Pause.)

For slaughter.

(Pause.)

You sleep through it. You’ve grown up with those sounds. I haven’t. The often wake me up – keep me awake. But I’ve pretended I didn’t mind.

KING. I know. I’m sorry. (211-12)
The King’s happiness knows no bounds when he comes to know of his wife’s pregnancy. He conveniently forgets about her affair with the Mahout as the desire to produce an heir possesses him:

KING. I am so happy. The entire kingdom will burst into festivities.

But first we must tell Mother. She will be ecstatic. This is what she has been praying for . . .

QUEEN. Yes, we must. She first of all. (209)

However, as per royal custom, the debauchery of the Queen has to be atoned through sacrifice:

KING. You know that’s been the family tradition.

QUEEN. Weren’t human beings also offered in sacrifice to the goddess once?

KING. Yes. But that was generations ago.

QUEEN. So you see, a tradition can be given up. Or at least changed.

KING. Mother will not agree to give up her practices. You know that.

She feels she owes it to our ancestors. We’ve been through all this before.

QUEEN. But now it concerns our child. What offerings will be considered worthy of a royal birth, do you think?

(No reply.)

They say when you were born, every inch of the earth for miles around was soaked in blood.
KING. People exaggerate.

QUEEN. Yes, you’re right. I shouldn’t be complaining about the scale. Just the thought. Of bloodshed. Even a single drop of blood.

(Pause.)

I don’t want it. Not in the name of our son. (212-13)

The Queen mother abides by old traditions. The Queen, on the other hand desires a non-violent world for her child. She delineates the positive aspects of an existence without bloodshed: “I don’t want to hurt her. She can live by her beliefs. But we are Jains. Our son will be a Jain. He will have to uphold the principle of compassion for all living beings, of non-violence. Should we allow a blood rite to mark his arrival? It should be wrong. Terribly wrong” (213). The Queen Mother reacts with anger at the violation of ancient proprieties. A heated debate ensues between her and the King:

MOTHER. You’re treating my goddess as though she were a cheap, tribal spirit. And you are cutting off my path to her.

KING. Try and be sensible, Mother. No one is stopping you from worshipping your goddess or from your own form of worship. But I am a Jain. My son will be a Jain – a Jain King. I cannot have his birth greeted with the infliction of death.

MOTHER. You were not born a Jain. You were born my son. But you betrayed me and my faith. Instead of choosing the woman and bringing her to your faith, you chose hers.
KING. I accepted the faith because I found truth in it and compassion for the world in pain. I don’t want to add to the pain. I will not let anyone do it. Certainly not in the name of my son.

MOTHER. He is my grandson too. I too have prayed for him. For me, he is the gift of my goddess.

KING. A king can follow only one path and I have chosen mine. (214)

Ultimately, to placate his mother he agrees to carry out the symbolic sacrifice on the condition that there will be no bloodshed. He even agrees to build her a separate cottage where she could carry out her rituals.

The King wishes to teach the Mahout a lesson, but is reminded every now and then of his religion. The Mahout ridicules him: “Of course, how could I forget? You are a Jain. You can’t indulge in violence. You aren’t permitted to shed blood. Ooh! I forgot that” (204). The Mahout is portrayed as the most interesting character in the play and acts as a foil to the others, especially the King. Unlike the others, he is not a stereotype, but rather an iconoclast. He is a man who makes his own rules and is not concerned about what people think of him. Though he belongs to the lower strata of the society, he is proud of his position in the kingdom: “People mock at mahouts. Call us ‘low-born’. But where would all your princes and kings be without us, I want to know. What would happen to their elephants? No elephants. No army. No pomp and splendor. No processions. No kings! Ha!” (196). Like the King’s mother, he too is superstitious and blames the eclipse for his ugly looks. However, he feels that god has compensated his looks with a gifted voice; a voice which brought many women to him. The King admires him for his knowledge of women: “What a pundit. A veritable sage. A guru. A man of divine wisdom . . . and beauty” (233). However, the Mahout
distrusts his intuitive wisdom regarding the forces of Nature. He declares to the King and the Queen:

Listen, the two of you. Stop playing with these things, these forces. Look at those bats – hanging on the roof. Silent. Still. Watching us. Waiting for some signal. Go now. Fetch a witch-doctor. Let him deal with it. Take my advice. These things can eat into you. Go back to the palace. As for me, I am leaving town. (238)

The Mahout also finds the whole idea of sacrificing a cock made of dough very amusing:

. . . I’ll tell you what . . . why don’t you make an image of me with dough.  
(He giggles.)

. . . with dough and string it up. After all, if you find it fit for gods, I don’t see why dough shouldn’t be good enough for you.  
(Pause.)

Would a man of dough satisfy her though? Goodnight. (234)

Karnad comments on the way of thinking of the royals and the common man by shedding light on the rational and the irrational. As the title of the play suggests, the central theme of the play, apart from hypocrisy of marriage and patriarchal ideologies, is the meaninglessness of sacrifice and the irrelevance of rituals. The concept of ‘bali’ or sacrifice permeates throughout the play and acts as a vehicle to show the religious
beliefs of Jains and Hindus. The debate between the two religions begins when the playwright describes the first meeting of the King and the Queen:

KING. I know. You are Jains, aren’t you? Your kings can’t hunt. Your Saviours are all stark naked.

QUEEN. And . . . and . . . my maid says your goddess eats meat.

KING. She does too. But she is dressed in such gorgeous saris. Clothed from neck to toe.

QUEEN (losing the argument). Your goddess eats . . . chicken . . . and goats . . .

KING. But she is decked in gold. What kind of king is your father? Can’t he even afford a jockstrap for your Saviour? Not even a piece of rag to cover his shame? (206)

As the play progresses, differences between the two characters come to the fore as a result of their beliefs. Non-violence is one of the major tenets of Jainism and is the first of the vows taken by Jains. According to Jainism, violence is not simply injuring living beings but even the intention to kill, destroy or even hurt means violence. The King, for instance, forgets this basic principle and threatens the Mahout. The King’s mother, on the other hand, follows the sacrificial rituals as practiced centuries ago. Such sacrifices serve the purpose of alleviating the anger of the gods and provide relief from the threat of an onset of an illness or worse. Suchitra Samanta observes: “The sacrifice of the paśu (animal) increases a person’s store of ‘merit’ (punya), and liberates it from a condition of gross, physical, and a morally degenerate matter onto a
higher, more refined plane of perception, as the created being progresses towards mōksa” (794)

The Queen, being a witness to her mother-in-law’s rituals learns how and on what occasion different animals are sacrificed and is aware that human beings were also killed. In the course of the play she gains awareness that violence can be practiced in intent and thought as well. The King’s mother despises the Queen, but for her son’s sake bears with the relationship. She feels the only way the Queen could be absolved of her sins is by making a sacrifice, even if it is of clay. The Queen finally agrees to the sacrifice, but the act of violence horrifies her and she sacrifices herself for the sake of her religion rather than committing the act of violence. She remains true to her religion and even liberates the King from his responsibility towards her.

This way Karnad takes up a dark chapter from the annals of history. Through the play he shows that the nation has hardly progressed when it comes to giving up superstitions and absurd religious practices. Animal and human sacrifice was carried out centuries ago and even today it is common in some regions of the country. Karnad draws a line between violence and non-violence, between right and wrong.

Critics see the play as a comment on the omnipresent issue of violence. According Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, the play’s originality lies in the fact that “it assimilates the sexual issues to a historically-nuanced meditation on the nature and psychology of violence” (xxxv). Commenting on the opening of the play S. Subhash Chandran remarks that the play shows the conflict between the two halves of the human soul – one governed by violence, and the other by non-violence. He goes on to analyse the play in terms of Dionysian and Apollonian principles where the Queen-Mother and the Mahout represent these principles (295-302). Shubha Mishra uses Foucault’s concept of ‘Panopticism’ and explains how the four characters are under
constant surveillance and how each becomes a prisoner of his or her own mentality.

(127-56)

Even though the Queen sacrifices herself for the sake of humanity, she too commits an act of violence by ending the life of her unborn child and with that shattering the King’s dream of a future heir. Yet she emerges as a new woman who is “deprived of conventional feminine roles by chance and circumstance, but self-possessed and cerebral enough not to surrender to pressures of conformity” (Dharwadker xxxiv). In the words of Binod Mishra: “The way she finally ends her life becomes the real sacrifice and not the fake one as proposed by the King and his mother. Her death shows her purity and as such it is an indication to awaken the sleeping conscience of the royal members considered next to God” (97). The experience with the Mahout proved to be a turning point in the life of the Queen. She was relieved of her repressions.

The King is as a weak character who is unable to take decisions. He fails to take sides as he does not wish to lose his loved ones:

He gets very little chance to show his real self. A follower of family traditions, he has already been disloyal the way he embraced his wife’s religion. This gives us a little hint about his rational approach yet his lack of courage to oppose the old time stigma, superstitious beliefs makes him an effeminate. (B. Mishra 98)

The King’s mother, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker opines, “is . . . removed from the two-dimensional ‘mother-in-law’ of myth and folklore. What alienates her from the barren and unfaithful queen is not only a mother’s possessiveness and anger, but
fundamental differences that insert larger cultural questions into their personal
antagonisms” (xxxiv). Indeed her superstitious beliefs in age old practices result in
the rift between the two. Her wish to sacrifice a cock made of dough proves to a
chimera in the eyes of the Queen.

Finally, the Mahout, though also a victim of superstitious beliefs, “is
conscious of his assigned category in the social and moral scheme of things, of
distinct physical and conceptual characteristics that put him in the ‘other’ category”
(Khanna 110). He is the harbinger of change; a noble savage whose wisdom is drawn
from nature and proximity to animals.

The theme of Bali is played out at many levels. The King is sacrificed to his
responsibilities. He has no independence; everything in his life is governed by his
commitments to the state and to his family. The Mahout, in contrast, is absolutely
free. He makes love to the Queen and is accountable to none. He has no family and no
friends. The filth and squalor of the surroundings and unwashed smelly self of the
Mahout suggest that he has been sacrificed to poverty. The Queen sacrifices herself at
the end of the play. Prior to this, she was sacrificed many times over. She was
sacrificed to the community that condemned her as barren and was verbally
slaughtered by the King’s mother for her association with the Mahout. The dilemma
of the modern man has been captured in all its aspects.
Nāga-Mandala (1988)

In Nāga-Mandala: Play with a Cobra (1988), Karnad continues his quest to ‘write back’ and attacks the hegemonic ideologies of the colonial world. He employs the magic realist technique to repair the fissures within society and projects a Utopian world for the common man. The play is based on two folk tales which Karnad heard from A.K. Ramanujan – one about lamp flames who gather late at night in a temple to gossip, and the other about a cobra who visits a woman every night by taking the human form of her husband. It had its premiere at the University of Chicago in 1988 and was the first contemporary Indian play to be produced by a major American theatre company, the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis (Dharwadker xxxii). The action of the play once again begins in a ruined temple:

_The inner sanctum of a ruined temple. The idol is broken, so the presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified._

_It is night. Moonlight seeps in through the cracks in the roof and the walls._ (247).

The broken idol symbolizes the dwindling faith of the urban Indian. Being in a ruined state, it may well be compared to the state of man who is drowned in sins and hopes for forgiveness. In this case it is a playwright who has to stay awake the whole night “having been cursed by a mendicant as a result of making so many of his audiences soporific in the past” (Crow 154 ). In order to break the curse he decides to spend the night in the temple. He finds solace in the presence of god and hopes to redeem himself. The play deals with the introspection of a playwright who was a failure. Nighttime visions, illusions, dreams and hallucination ignite his imagination and help
him to create a story and also provide him with the beginning of a new one. The location of the temple is recurrent in Karnad’s plays. He presents it as a place where anything that is human is sacred, whether it is the act of having an illicit affair (Bali), or the act of shedding blood within the four walls of the holy place (Hayavadana). At the same time, it becomes a place of gossip for the lamp flames. Karnad blasts the notion of a perfect, pure and ideal human being overwhelmed by the sacred environment. He promotes the idea of a friendly place where no aspect of the human personality is a cause for embarrassment:

*(He hides behind a pillar. Several Flames enter the temple, giggling, talking to each other in female voices.)*

“I don’t believe it! They are naked lamp flames! No wicks, no lamps. No one holding them. Just lamp flames on their own – floating in the air! Is that even possible?” (248).

Magic realism is omnipresent in the play. Based on a folk tale, this particular image of flames becomes an effective post-colonial tool where the irrational dismantles the colonial history and becomes a way to familiarise people with the rich culture of a nation. Karnad’s magic realism becomes a tool for explaining the wisdom of the uneducated, the rural, and of women. He counters the hegemonic notion that wisdom can come only through books and higher education. One of the flames narrates the tale of how a story and a song escaped from a women’s mouth and “the story took the form of a young woman and the song became a sari” (250). Sari is a traditional Indian dress which women have been wearing for centuries. Worn on different occasions, it reflects the history and culture of Indian society. However, it is much maligned by western feminists who consider it as a form of bondage.
The ‘Story’ in its new form agrees to tell the playwright “a story” (96) on the condition that he will have to retell it. The fact that the story and the song were imprisoned inside the old woman once again refers to the hegemony of the colonisers, and the struggle of the indigenous people to seek freedom and to reconstruct their identity. It also points to the fact that stories “live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener” (Karnad, “Appendix 1” 315). The story teller plays an important role in decolonising the established name and conventions of the coloniser. Gilbert and Tompkins see the story teller as “one of the most significant manipulators of historical narrative in colonized societies . . .” (126). Childhood stories carry with them wisdom and deep insight which stay with us as time passes. Often a story which is heard years ago makes more sense when we face a similar situation in our lives. Tales that children hear from their grandmother are loaded with hidden meanings. With time the plot might change when passed on, but the essence remains the same.

Like a fairy tale the Story begins: “A young girl. Her name . . . it doesn’t matter. But she was an only daughter, so her parents called her Rani. Queen. Queen of the whole wide world. Queen of the long tresses” (253). Similarly, her husband is called “Appanna”, which is a “common name” (253). Karnad once again uses the Expressionist mode to universalise the characters in the play. The spectators and the readers are thus able to identify themselves with the characters and this gives the play the stamp of universality. Appanna is portrayed as a ruthless husband who reduces Rani’s position to a servant. Her only job is to serve him mid-day meals while he remains outdoors for the rest of the day. Imprisoned, she longs for her parents who gave her unconditional love:
“. . . So Rani asks him: where are you taking me? And the Eagle answers: ‘Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you.’ So Rani says: ‘Do they? Then please, please take me to them – immediately. Here I come.’ So the Eagle carries her clear across the seven seas . . . (254).

The magical garden becomes an exotic symbol of a perfect world which every individual craves for, but which exists only in our imagination. To make her dreams a reality, Kurudavva, a blind old woman, wishes to revive the institutionalised alliance. Kurudavva has a significant role in the play. She creates the potion which facilitates Rani’s control of her own life. Kurudavva learns that Rani’s marriage has not been consummated as Apanna is involved with a prostitute:

KURUDAVVA. You don’t mean, he is home only once a day, and that too . . . only for lunch?
(No reply.)

And you are alone in the house all day?
(Rani begins to sob.)

Don’t cry child, don’t cry. I haven’t come here to make you cry.

Does he lock you up every day like this?

RANI. Yes, since the day I came here.

KURUDAVVA. Does he beat you or ill-treat you?

RANI. No.

KURUDAVVA (pause). Does he . . . ‘talk’ to you?
RANI. Oh, that he does. But not more than a syllable required. ‘Do this’, ‘Do that’, ‘Serve the food’.

KURUDAVVA. You mean – ? That means – you are – still – hmm! Has he . . . ? (258-59)

She gives Rani a root that will awaken desire for her in Apanna:

KURUDAVVA. The root I was telling you about.

(Rani Starts.) Here. Take this smaller piece. That should do for a pretty jasmine like you. Take it. Grind it into a nice paste and feed it to your husband. And watch the results. Once he smells you . . .

He will make you a wife instantly.

RANI. But I am his wife already.

KURUDAVVA. Just do as I say. (262)

To decide she takes the Story’s advice:

RANI (to the Story). Shall I pour it in?

STORY. Yes. (Rani prays silently to the gods and pours the paste into the curry. There is a sudden explosion. She runs and hides in a corner of the room. The curry boils over, red as blood. Steam, pink and dangerous, coils out of the pot. Rani shuts her eyes in fear . . . ) (265)

Here Karnad uses Brecht’s concepts of ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ or ‘alienation effect’. The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre explains that alienation effect “stipulates the
emotional detachment of both the audience and the actors from the drama, in order to emphasize the intellectual significance of what is happening” (“Alienation Effect”). The actor thus steps out of its character and interacts with the Story. Karnad is highly influenced by Brecht’s technique as he first uses it in the Prologue where the playwright announces his task of staying awake till the sun rises. The play then shifts to the performance of Rani’s story and the audience is thus distanced from the story through the prologue.

Fearing the effects of the root on Apanna, Rani pours it into an anthill where a cobra resides. The powerful potion makes the cobra, called Naga, fall in love with Rani. He metamorphosises into Appanna every night and becomes a perfect husband for her. Though puzzled by this sudden transformation, she does not question him. Naga, the cobra, in the guise of Apanna solicits Rani’s attention:

NAGA. Yes, I shall come home every night from now on. May I?

(Rani laughs shyly. Pause. She is sleepy.)

May I sit by you now? Or will that make you jump out of your skin again?

(Rani shakes her head. Naga comes and sits very close to her. When she tries to move away, he suddenly grabs her, with frightening speed.)

NAGA. Don’t be afraid. Put your head against my shoulder.

(She slowly puts her head on his shoulder. He gently puts his arm around her.)

NAGA. Now, don’t be silly. I am not a mongoose or a hawk that you should be afraid of me. Good. Relax. Tell me about your parents.
What did all of you talk about? Did they pamper you? Tell me everything.

(She has fallen asleep against his chest. He slowly unties her hair. It is long and thick and covers them both. He picks up her hair in his hand, smells it.)

NAGA. What beautiful, long hair! Like dark, black, snake princesses!

(269-70)

The flames then celebrate the consummation of their marriage with a song and dance:

Come let us dance
through the weaver – bird’s nest
and light the hanging lamps
of glow worms
through the caverns in the ant-hill
and set the diamond
in the cobra’s crown ablaze
through the blind woman’s dream
through the deaf-mute’s song . . . (274)

Commenting on the role of ‘dancing bodies’ in post-colonial drama, Gilbert and Tompkins observe:

Dance is a form of spatial inscription and thus a productive way of illustrating – and countering – the territorial aspects of western
imperialism. Dance’s patterned movement also offers the opportunity to establish cultural context, especially when the dance executed challenges the norms of the colonizer. In this way, dance recuperates post-colonial subjectivity by centralising traditional, non-verbal forms of self-representation. (239)

Like Appanna, Naga bids her to remain silent, to wait for him and serve him. Ironically, her infidelity confines her further. She thinks her dilemma is resolved when she discovers that she is pregnant:

All these days I was never sure I didn’t just dream up these nightly visits of yours. You don’t know how I have suffered. When I saw your scowling face in the morning, I would be certain everything was a fantasy and almost want to cry. But my real anxiety began as the evening approached. I would merely lie here, my eyes shut tight. What is there to see after all? The same walls. The same roof. As the afternoon passed, my whole being got focused in my ears. The bells of cattle returning home – that means it is late afternoon. The cacophony of birds in a far-away tree – it is sunset. The chorus of crickets spreading from one groove to another – it is night. Now he will come. Suppose he doesn’t tonight? Suppose the nightqueen does not blossom? Suppose it’s all a dream? Every night the same anxiety. The same cold feeling within me! Thank God. That’s all past now. (282)
In response Naga once again tells her to remain silent and swears her to secrecy: “Don’t ask questions. Do as I say” (284). Appanna institutes a trial for her. All along, he remains insensitive to his own betrayal and demands punishment for the adultress: “Open the door! Open the door, you whore! All right then, I’ll show you. I’ll go to the Village Elders. If they don’t throw that child into boiling oil and you along with it, my name is not Appanna” (285). The caustic trial ends with the elevation of Rani to godhood. The chastity test, unlike Sita’s chastity test in Ramayana, is proved false. Sita could walk through fire because she was faithful. Rani is rescued by the powers of the Naga. Appanna is silenced by the performance, the touchstone of purity is nullified and the faithless wife is exonerated.

However, the playwright questions the cobra’s position as he feels it too deserves a fitting conclusion. Gilbert and Tompkins explain: “While propelling the story forward – and sometimes participating in the enactment – the storyteller gauges his/her performance by the reactions of the audience and elaborates and/or improvises accordingly” (128). Thus, the flames’ unhappy reaction forces the playwright to give another alternate ending where the cobra lives happily ever after in Rani’s hair. The double ending gives choices to the readers. In the first ending the snake sacrifices itself for Rani’s marital bliss. In the second, the more romantic one, it snuggles in her tresses and remains a constant danger to Appanna’s patriarchal authority:

RANI (softly, to the Cobra). You? What are you doing here? He’ll kill you. Go. Go away. No! Not that way. He’s there. What shall we do? What shall we do? Why did you ever come back here, stupid?

(Suddenly) My hair! Of course, Come, quick. Climb into it.

(She lets her hair down to the floor.)

And lie still. You don’t know how heavy you are. Let me get used to you, will you?

(*Appanna comes in with a stick.*)

It went that way – toward the bathroom.

(*Appanna rushes out of the bedroom, toward the bathroom, looking for the snake. Rani pats her hair.*)

The hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, for ever.

(*Picks the baby up. Turns to the Man, gives him a thumbs-up sign. Walks out triumphant . . .*) (299-300)

Rani’s housing the cobra in her hair is symbolic of her evolution. Her decision questions the dictates of the patriarchy. It challenges the concepts of chastity, loyalty and devotion which are propagated as determiners of ‘good’ women by the patriarchy but not as determiners of ‘good’ men. The rendering of the myth as a play exposes the subconscious fears and desires of the male-oriented society. The Story, thus, emphasises the feminist perspective of the tale. Classical Indian Drama was primarily male-oriented. It dealt with the exploits of epic heroes. The playwright’s night in the temple with the flames and the Story reoriented him and he could revive the legacy of myth and folklore to explore contemporary realities, particularly the issues of the marginalised like women, sudras and nature. The original myth was extremely phallocentric. Karnad’s version combines the myth and a modern vision. The cobra is comparable to the dirty Mahout. Both are repulsive to the hypocritical mind. Their goodness has to be perceived.
An unanswered question in the play is Kurudavva’s son’s mysterious disappearance. When the playwright asks about her the Story replies: “Oh, that is Kurudavva’s story. If you are interested in that one, you may find her yet, meet her unexpectedly as you met me here, in some remote place. . . . Or you can invent the missing details. That would be quite in order. I am only Rani’s story” (294). As Karnad believes that anyone can tell a story, he leaves some conclusions to the audience. Kurudavva’s son plays an important role as he serves as his blind mother’s eyes. While Rani’s story has a happy ending, Karnad gives the audience the freedom to decide Kappana’s fate.

According to Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker the snake’s visits are “virtually overdetermined by the familiar folk logic that beauty and innocence must triumph without the overt violation of social norms” (xxx). She further says:

Given the premodern setting of the play, its proximity to the life of the average urban Indian woman is not self-evident, but the polarities of love and lovelessness, perplexity and fulfilment it assigns to the relationships of men and women within marriage speak across the particularities of form and content (especially in performance), and make a distinctive contribution to the ongoing dialogue on gender. (xxxii)

B.T. Seetha observes that the flames “represent the essence that can consume but cannot be consumed themselves. They seem to rise above time and space, mind and body. They ignite and release the “Story and the Song”, to give them a direction
and a freedom to be” (191). The flames represent feminine imagination. Comparing the characters in the play to the geometrical figure of a “mandala”, V. Rangan writes:

A “mandala” consists of a triangle and a square: a triangle within a square. The zeitgeist of the play is the mandala. The three points of the triangle are Rani, Apanna and Naga, thus illustrating the eternal triangle of an adulterous situation presenting the wife, the husband and the lover. The four sides of the square provide the dramatic framing and stand for the Flames (the tellers), the tale, the Man (the listener) and the audience (the perpetuator). (201)

R. Radhiga Priyadarshini compares the western and eastern views of a snake. While in the west a snake is considered “demonic”, in the east they acquire the status of a deity. Whether it is the story of Aravan in the Mahabharata or the Indian poet Gunadhya, snakes occupies a prominent place in Hindu mythology and folklore (165). She also compares Kurudavva to mother-earth:

Whenever a woman suffers, Hindu mythology makes the earth as the ultimate asylum to her. . . . Kurudavva is the mythological earth-mother displaced in the plausible human direction. She is associated with ploughs, roots, pebbles. . . . Girish Karnad makes the earth erupt out in the form of Kurudavva, roots, plough, ant-hill and a serpent to rescue Rani and avenge Appanna. (169-70)

S.R.Jalote also sees the play as a fine example of Brecht’s Epic Theatre. The mixing of folklore and magic keeps reminding the spectators that they are only watching a
play. Instead of being “emotionally” involved they use their intellectual faculty to judge the events (263-74).

Karnad’s purpose is to voice his concerns about the patriarchy and to create a society where men and women are treated as equal. He believes, like other feminist thinkers, that the patriarchy is creating a degenerate society where both the sexes suffer, and this results in a chaotic world. He blasts the myth of the patriarchal concept of the perfect women, for the perfect woman cannot exist. He believes that magic is the only way to attain the state of perfection. He thus blends magic and realism to comment on the established patriarchal norms with the hope that in the future attempts are not made to confine the human mind.
Works Cited


Chapter IV

UTOPIA IN MY DREAMS

A Study of Tale-Daṇḍa, The Fire and the Rain and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan
Talé-Daṇḍa (1990)

Karnad’s Talé-Daṇḍa can be considered a prologue to Tughlaq. While Tughlaq shows the importance of a secular nation, Talé-Daṇḍa explores the chasms that exist within religion. It identifies the need to find solutions and attempts to unite communities. Set in the twelfth century, the play revives the social upheavals and religious reforms of the period and connects them with contemporary Indian situations. Karnad chooses as his protagonist a historical figure named Basavanna who dared to challenge the conventions of society. Once again the dramatist meanders through mazes of history, myth, religion, antiquity and modernity. The title of the play means ‘death by beheading’ and Karnad indeed shows a metaphorical beheading of values that destroy the moral fabric of society. Karnad’s objective in writing Talé-Daṇḍa was to promote communal integration. Karnad explains the play’s historical context:

During the two decades ending in AD 1168, in the city of Kalyan, a man called Basavanna assembled a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers. . . . They condemned idolatry and temple worship. . . . They opposed the caste system, not just in theory but in practice. This last act brought down upon them the wrath of the orthodox. The movement ended in terror and bloodshed. (2)

I wrote Talé-Daṇḍa in 1989 when the ‘Mandir’ and ‘Mandal’ movements were beginning to show how relevant the questions posted by these thinkers were for our age. The horrors of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today
have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered. (Preface)

The Mandal Commission decided to reserve 27% government jobs for people belonging to the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This “sparked off nationwide protests and horrific acts of self-destruction on the part of young upper-caste students who claimed their future had been irredeemably compromised” (Dharwadker ix). In 1990, the Ayodhya controversy erupted when a decision was taken to demolish the Babri mosque and to construct a temple in its place. These infamous events divided the nation and resulted in chaos and destruction.

Unlike Tughlaq, who is a king and a symbol of power, Basavanna’s strength lies in his beliefs. He leads the ‘Virasaiva’ movement, the members of which called themselves ‘Sharanas’, and aims to eradicate the caste system that threatens equality. Julia Leslie writes:

The Vīraśaivas are worshippers of Śiva, the term vīra (‘heroic’ or ‘militant’) suggesting the strength of their devotional experience. . . . Another term for Vīraśaiva is ‘Lingāyat(a)’, literally ‘bearers of the linga, the emblem of Śiva. The name is derived from the habitual wearing of a small stone śivalinga, usually in a silver container suspended at the neck. . . . While the terms ‘Vīraśaivas’ and ‘Lingāyat’ are often used interchangeably, there is a tendency for the former to describe the philosophical or historical context while the latter denotes the modern social group. (229)
Basavanna serves as the author’s mouthpiece. Santosh Kumar writes:

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 brotherhood. Philosopher, poet and minister Basavanna reformed and revived Vira Saivism in Karnataka. . . . 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. (Muse India)

Construction of identity according to one’s caste becomes the most important theme in the play. The play conducts a debate about culture and cultural politics. The realm of such politics is to consider which culture is the dominant one and which is subordinated. The arrival of the Aryans led to the establishment of the caste system. Society was divided into four distinct groups – the Brahmins, who are the priests; the Kshatriyas represent the warrior and nobility; the Vaishyas are the merchants and peasants; and the Shudras are the labour class whose duty is to serve. There is also a fifth category, called the untouchables, which falls outside the caste system.

The division of caste also highlights the superiority of one language over another and this Karnad highlights through the clash between Sanskrit and Kannada. People belonging to the upper strata of society hold Sanskrit in reverence and praise it for its purity. The Queen’s priest, Damodara Bhatta declares:
Sanskrit is a language engraved on diamond, unchanging, austere. Eternal truths can be captured in its immutability. Kannada, our mother tongue, on the other hand, is pure flux. It changes from mouth to mouth, from caste to caste, from today to tomorrow. It is geared to the needs of squabbling couples, wheedling beggars, prostitutes spreading their saris out. It can only speak in inconstant moods. Its sensuality is addictive and the sharanas use it to pimp for their vulgarities. (64)

He thus condemns his mother tongue as it does not convey a sense of royalty which suits his community and constructed identity. Like Damodara Bhatta, John Locke believed that the English language was being polluted by the lower sections of the society; people who were considered outsiders in the so-called pristine circle of intellectuals (Thadathil 154). Language becomes a tool of pushing people back. Damodara and other characters in the royal court use Sanskrit as a means to dominate and vanquish the Sharanas. Karnad defines the process through which identities and relationships are constructed. The power negotiations resulted in Sanskrit functioning as a controlling device that deliberately silenced Kannada. Today Sanskrit is considered a dead language while Kannada is still spoken predominately in Karnataka. Girish Karnad writes:

In Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his geographical origins, even his economic status. In the original Kannada version of Talé-Daṇḍa, the language of the play engages with implications of this fact for a
situation in which a group of people are trying to fight caste and social
inequality. (3)

Karnad writes with the vision of a social reformer. He challenges the vices of the
caste system and desires an equal society. The evolution of his characters is visible in
the course of the play.

Basavanna’s identity is reflected through his use of Kannada in composing
vachanas or poetry. His simple, soul stirring poems capture the true essence of life.
They are like religious sermons which lead one to the path of truth, compassion and
sympathy:

Do not steal
Do not kill
Do not ever lie
Do not rage . . . (21)

His verses mock the caste system and the superstitions which blind a man’s vision and
his ability to reason. He is totally against the Shudras’ idol worship:

The pot is god. The winnowing
fan is god. The stone in the
street is a god. The comb is a
god. The bowstring is also a god.
Gods, gods, there are so many
there’s no place left
He tells his people to always believe in one god, Shiva, for it is he who would show them the right way. Even King Bijjala cannot help but recall his verses in moments of distress. Bijjala is aware of the evils of the caste system and admits his low birth. His forefathers were barbers and he sees it as a stain which cannot be washed away: “One’s caste is like the skin on one’s body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber – a shepherd, a scavenger!” (21). He doesn’t believe in god, but builds temples to please his followers. However, at the time of his death he clings to the linga; an act which he calls a miracle: “... Basavanna couldn’t make me bend before the Lord. My wife couldn’t. But you young whelps have made me cling to Him. Something must be wrong with me. Whatever I reach for – wherever I crawl – I bump into miracles” (96). Even though he doesn’t support Basavanna openly, he admires him for his vision and has complete trust in him. When Bijjala’s son, Sovideva accuses Basavanna for manipulating the account in the royal treasury, he declares, “when Basavanna puts something on paper, it’s there for good” (18). He humiliates his son by kicking him in front of his mother:

“Rambha! Rambha! All this is your doing. You, with your pampering and swaddling, you have turned him into a royal eunuch. And I am the greater fool for having let your tears stop me. If only I had birched the skin off his back as I had with his brothers. If only I had tied him up in a bundle and dowsed him in the river. But you had to get in the way and cry and wail. It’s all your doing...” (18)
This cruel treatment of Sovideva results in hatred for his father. In order to prove his mettle, Sovideva usurps the throne and holds Bijjala captive. Sovideva’s relationship with his father also shows how the patriarchy treats men in society. The patriarchy of the old society believed in masculinity. Sovideva’s affinity with his mother makes him appear effeminate to his father. Bijjala’s embarrassment results in unreasonable anger which he vents on Sovideva. Even though he is a prince, he is not treated as one. This is the reason that the desire for revenge burns inside him. So, it is not just women who are subjugated and dominated, but also men. By defining genders through obvious ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities, the patriarchy is contemptuous of soft-hearted men like Sovideva and marginalises them. The unhappy youth represents the dysfunctional new generation. The old order has decayed and needs to be discarded.

Karnad gives a stereotypical representation of women in the play. Bijjala’s wife Queen Rambhavati is not allowed to have a say in the operations of the kingdom and remains a mute spectator. Sovideva’s wife also becomes a victim of patriarchal hegemony. Though she does not make an appearance and is mentioned just once, it becomes evident that she does not live with him. It is only when Sovideva needs advice from his father -in-law he reminds himself that he has a wife.

In the twelfth century women were stifled in confinement. The conservative society placed them within domestic boundaries and treated them as unintelligent and inferior. The married woman was forcefully subjugated by her in-laws. Sati or immolation of the widows on the husband’s funeral pyre was practiced. The famous text ‘Manusmrti’ is particularly biased:
The lawgiver warns men about women whose nature is to seduce men. . . . In a well-known verse it is stated that a woman always needs protection by men: her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in her youth, and in her old age her sons will protect her. . . . In marriage a woman should worship her husband constantly as a god . . . (Schouten 143-44).

On the other hand, courtesans who were attached to temples or courts were often influential and could wield a certain amount of power. To escape domestic drudgery, women often opted for ascetic lives. Akka Mahadevi, a follower of Basavanna, produced vachanas that, in hindsight, make her a precursor of feminism. The thoughtful aspect of womanhood in Talé-Daṇḍa is visible in the following dialogue:

BIJJALA. . . . Doesn’t anything interest you woman except marriage and husbands and children?

RAMBHAVATI. Have you left us anything else? (22)

Rambhavati strips herself of initiative and desire and complies with the dictates of patriarchy. Her daughter-in-law never appears in the play. She is invisible and voiceless. Bijaḷa’s attitude towards the women is framed by internalized patriarchal beliefs. Basavanna’s follower, Jagadeva also treats his wife as a mere object. He refuses to see her when she requests him to visit his ailing mother. So, in the royal kingdom as well as in the Sharan household women are treated with disrespect. It is only Basvanna’s wife who enjoys a better position. Their relationship
is bound together with love and understanding. The couple represents evolved humanity, thus giving the play its post-colonial texture.

The debate regarding the inter-caste marriage, which is a pivotal episode in the play, resonates with patriarchal conventions. Aware of the consequences of such a union, the bride’s mother, Lalita, hopes that the marriage would be stopped. However, her husband forbids her from saying a word. As per rules of patriarchy she is easily persuaded into silence. The elders of the community hesitate to give their blessings to Kalavati, daughter of Madhuvarsa, a Brahmin who is marrying Sheelavanta, the son of Haralayya, a cobbler. Basavanna, along with some sharanas, leads a goodwill mission and the marriage is solemnized.

The newly crowned Sovideva directs the soldiers to kill all those who were involved in the inter-caste marriage. Terror breaks loose as the soldiers carry out his orders:

**GUNDANNA.** It’s harrowing! A while ago – the King’s soldiers arrested Haralayya and took him to the city square. They also brought Madhuvarsa there – And then – then – as the city watched – they plucked their eyes out.

*(A reaction of horror from those present.)*

Plucked put their eyes with iron rods – bound them hand and foot and had them dragged through the streets – tied to elephant’s legs – *Ayyo!* How can I tell you? – Torn limbs along the lanes, torn entrails, flesh, bones – They died screaming!

**JAGADEVA.** And no one intervened? What about the *sharanas*?
GUNDANNA. They all watched, shut inside their houses. I can’t stop shivering. It was horrible. (90-91).

The riot that ensues contains the vengeance and senselessness of any contemporary upheaval.

For some characters, the Sharana community is more important than familial duties. Jagadeva leaves his father on his death bed and comes to Basavanna’s rescue when he is accused of theft. It is because of his efforts that Sovideva’s accusation falls flat. However, no one praises Jagadeva for his heroics, but they believe that Basavanna performed a miracle as the accounts were untouched. Basavanna’s sharp perception and confident manner lead him to achievements that seem magical. He explains to Jagadeva the dynamics of human nature by revealing the Allama’s tableaux:

... So I asked him: ‘What is this I? How do I recognize it?’ And the Allama replied: ‘I’ll show you. Watch.’ And right there, even as I was watching, his whole life poured out of his body.

(Pause.)

Like shadow puppets, row after endless row. His birth. Childhood.

... Everything. Not just the ordinary or the simple or the holy or the beautiful. Along with that, the grotesque and the evil. Filth beyond belief. As through a river full of spring blossoms also carried decaying flesh, rotten limbs, uprooted hair. Flood of pus – the stench of pus interwoven with fragrance. I couldn’t bear it...

(39-40)
The Allama’s vision is a picture of the modern and fragmented world where the beautiful and the unpleasant co-exist. “I” refers to each and every individual in whom we find these binary opposites; a reflection of the conscious and the unconscious. For Basavanna, the conscious is the rational way of leading life. He hopes to bring all the castes under one roof, but doesn’t use violent means. Jagadeva fails to keep his unconscious thoughts repressed and uses violence to find a solution. The Allama’s vision comes true when the marriage takes place and results in bloodshed.

It is ironic that the procession of 1,96,000 Sharanas does not accompany Basavanna when the king is incarcerated in the palace. With a small gathering he pays Bijjala a visit. It is a moment when the master-servant relationship is forgotten and both see themselves as helpless beings in search of god. He bids farewell to Bijjala with the following words: “Believe in him, I too shall go now to Kappadi of the meeting rivers in search of him. May Shiva bless you. Sharan” (86). Soon after, Jagadeva murders the king and ends his own life. Pained by the series of events, Basavanna “merged with the elements” (101). The play ends with Sovideva being made the new king of Kalyan, an image which reflects a bleak future. He gives orders to kill all the Sharanas and emerges as a tyrant:

Pursue them. Don’t let them escape. Men, women, children – cut them all down. Set the hounds after them. Search each wood, each bush. Burn the houses that give them shelter. Burn their books. Yes books! Tear them into shreds and consign them to the wells. Their voices shall be stilled for ever...
(Fire erupts in the background. Screams fill the skies. Manchanna Kramita and three other Brahmins enter, seat Sovideva on the throne, hold the ‘urn of thousand holes’ on his head. Water jets out in a thousand streams and cascades on Sovideva’s head.

He continues to talk through all this.

They sing Vedic chants.

Eulogies begin and drown everything else.) (101-02)

Julia Leslie is of the view that Sovideva’s final monologue has echoes of Indira Gandhi’s stance during the Emergency. At the same time, “Karnad intended this passage to remind his audience of current nationalist rhetoric” (Leslie 254), and to show how religious fundamentalists are trying to tear apart the very fabric of the nation.

Government records of the pre-independence era represent an important genre of colonial text. Similarly, government records, dispatches, orders, notifications etc. of the post-independence era may be treated as post-colonial texts. Karnad seems to be using the rhetoric of lament. The bloodshed, emergence of Sovideva as a ruler, the disintegration of Basavanna represent the confusions of loyalty, emotions and political relationships that mark the transformations of relations. Ritual is merged with politics to feed benign modes into the culture of intimidation. According to Aparna Dharwadker:

Throughout *Talé-Danda* we could substitute the category of caste, and the terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ for the terms ‘brahmin’ and ‘untouchable’, without modifying the the play’s thematic or its
interlocked movements of transgression and punishment. This possibility of substitution nullifies the argument that one kind of violence or fanaticism is godly while another is godless . . . (xiii)

H.S.Krishnamurthy opines that the play “elucidates the endemic spread of violence but it is not the violent outburst of just one caste against another. The entire ethos is enveloped in the large scale violence that seems to suit the strategy of power-brokers like Sovideva” (234).

_Talé-Daṇḍa_, in conclusion, reinforces the seriousness of intra-religious and inter-religious conflicts. Basavanna’s carefully thought out ideology crumbles before the insane reaction of the public. He is unable to protect his followers. However, his vachanas in Kannada lived on and served as an inspiration to later writers.

### The Fire and the Rain (1994)

Myth again forms an integral part of Karnad’s _The Fire and the Rain_, but this time his focus is on the degradation of the environment and also of mankind’s condition. The clash of desires within the self, chaos prevalent in the external world, fractured relationships dominated by destructive emotions like lust, incest, jealousy and rivalry are some of the themes explored by the dramatist. Archetypal situations connect the ancient and the modern. The plot works through a trilogy. Each part has its own protagonist and its own specific events. Nature is palpably alive. Karnad entwines the dark recesses of the forest with the dark recesses of the human mind in his attempts to decipher codes of ancient wisdom. Karnad uses dramatic devices like the prologue, flashback, epilogue and the mask.
Karnad takes up a lesser known myth from the Mahabharata which “occurs in Chapters 135-8 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto) . . .” (Karnad, Appendix 289). The myth revolves around Yavakri who offered penance to the gods in order to obtain universal knowledge. However, his way of acquiring knowledge was not considered proper by the gods for he wished to obtain it directly from them. He returned after ten years only to molest Raibhya’s daughter-in-law, Vishaka. Enraged by this sinful act Raibhya conjured a spell to bring forth a spirit to kill Yavakri:

Yavakari’s misdemeanor incensed Raibhya. 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. (Karnad, Appendix 292)

The only place where Yavakri could be safe was his father’s hermitage, but a blind man stopped Yavakri from crossing the threshold and he was killed. When Bharadwaja, Yavakri’s father learned of his death he cursed Raibhya who was killed by his own son, Paravasu, who mistook him for a wild animal. Paravasu asked his younger brother, Aravasu to perform the penitential rites as he had to complete the fire sacrifice. After obeying his brother’s orders he too returned to the site of the fire sacrifice, but to his shock Paravasu accused him of being a Brahmin killer and threw him out. Aravasu then prayed to the Sun God to restore the lives of Yavakri, Bharadwaja and Raibhya. His wish was granted and Yavakri was instructed to “pursue knowledge in the right manner” (Karnad, Appendix 293).
Karnad takes up this prevalent issue of the sublime leading to the criminal. The myth is alive, energetic and ever changing. The dramatist expands the myth with sub-plots, descriptions, and narratives of morality and immorality. Karnad’s prologue combines the mythical, the magical, and the elemental. He identifies drama as a pre-historic art form. When the Actor-Manager takes permission from Paravasu to stage a play, he explains that the fifth Veda gave birth to drama. Since knowledge of the Vedas was restricted only to the upper strata of the society, Brahma combined the four Vedas and gave birth to the fifth Veda or *Natya Veda*:

> It consists of four elements – *pathya* (text including the art of recitation and rendition in performance) taken from the *Rig Veda*, *gita* (songs, including instrumental music) from the *Sama Veda*, *abhinaya* (acting, the technique of expressing the poetic meaning of the text and communicating it to the spectator) from the *Yajur Veda*, and *rasa* (aesthetic experience) from the *Atharva Veda*. (Tripathi, *Theatres* 317-318)

The fifth Veda was accessible to the lower caste as well – the shudras. It was then passed on to Bharata, who “with the help of his hundred sons and some nymphs specially created by Brahma for the purpose, staged the first play” (Karnad, Appendix 299). The Actor-Manager tries to convince Paravasu that only by staging a play they would be able to appease Indra and end the drought. The troupe consists of only three actors. However, the musicians are women who play wind instruments and a drum.

The play moves in flashback and gives an account of the series of events that took place. Unlike the myth in the *Mahabharata*, Karnad makes some minor changes.
He introduces a new character, Nittilai, who is Arvasu's (Kamad changes the spelling) love interest. However, unforeseen circumstances shatter their dream of getting married and Nittilai is forced to marry a man of her tribe. Secondly, Yavakri and Vishaka are not mere strangers, but lovers and Paravasu's killing of Raibhya becomes a deliberate act of vengeance. Paravasu says: "He deserved to die. He killed Yavakri to disturb me in the last stages of the sacrifice. I had to attend to him before he went any further" (142). Finally, at the end of the play Arvasu requests Indra to grant the Brahma Rakshasa its freedom instead of restoring the lives of his near and dear ones.

By setting the play in the forest, Kamad makes a return to nature and brings forth the important role of forests. An eco-critical reading of the play suggests how forests are a life-saving force and at the same time it portrays its richness and diversity in terms of the inhabitants' beliefs, customs and values. Kamad associates the cloistered, secretive Brahmin with the dark depths of the forest and the tribe of hunters with the open grounds. Nittilai playfully comments: "You know, their fire sacrifices are conducted in covered enclosures. They mortify themselves in the dark of the jungle. Even their gods appear so secretly. Why? What are they afraid of? Look at my people. Everything is done in public view there" (116). The dark depths symbolize narrow-mindedness whereas the shades of the trees and open grounds indicate tolerance.

'Eco-criticism' or 'green theory' is concerned with the relationship between "literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities" ("Ecocriticism" 81). The term is said to have been coined by William Rueckert in an essay titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. Cheryll
Glotfelty and Harold Fromm later included the landmark essay in The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996). The purpose of revisiting nature from an eco-centric point of view is not to bring back the romantic ideals of the nineteenth century, but to create awareness in the post-colonial era of the dangers the environment is facing. Hans Bertens in Literary Theory: The Basics writes:

[Eco criticism] examines representations of landscapes and of nature in its original state: 'the landscape of pastoral, for instance, and the wilderness, . . . is often represented as a place with a special significance, a place of healing and redemption, or evil and danger where the individual’s moral resolve is severely tested. (200-01)

The pastoral setting, the enchanted woods and the wilderness have always stirred the imagination of the writers. In the nineteenth century, particularly, it was seen as a place of respite from the materialistic and fragmented world. The transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, saw nature as a way of life and even made the woods his home. He once declared: “From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind” (610). The “forest and wilderness” become the home of Karnad’s characters in The Fire and the Rain. The people look forward to a heavy downpour which has eluded them for ten years. The opening lines set the tone of the play: “It has not rained adequately for nearly ten years. Drought grips the land and a seven year long fire sacrifice (yajña) is held to propitiate Indra, the god of rains” (105).

Arvasu who is now a criminal in the eyes of the public, joins an acting troupe to stage a play in order to appease the gods, for a fire sacrifice may not be enough.
Though the priests are reluctant to let Arvasu enter the altar, Paravasu surprisingly gives him permission. Like *Hamlet*, Karnad employs the play-within-a-play technique and incorporates the myth of Indra and Vritra. According to the version in the *Mahabharata*:

. . . Indra is anxious that Vishwarupa (also called Trishiras, the three-headed one), son of Tvastri, may dislodge him from his throne. He therefore destroys Vishwarupa treacherously. Tvastri then gives birth to another son, Vritra, by a female demon, and tells him: ‘Kill Indra’. Indra, unable to overcome the new enemy, again has to resort to ignominious trickery to survive. Having killed Vritra, he suffers from the guilt of Brahminicide.

The myth can be seen as expressing a deep anxiety which informs the whole of Indian mythology, the fear of brother destroying brother . . . (Karnad, Appendix 296)

Karnad further explains:

The tale of Arvasu and Paravasu fascinated me as an unusual variant of this Indian obsession with fratricide and it seemed logical too that Yavakri should be their cousin, though the Mahabharata does not explicitly say so. I cannot remember when I decided to incorporate the Indra-Vritra legend in my plot, but years later, while re-reading the original version, I was astonished to find . . . that the whole story took place on the banks of a river in which Indra had bathed to cleanse
himself of the sin of killing Vritra! One of the fascinating aspects of dealing with myths is their self-reflexivity. A myth seems complete in itself and yet when examined in detail, contains subconscious signals which lead you on to another myth which in turn will act as a conduit to a third one while illuminating the one you started. (Appendix 296-97)

The Actor-Manager plays the role of Indra in the play and gives the mask of Vritra to Arvasu. He warns him to “keep a tight control over it, otherwise it’ll try to take over” (165). Arvasu, however, fails to exercise control over the mask and he is possessed by it. Jiwan Pani explains: “When the wearer totally identifies with the mask, its magic power seizes him and what he performs is more or less a ritual, sometimes classed as possession. Here the mask serves the purpose of an instrument to re-enact some experimental experience by projecting and reflecting supernatural powers” (290).

Chaos ensues as the villagers enter the pavilion:

BRAHMINS. It’s the tribals – the savages – they’re desecrating the sacrifice – Oh God! This is madness. The doomsday – they are eating and drinking the food kept for the gods. They are leveling the sacrifice to the ground.

KING. Chief Priest! Sir! What shall we do?

(Parvasu has been watching the chaos, without so much as moving a muscle. He gets up and without a word calmly walks into the blazing enclosure . . . ) (171)
The play within the play has a three dimensional audience. The first audience consists of the priests and other holy men involved in the sacrifice and the victims of the drought who wait for the rain. The second audience is the actual audience who watch the play. The third space is occupied by the writer who aligns the medieval and the contemporary. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker observes: "The metatheatrical commentary on the actor’s craft in the play thus becomes an occasion for revisiting, and celebrating, the myth of the divine origins of theatre" (xix).

In *The Fire and the Rain*, the question of social justice towards the environment echoes from the jungle which has long been a victim of “inflated egos” of learned men who have ignored the question of humanity. The moral resolve of each and every character in the play is tested, but except for Arvasu and Nittilai, all the others fail. Revenge becomes the most prominent theme as all the male characters in the play, except Arvasu, believe in bloodshed. Though it does not contain the basic elements of a revenge tragedy, it nevertheless has a strong element of vengeance that encompasses the whole play. The proximity to nature brings out the barbaric element. Nature is at its most savage and brews venom in characters who dwell in the forest. Yavakri wishes to gain universal knowledge from the gods directly not because he wishes to put it to good use, but to be “vicious, destructive" (131). When Vishaka begs Yavakri to returns to his father’s hermitage he reveals the shocking truth behind his return. Humiliated because his father was not given the respect he deserved, he returns after ten years filled with the same hatred and venom, to get even with Raibhya and Paravasu.

The two main women characters in the play, Vishaka and Nittilai, become a victims of patriarchal domination. Vishaka loved Yavakri but married Paravasu. Her
father had no faith in her judgement. She complied with his wishes as she knew of no other way. At a later stage she confessed her helplessness to Yavakri:

YAVAKRI. Your father must have felt relieved that I went away.

Paravasu was a better match. I was only his miserable cousin.

VISHAKA. Yes, Father was happy. I was married off to Paravasu. I didn’t want to, but that didn’t matter . . . (122)

Marriage plunged her into “a kind of bliss I didn’t know existed. It was heaven – here and now – at the tip of my senses” (123). Drowned in the sensual world she lost her touch with reality until Paravasu abandoned domestic bliss for the masculine task of the fire sacrifice:

But the question of happiness receded into the background. He used my body and his own body, like an experimenter, an explorer. As instruments in a search. Search of what? I never knew. But I knew he knew. Nothing was too shameful, too degrading, even too painful. Shame died in me. And I yielded. I let my body be turned inside out as he did his own. I had a sense he was leading me to something. Mystical? Spiritual? We never talked. Only the sense pervaded the air. You’re still lost in the fragrance of the jack-fruit, Yavakri. I have known what it is to grow heavy, burst open, drip and rot, to fill the world with one’s innards. Then one day he received the invitation from the King. To be the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice. And he left . . . (123)
Karnad delineates Vishaka’s heightened consciousness regarding the role as a woman in a male-dominated society in the above speech. The men in her life considered her senseless and unreliable. Her father-in-law sexually abused her in his son’s absence. Vishaka suffered in silence as she feared ostracization. Low self-esteem and insecurity forced her to remain voiceless. The return of Yavakri instills confidence in her and she breaks through the shackles of patriarchy: “I was so happy this morning. You were so good. So warm. I wanted to envelope you in everything I could give. It was more as a mother I offered my breasts to you” (132). Karnad treats Vishaka’s sexual encounter as an act of emancipation. Empowered with initiative, she empties Yavakri’s kamandalu (water pot) when she discovered he betrayed her for the sake of ambition. She gives up her wordless compliance and tells her husband: “I shouldn’t ask. I should be silent. And you, in any case, will be silent. My silence again followed by yours. Silences endlessly repeated. Perhaps that too will describe a whole universe. But I am sick of silence” (141).

Nittilai is forbidden to marry a man of her choice. She is the only character in the play who is in sync with nature. She is a beautiful and virtuous tribal girl. She lives by nature and natural wisdom. In contrast to Vishaka, she is moral and pious. Andhaka, the old man with his treasure trove of historical memory warns her: “You two are brave. It’s one thing to frolic together as children. But you’re not children any longer. You’re old enough to know that the world can be cruel and ruthless” (112). Being a hunter, she knows every nook and corner of the jungle and can sense any kind of danger. She understands that it is not violence but a peaceful environment that the world needs today. She is an evolved character and is more intelligent than the others. She is deeply concerned about the environment and the shortage of essential resources.
that has sent people fleeing to the city. Aware of the difficulties the inhabitants are facing, Nittilai questions Yavakri’s new-found knowledge:

My point is since Lord Indra appeared to Yavakri and Indra is their God of Rains, why didn’t Yavakri ask for a couple of good showers? You should see the region around our village. Parched. Every morning, women with babes on their hips, shrunken children, shrivelled old men and women gather in front of my father’s house – for the gruel he distributes. No young people. They have all disappeared! And father says all the land needs is a couple of heavy down pours. That’ll revive the earth. Not too much to ask of a god, is it?” (116-17).

Nittilai does not forget her commitment to Arvasu and flees from her village when she comes to know of his helplessness. She selflessly nurses Arvasu back to health after he was beaten up by the people from her village. The Actor-Manager praises her:

I don’t know what you are to her. Not that I want to know. Any fool can see you two belong to different worlds. Anything’s possible in these troubled times. So I won’t comment. 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 has been nursing you. (156)

The inter-caste marriage that they desire does not work out. In the end she becomes a victim of honour killing. The play concludes with the rain falling on Nittila’s body.
Arvasu’s act of generosity in releasing the Brahma Rakshasa cleanses the world of evil and the rain comes pelting down. Aravasu attributes this cleansing to Nittilai in the Epilogue:

INDRA. Arvasu, have you decided?
ARVASU. Indra—
INDRA. Yes—
ARVASU. Grant this Brahma Rakshasa his release. Let him go.
INDRA. You’re sure you want that?
ARVASU. Nittilai would have wanted it so.
INDRA. Well then, so be it! (176)

In the end, humanity triumphs in the form of rain. It is Arvasu and Nittila’s purity which results in the rejuvenation of the lands:

(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.) (176)

The condition of Nittilai and Vishaka can be looked upon from an ‘ecofeminist’ perspective where a parallel can be drawn between the oppression of women and the arid land. Ecofeminism is an academic movement which combines environmentalism and feminism. The term was coined by the French feminist
Francoise d’Eaubonne and it spread its roots through pioneering works of Susan Griffin’s *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside*, Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* and Rosemary Ruether’s *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. Ecofeminists believe that women are more connected to nature and are in a better position to understand and interact with it. They look at the domination and degradation of nature similar to their own subjugation. Ecofeminists also claim that if women are treated as equals, it would result in environmental improvement. However, this is not the case with Nittilai and Vishaka.

The play is marked by underlying tensions and conflicts that characterize change. The crumbling of the patriarchy is visible in the evil distortions of Raibhya’s character. He is filled with hatred for his son, Paravasu when he is appointed Chief Priest. Instead of passing on his mantle to him he wrecks vengeance on Vishaka. Yavakri, with his achievement of a decade of meditation, resents being ignored by the King and harbours a grudge about Paravasu’s appointment. He, too, tricks and seduces Vishaka. Thus he disproves his own claim of being knowledgeable and enlightened. Redemption comes through the sacrifice of their love by Arvasu and Nittilai. The trials and traumas of the characters of this medieval scenario point to the chaos in the contemporary human jungle. For Kamad the solution lies in Raibhya’s symbolic statement: “It’s not the wild beasts one has to watch out for – it’s the human beings” (138).

Rama Nair analyses the two key words in the title: “‘Fire’ “is the dominant metaphor which engulfs the dramatic action of the play. The fire of passion, lust, revenge and betrayal consume both good and evil” (243). ‘Rain’ “is symbolic not only of regeneration but also of redemption” (245). He concludes:
... 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. ... It enables one to regain an integrated perception of life, transmuting into practical reality the essential principle of Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram: Truth as eternally Beautiful! (Nair 249)

Commenting on Nittilai’s character, P. Jayalakshmi writes: “Nittilai being part of nature and belonging to the earth is earthy, is hardened by marginalization and oppression but that is not the case with Vishaka” (261). The final image of her water pot covered with cobwebs is symbolic of her condition. Just like the parched land, her life too is devoid of happiness and she perhaps dies a silent death.

The play may be considered a post modernist text that is concerned with the fragmentation of human identities. The equilibrium of the world is destroyed. A persistent drought converts the world into a wasteland. Nature, once all powerful, cannot replenish its lost potential and its harmonies. The playwright merges with Indra and enters his own play and communicates with his own characters. Expression of human values like love, dedication and integrity provide a healing touch and the rain comes pouring down filling the world with earthy fragrances.
Kamad’s trilogy of historical plays culminates with *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997). Though not written in a chronological order, his final historical play may well be placed after *Tughlaq*, while *Tale-Danda* precedes both. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* was earlier written as a radio play and was broadcast by the BBC to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Indian Independence. It was then rewritten for the stage and captured the essence of India’s colonial era and the battle for independence.

As the title suggests the focus is on certain dreams that the Tiger of Mysore had and the record of which he kept in a secret diary. The combination of a dream play and history gives a unique account of a ruler who fought four wars to free his nation from the shackles of the British. Karnad, through the play, redeems Tipu Sultan’s dignity as an individual and as a ruler. In his own words: “He was a thinker and a visionary, who represented the best of Karnataka. Unfortunately he has been misunderstood by the people of his own country and a lot of untruths were spread about him. . . . For me, he is the greatest Kannadiga” (“Greatest”). These untruths were spread by the British who came up with their own “version of history” (182), as pointed out by Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kirmani to Colonel Colin Mackenzie. At the very opening of the play Karnad points out that Mackenzie is an “Oriental Scholar” (180) and, is sympathetic to Indian causes and modes. Kirmani, who was Tipu Sultan’s courtier, is Karnad’s mouthpiece as he tries to reconstruct Tipu’s image. He does this by referring to Tipu’s dream register. In the Sultan’s own words: “In this register are recorded the dreams I have had and am having” (191). The written record facilitates multiple interpretations and highlights the Sultan’s dilemma regarding his own patriotism and also his admiration for the white man’s values. He tells the delegation:
But no self-indulgence. No slacking. This is not a picnic. Please bear that in mind. I’m told the city of Paris enchants people like a woman, and they forget themselves in its embrace. Whenever you feel lazy or despondent, think of the John Company – how they came to this country, poor, cringing, and what they have become in a mere fifty years. They threaten us today. It’s all because of their passion for trade.

Kamad uses the flashback technique, beginning with the Sultan’s death in the last Anglo-Mysore war and ending with his last dream in which he sees victory against the British. Kirmani and Mackenzie play the role of the chorus and comment on the incidents that finally lead to Tipu’s fall during the siege of Seringapatam. They comment on each episode as the play keeps oscillating between the past and present. Karnad takes into account four dreams with the intention of delineating not just the character of a ruler, but also the man without the crown. Kate Brittlebank points out that the register contains thirty-seven dreams and other items described as ‘memoranda’. With the help of these dreams he “searched for meaning and guidance” (Brittlebank 167), hoping to deal with the difficulties that he faced during the final years of his reign.

Faith in dreams as supernatural messages is an old Indian tradition. They probe the hidden recesses of the mind. They are a medium for the expression of the unconscious that appears in a disguised form. According to Leon Tyson in *Critical Theory Today*:
During sleep, the unconscious is free to express itself, and it does so in our dreams. However, even in our dreams there is some censorship, some protection against the frightening insights into our expressed experiences and emotions, and that protection takes the form of dream distortion. The “message” our unconscious expresses in our dreams, which is the dream’s underlying meaning, or latent content, is altered so that we don’t readily recognize it through processes called displacement and condensation. (18)

The dreams selected by Karnad and the Sultan’s own interpretations are fine examples of how a dream’s latent content gives way to its manifest content through Freudian concepts of ‘displacement’ and ‘condensation’. In the last dream he sees his four trusted men, Mir Sadiq, Nadeem Khan, Poornaiya and Qamaruddin greeting him with the news of victory. In reality they betray him which results in his destruction:

KIRMANI. That was Tipu’s last dream.

That afternoon he was killed in battle.

Mir Sadiq’s conduct of the war was so openly treacherous that his own troops lynched him. Nadeem Khan, the Qilledar, had ordered a pay parade for his troops at the very moment of British assault, thus taking them away from the battlefront. Poornaiya slipped with alacrity into the post of Prime Minister under the new regime. Qamaruddin was by his side. The battle of Seringapatam was lost before it had begun. (238)
So, defeat is disguised in the form of triumph, and treachery is masked as loyalty. This shows that dreams may be capricious and they sometimes reverse the truth.

Freudian Psychoanalysis also provided the basis for the Trauma Theory which gained momentum in the 1990s. The theory takes into account psychological, moral, ethical and personal questions regarding traumatic experiences and how they figure in personal, public and historic memory. Kirmani voices his trauma when he says: “There’s no healing. True, the blood and tears dried up a long time ago. But the wound remains fresh” (181).

In another dream Tipu sees his dead father without limbs. He sees this vision after his defeat in the third Anglo-Mysore war. As a result, he is forced to give up half his kingdom and hand over two of his sons as hostages, who later become prisoners of war. In his father Tipu sees himself helpless without his sons and half of his kingdom, compounded with the loss of his beloved wife Ruqayya Bano, one of the few women characters in the play. The image of women also appears in two of his dreams. In the first dream, while the Sultan and Poornaiya inspect a dilapidated temple, two of the idols come to life:

WOMAN. Your majesty, we are living women. The rest of us, these men here, are merely images. We have been here for many centuries now, praying to God and seeking our salvation.

TIPU. Good. I am sorry then we’ve disturbed you. Do you need any help?

WOMAN. None at all except for total isolation. (193)
Tipu orders Poornaiya to have the temple walls repaired. He sees himself as a protector of different communities and different faiths. This dream brings out Tipu’s secular attitude which has always been questioned. He was considered a bigot, a ruler who abandoned other religious groups. The claims are however untrue, and have been used by the British to tarnish his image, as he posed a threat to them. Like Tipu Sultan, Tughlaq too believed in secularism. However, while the Sultan’s battle was against the British, Tughlaq’s was against his own people which resulted in chasms within the kingdom. Tipu too fails in this regard as we find his loyal men and the Maratha, Hari Pant Phadke, forming an alliance with the British.

Karnad is sensitive to the fact that women, even though silenced and subjugated, are keen observers. The idol breaks her centuries-old silence and asks for isolation as she fears vandalism and molestation. Through the idol’s speech Karnad comments on contemporary incidents which he could foresee. For instance, it brings to mind the Nirbhaya rape case which once again questioned the safety of women in the country. In December 2012, a twenty-three year old woman, along with a male escort, was brutally assaulted by a group of men on a bus. She was gravely injured and died thirteen days after the incident. The incident blasted the common notion that women should use public transport and not go out alone at night.

In the second dream he meets a woman dressed as a Maratha:

TIPU. On the sixth day of the Khusrawi month in the year of Busd, as I was preparing for a night attack on the Maratha armies of Hari Pant Phadke at Shahnur near Devigri, I had a dream.

(A young man, turbaned like a Maratha, enters.)
A handsome young man, fair-skinned and light-eyed, approached me and I said: ‘Who are you, young man? Why don’t you speak?’

When the man reveals his tresses and opens his blouse, Tipu concludes that the Marathas would “prove to be women” (204). The Marathas were puppets in the hands of the British and together with the Nizam, were responsible for Tipu’s downfall. The dream reveals Tipu Sultan’s anxiety about the enemy. The warrior King desperately wants to understand the Maratha’s strategies. In his dream he visualizes the Marathas as women and concludes that they are naive and short-sighted.

Despite his hatred for the colonisers, he admires the west for its achievements and wants his nation to follow the same path: “That’s what makes Europe so wonderful – it’s full of ideas – inventions – all kinds of machines – bursting with energy. Why don’t we in our country think like them?” (199). He could foresee India as a trading hub, with its branches all over the world. His vision dismantles the notion of the east as uncivilised in the eyes of the British. So what was known as the white man’s burden was actually the native’s burden. He wonders what makes his adversary so ruthless and unstoppable and wishes to see the same passion in his people.

They believe in the destiny of their race. Why can’t we? . . . the English fight for something called England. What is it? It’s not a religion that sustains them, nor a land that feeds them. They wouldn’t be here if it did. It’s just a dream, for which they are willing to kill and die. Children of England. They have conquered our land, plundered its riches. And now they’ve started taking away our children . . . (226)
He rightly earns the title of the ‘Tiger of Mysore’ for his bravery and his fearlessness and leaves no stone unturned in his efforts to expel the British from his land. William Blake’s “The Tiger” captures the true spirit of this ruler whose dream was to vanquish the coloniser:

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? (71)

For the British, the Sultan was indeed a “fearful symmetry” who could only be conquered through betrayal by his own people. The ‘tiger’ becomes an important symbol that permeates throughout the play. From his throne and possessions to the tiger-marked uniforms of his soldiers, it became symbolic of the fearlessness and the courage with which he faced the British. Apart from his fondness for keeping tigers as pets he was fascinated by a mechanical tiger especially made for him which Kamad mentions in the play. The Victoria and Albert Museum gives the following description of the toy:

The almost life-size wooden automaton consists of a tiger mauling a prostrate figure in European clothes. An organ is concealed inside the tiger’s body and when a handle at the side is turned, the organ can be played and the man’s arm simultaneously lifts up and down.
Intermittent noises are supposed to imitate the wails of the dying man. ("Tippoo’s Tiger")

This is how Tipu Sultan wanted to see his enemies suffer. The toy presents a perfect picture of the Sultan who was merciless towards his enemies whenever they posed a threat to him.

In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Tipu is portrayed in multiple roles and not just as a ruler. There is an endless chain of signifiers where one signifier leads to another – a Sultan, a warrior, a loving husband, a friend and a father. When his sons have to be handed over as hostages to the British, he requests Ghulam Ali to go with them.

TIPU. . . . It’s my sons I have to worry about now. Poornaiya, send for the Chief Astrologer of the Chennapatna temple. Ask him to study the stars and set the most auspicious moment for the departure of my sons. Ghulam Ali Khan, will you accompany your nephews? I don’t want my babies to feel their family abandoned them totally – although that is what it amounts to finally.

GHILAM ALI. I shall spend every moment with them until they are reunited with you.

TIPU (getting excited). Mir Sadiq, tell the British – tell them my sons must be received properly. With full honours. They are princes. There are to be no lapses. Not the smallest – *(Almost angry)* I shall not tolerate it.

MIR SADIQ. Of course, Your Majesty.
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TIPU. And we’ll send them as heroes, symbols of the glory of their land. In full splendor. A splendor that’ll put the foreigners to shame – and cover up my own sense of shame. (218)

Tipu bravely faces his own downfall. He embodies the eternal helplessness of man against forces beyond his control. One of the most perceptive monarchs in history, he dreamt of creating a new world. Though he did not succeed in this venture, he could foresee the future: “The danger is: they’ll teach my children their language, English. The language in which it is possible to think of children as hostages. All I can try to do is agree to their conditions and conclude the treaty in a hurry – before my children have learnt to think in those terms” (217). As per the prediction of the Sultan, British imperialism used language as a tool of colonisation.

According to Aparna Dharwadker:

. . . Tipu Sultan stands apart in Karnad’s oeuvre because as a play about colonialism it has to grapple with the inescapable psychodrama of East vs. West, Europe vs. the non-European other, white vs. non-white, and colonizer vs. colonized. . . . Karnad interlineates ‘textualized’ history with legend, lore, and memory because all these modes are germane to the story of Tipu. (xxiv)

Karnad with finesse interweaves “dream and reality without really defining the boundaries between the two. The real glides into the dream world and back so seamlessly that in the closing scene, you almost believe that Tipu has won the Fourth War of Mysore until the scene shifts back to Kirmani saying that was Tipu’s last
Kamad uses Hindi-Urdu words to retain its Indian flavour. They are used “to suit the Indian environment . . . to make the meaning more clear” (210). This is seen in the first act when the British soldiers look for Tipu Sultan’s body:

WILKS. Ask the one huddled in the corner of the group. We haven’t tried him.

SOLDIER 2. Arre suno – Tum naheen – Han! Tum! (You there! Not you – Yes, you!)

ZAFER. Jee Huzoor.

SOLDIER 2. Yehan aao. (Come here.)

ZAFER. Jee.

SOLDIER 2. Naam kya hai? (Name?)

ZAFER. Zafer.

SOLDIER 2. Yeh murdah. Kya yeh tumhare Sultan ka hai? (This corpse. Is this your Sultan’s?) (184)

Kamad pays tribute to a true patriot who gave his life for his country, but was unfortunately not given his due. He attempts to reinstate Tipu Sultan in his true position. He invests Tipu with a keen intuition that translates itself into his dreams. The dreams provide Kamad with a flexibility that permits him to comment on contemporary issues, alongside historical ones. Tipu Sultan’s dreams incorporated and prophesied the predicament of the contemporary world where globalization has erased boundaries and nationalism has given way to global culture. However, contemporary man continues to face the tussle between human values and worldly achievement. Karnad weaves together dream, memory and interpretation in a
sequence that is both poetic and eloquent. Tipu emerges as a victim of marginalization.

He was marginalized by history, by the British and by destiny:

Postscript. When India became independent in 1947, the families of the maharajas who had bowed and scraped before the British masters were granted sumptuous privy purses by the Government of India while the descendants of Tipu Sultan were left to rot in the slums of Calcutta. (239).

Thus, through The Dreams of Tipu Sultan Karnad endeavours to show how Tipu wished to create an independent nation in which people could live with self-respect and their heads held high. He left behind a legacy which many have either forgotten or ignored. Karnad brilliantly explores a historical context through a subjective consciousness. He uses Tipu’s dreams to humanize him and to invoke the sympathy of the readers.
Works Cited


Chapter V

FAITH, MORALITY AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A Study of Two Monologues: Flowers/Broken Images and Wedding Album
Flowers (2004)

After presenting an array of characters on stage and dealing with a variety of themes, Karnad explores the genre of monologue which is more challenging as, when staged, only a single character has to hold the attention of the audience for a defined period of time. A monologue, as M.H. Abrams defines it, “is a lengthy speech by a single person” (80). Given that just one actor participates in the narrative, monologues can be placed in the category of a ‘monodrama’. In both the monologues, Flowers and Broken Images (2004) the character lays bare his or her soul through a series of events coupled with flowing speech.

In Flowers, Karnad deals with the philosophy of religion and tries to answer questions pertaining to God, justice and mercy. The old questions are cast in contemporary modes as the protagonist discovers flaws in ancient wisdom and raises new debates regarding faith and morality. He also explores the conflicts of love and lust, idealisation and profanity, power and morality. Issues like women’s position in society, gender roles, social and family structures, religious and princely hierarchies are also discussed.

The plot revolves around a married priest who dutifully worships the linga, but stumbles when he falls madly in love with a courtesan. The monologue is based on a folktale from the Chitradurga region in Karnataka, which was used by the Kannada writer T.R. Subbanna in his 1952 novel Hamasageethe (Swan Song). Subbanna’s protagonist is a temple priest who falls in love with a courtesan. Unable to control his desire, he visits her every evening with the prayer offerings. This continues till the village chieftain discovers a strand of hair in the prasada. The priest, Veeranna, lies that the hair belongs to the god and accepts the chieftain’s challenge to prove his claim. After a day’s meditation, Veeranna is surprised to find the shivalinga
with long hair. The *linga* starts bleeding when he breaks a strand to check whether the hair is real. Filled with guilt, Veeranna beheads himself as an act of retribution. Like Veeranna, the priest in the play finds himself in a dilemma when the god forgives his immoral act. After the whole village witnesses “waves and waves of jet black hair” (258) sprouting out of the *linga*, he is made the state saint, “to be prized, protected and shown off to visiting envoys” (259). Unable to understand the way his god governs right and wrong, he commits suicide.

The monologue is meditative as well as expansive. Unable to come terms with his new-found sainthood, the priest wants to die. Well-versed in astrology, he predicts his own impending death:

In a few moments from now, Scorpio will start creeping into the water from the south-eastern corner of the temple tank. There is a hollow there in the third step under the water, large enough to hold an unhusked coconut. And I know that on this day of the year at this precise moment – and I can tell the precise moment because Scorpio is stretched out in the eastern sky in all his magnificent glory with the lowest point of his curving tail just about to take off from the horizon – at this precise moment his reflection will enter the water at the exact point under which the hollow lies. (243)

So immense is his knowledge that he can look beyond his own life, into infinity: “And looking up at the constellation from this top step of the tank, even with my back to the temple, I could tell you what star is perched on the brass tip of its pinnacle. For I know every nook and cranny in these grounds. I know where every star will be as the
skies revolve through the year” (243). The action of the play takes place in his mind and descends before the audience through memories, predictions, associative thinking, dilemmas, anxieties, regrets and fear psychosis. His recapitulation embodies the universal experience of sin and retribution. Whereas an ordinary man would have reveled in the sainthood, the priest thinks of it as a burden. The values of loyalty, commitment and morality do not lose their validity even though he searches all realms of knowledge and he prepares for the final penance:

Scorpio has crawled out of the recess in the third step under water. His reflection is floating towards me. The hollow is empty. As a boy I used to shove my head into the hollow to test how long I could hold my breath. I shall do so again now, but not to test my lungs. I shall seek in the narrow confines of that hollow the answers that God has denied me. (260)

In Hinduism, the linga is a symbol of Lord Shiva and is believed to represent the male generative power. There have been debates on the origin of the linga. According to one of the myths, when Shiva tore off his linga it “extended deeper into the cosmic waters than Vishnu could dive and higher into the cosmos than Brahma could soar” (Williams 200). In Flowers the priest treats the linga as an independent living entity, “talking to it, singing to it, even discussing recent political developments, and most of all decorating it with flowers” (243-44). The chieftain admires the priest’s skill of inventing new ways of adorning the linga everyday, and he is well-known in the village for his devotion to the job. He explains the rituals that are performed on a daily basis:
I have a dip in the tank and, and in the wet *dhoti*, sit down in the sanctum surrounded by baskets of flowers. Everything else then recedes into hazy, scarcely-felt distance and for an hour there is only the *linga* and me. And the conversation conducted through flowers – *malligai, sevanti, chendu hoovu, sampigai* and *kanakambara*. (244)

Flowers form an important part of Hindu worship. Daily, fresh and specific flowers are offered to a Hindu deity as it is seen as an act to acquire the deity’s blessings and to ward off negative energies. For the priest this is more than a job. The experience is euphoric and rather surreal. The giant lingam, the heavy fragrance of the flowers and the incense conjure a picture of romance that is completed with the entry of the courtesan, Ranganayaki. ‘Ranga’ in Kannada means ‘colour’ and ‘nayaki’ means ‘performer’.

After falling in love with Ranganayaki at first sight, the priest on her request decides to show his skills on her bare body which becomes a daily practice just like the *pooja* rituals. Courtesans have a long history in Indian culture. They were independent women who entertained kings and aristocrats and in return they enjoyed royal patronage. Though educated and skilled in various arts, such as singing and dancing, courtesans were looked down upon and were considered outcasts. Lata Singh writes that “a courtesan has accumulated over time moralistic, value loaded connotations; in the popular mindset it was equated to a whore, forcing these women performers into silence” (1677). For the priest it was an all new experience as he found her body offering “a whole new world of patterns” (250), something which the *linga* lacked. He says:
I pitied it, felt exasperated at its unimaginative contours. Why did its shape have to be so bland and unindented that one had to balance garlands precariously on it and improvise superfluous knots to hide some ungainly strings? Why didn’t the Lord offer a form which inflamed invention like Ranga did? (250)

Through this statement Karnad compares the male and female forms. The deity represents the male form which the priest found “bland” as compared to Ranga’s well-kept body with which he plays lustfully.

Adorning the naked body with garlands becomes akin to lovemaking as both take pleasure in the act. Through Ranganayki the priest satisfies his sexual needs, something he is not able to do when at home with his wife: “On the days I wanted her, I would give her a look she had come to recognize and late at night when everyone was fast asleep, she would crawl up to my room for a furtive scuffle in bed which demanded minimum of uncovering” (248). In Naga Mandala, Rani’s husband also has an affair with a courtesan, but unlike the priest, Appanna mistreats his wife and subjects her to public humiliation. Like Rani, the priest’s wife is aware of the affair, but she does not complain even once and quietly continues to serve him:

She never ate before me. As soon as she heard me splashing in the tank, she would start heating up the food. While I ate, she stood rigid by the door, lanky and impassive, concerned but still. She never once asked me about Ranganayaki. . . . But I was distressed at the pain I was causing my wife. I loved her. I knew I had made her a target of vicious
gossip. . . . Communication in the house was reduced to fragments and we stopped even looking at each other. But there was nothing I could do. (251)

By portraying stereotypes, Karnad once again comments on the position of women in the Indian society. On the one hand is the priest's wife who endures everything silently, and on the other is Ranganayaki who is merely an object of pleasure for men. Unlike the queen in Bali or Padmini in Hayavadana, his wife suppresses her desires and performs the duties that are expected of her. Through the love triangle of the priest, his wife and the courtesan, Karnad comments on the patriarchal perspectives on marriage and love liaisons. The priest's wife is voiceless, constant and supportive. That she can leave her husband does not occur to her, as according to Hindu custom a wife leaves her husband's house only when he dies. Marriage is an eternal commitment. The courtesan, however, is not under any such bondage. Her presence, unlike the wife's, is not valued. She is allowed, by the dramatist, to disappear.

The only moment of intimacy between the priest and his wife is seen when they wait for the chieftain in the temple. After a long wait he performs the pooja and gives a flower to his wife:

The formality was over. I put a flower in my wife's outstretched hand. As she straightened to tuck it in the knot of her hair, she looked directly into my eyes. And held the look. My wife and I were there, just the two of us, alone, as we could never be at home. At a time and in a place where nobody could possibly surprise us. And for once, her infinite self-control had slipped and she was baring her desire as
brazenly as though she had let her *pallu* drop from her bosom to expose her blouse and let it hang unretrieved. . . . I could feel my insides reaching out to her and was taken aback that I had forgotten that I could want her. The *linga* sat there looking at us and I snarled silently at it, ‘Isn’t it funny? I am going to defile your sanctum and it has to be with my lawful wife, for Ranganayaki would never be allowed to step in here. (253-54)

Here Karnad comments on the marginalisation of courtesans. Considered to be morally degraded, they are not even allowed to enter a religious shrine. The priest makes it clear that had he the authority he would have made love to Ranganayaki inside the temple. He prefers to be in her company and like the everyday *pooja* he performs, he sees his visits as a ritual. Ranganayki offers a sharp contrast to the priest’s wife whose body has been damaged by child bearing and domestic labour. This is the reason he chooses to be with Ranga instead. The scene even recalls the illicit union between the Queen and the Mahout in a ruined temple in *Bali*.

His relationship with Ranganayaki comes to an end when the chieftain discovers her hair in a flower. Life comes full circle when he returns with the same flowers to its rightful place, the *linga*. Here he flouts the rule of offering fresh flowers to the deity and ends up using “the leavings, polluted discards” (256). Asked to prove that “God had long hair” (256) the priest goes into isolation for twelve days and prays as an act of penance. The priest’s twelve-day penance reaps rewards in the form of a *linga* with long hair. Hair is a central metaphor in the play. Ranga’s hair defiles the *prasada*. The priest offers his wife a flower for her hair when they sit together in the inner sanctum. The *linga* sprouts rich, lustrous hair that bleeds when plucked. The
same hair earns rewards and distinctions for the priest. However, he is unable to understand why God was so benign especially when he had committed a sin. He sees God’s mercy as a burden, a miracle which was beyond his understanding:

... I am guilty of gross dereliction, of sacrilege. ... Why then should God cast His vote on my behalf? ... Has God the right to mock justice in favour of love for Him? Or does he have a different logic? ... Such Grace is condescension even it comes from God. Why am I worthy of this burden He has placed on my shoulders? I refuse to bear it. God must understand I simply cannot live on His terms. (260)

With this ironic statement the priest distances himself from his religious beliefs and practices and condemns the rule of rising over bodily desires. Like other men who came in Ranganayaki’s life, the priest too leaves her and fails to give her an identity and place in society. She is remembered merely as a courtesan when she leaves the village. Her final image is reflective of her helpless state:

The tranquility of the night was shattered by the canon. ... Frantic, I started pulling out the flowers from her hair and piling them on my shoulder cloth. She sat up, groggy and dazed, yelping in pain as I snatched at the flowers. ... As I turned back to push the main door shut, I saw Ranganayaki, naked and on all fours, staring out stupefied, shivering. (255-56)
Karnad uses the disappearance of Ranga to restore normalcy. With her powers she metamorphoses into the linga and saves the priest from disgrace. His promotion is a tongue-in-cheek comment on how saints are made. He, however, is overwhelmed by her intelligence and his wife’s power of love and commits suicide. The suicide is unexpected and rattles the reader. He sees the title of sainthood as a punishment rather than an honour, for it would keep reminding him of his transgression. He is aware that it would be impossible for him to take the same path as he did before meeting Ranganayaki. Ranganayaki’s entry severs the priest’s ties with his god and his free will comes into play. Divine intervention only makes matters worse for him. Unable to bear the burden of his dwindling faith and the betrayal of his wife’s trust, he chooses to end his life in the very hollow in which he played as a child.

Women in the monologue are portrayed from a male perspective. The two women are radically different from each other. The priest’s wife is a submissive, nameless woman who performs the roles designated to her. She is engaged in housework all the time. She even seems to treat conjugal relations with her husband as a chore. The priest observes: “I had never seen a woman completely naked. At home, we all bathed in the open, in the corner formed by the neem and the banyan trees in our backyard, so my wife covered herself with a sari even when she bathed” (248). He even goes further to say: “The problem, however is more basic. My wife would have died of shame than be seen naked, even by herself” (249). Ranganayaki, on the other hand, is comfortable with nudity. In her company he sheds all inhibitions and worships her like a goddess. In spite of his close association, the priest refused to eat in Ranganayaki’s house. He was a Brahmin and would consume only the food cooked and served by his wife. Karnad highlights the hypocritical attitude: “I would
return home quite late, ravenous. Ranganayaki had given up teasing me about consuming her body but not the food in her house” (251)

A certain evolution takes place in the personality of the wife in the course of the play. She not only takes the initiative in love-making when she is alone with her husband in the inner sanctum, but she also exercises her rights. When the priest is mobbed by believers after the miracle takes place, she rescues him: “No one, not even the Chieftain, questioned her authority. I fell into deep sleep and woke up refreshed. It was almost midnight, my usual hour for the evening meal. She served me food and supervised the proceedings, as usual, leaning on the door” (259). In two simple sentences, she declares her victory: “She is gone. She and her woman left town the very next day” (259),

After watching one of the theatrical representations Devina Dutt writes:

Throughout the 80-minute performance he is perched on top of an audaciously imagined phallic stump . . . The set design invokes the elegance of rituals; a bronze basin with flowers and the sound of dripping water gradually overpowers us. The subterranean ambience is a metaphor for the priest’s narrative and allows the dual impulses of restriction and freedom to reveal themselves in his confession. But this is a space where mundane morality can be transcended and deeper metaphysical questions including the possibility of a forgiving God and the quality of mercy can be raised. (Dutt)

Jasbir Jain points out that no communication is established between the priest and Ranganayaki beyond lovemaking. When the priest tries to explain that each day he
uses the flowers “to say something special to God and then something entirely different to Ranga” (251), she tells him to concentrate just on her. Jain further says that the monologue’s essence lies in “the compressed narrative of transformation, change, questioning and the complexity of the human mind as it fluctuates between desire and power, sacrifice and self-fulfillment in order to hold on to some meaning in life” (357). Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar opines that the play offers an “ironic variation” of the ‘whore-madonna syndrome’ for “the priest’s voice has an endearing innocence and honesty rather than an alienating arrogance” (xxxiii). According to the whore-madonna complex a man would refrain from having sexual relations with his wife for he sees her as caring and saintly figure. To fulfill his sexual needs he would turn to a woman who has fallen in the eyes of society; an impure, tainted woman. According to Sigmund Freud, a man who has a cold, dysfunctional relationship with his mother develops this condition. The priest sees his wife as a mother-figure and would consider the act of lovemaking incestuous. Indeed the priest reveals the existential angst that he goes through after his illicit affair. He not only loves the linga which he had known and worshipped since childhood, but also his wife and the courtesan.

Karnad uses myth to deconstruct manmade institutions like priesthood and kinship as power centres. Once again the hollowness is exposed like in Naga Mandala, The Fire and the Rain and Talé-Danda. Through Flowers he shows that sin and retribution are defined by priests to their own advantage. The monologue also shows how man’s sudden awareness of his own vulnerability brings despair.
Broken Images (2004)

Broken Images, which Kamad also directed, deals with the dominance of the English language in the field of Indian writing. It provides a caustic comment on the response a writer gets from the media for using the coloniser’s language. It was Shashi Deshpande’s comments that inspired Karnad to write the play. She pointed out that “Indian writers in English who are published in India get a step-motherly treatment compared to those published on foreign shores” (John). Works of great worth published in Indian languages languished until translated into English. The deliberate marginalisation of vernacular literature during the colonial period impacted Indian literary heritage. Thus the monologue explores the ethics of originality which has been a major debate in the literary world since the Romantic period. The protagonist’s novel, The River Has No Memories, is looked upon as a betrayal in certain quarters:

Actually let me confess. If I had foreseen how many people I would upset by writing in English – I really would not have committed that folly.

Intellectuals whom I respected, writers who were gurus to me, friends who I thought would pat me on my back and share my delight – they are all suddenly breathing fire. How dare I write in English and betray Kannada! (263)

With just a single character Karnad juxtaposes twenty first century technology with the language debate that has been raging for years. Karnad makes Manjula Nayak his mouthpiece and defends Indo-Anglian Literature for using English to reach
out to a wider audience. Her debut novel in English has taken the literary world by storm. She has been invited by a broadcasting studio to share her success story. She walks onto the stage wearing a lapel mike, surrounded by television sets:


(261-62).

The very setting is reminiscent of Michael Foucault’s interpretation of a ‘Panopticon’; a building where each and every movement of an individual is watched. Similarly, the media has become the new Panopticon; the ‘all seeing’ eye to which Manjula falls prey. She reveals her repressed desires and fears to her own image on the giant screen. What was supposed to be just an interview turns out to be a dissection of a character who steals her physically challenged sister’s novel and identity and presents it to the world as her own. She weaves a brilliant story, full of lies and deceit, about how she was affected by her sister’s failing health:

Truly the book is about her. I have dedicated it to her memory. She died last year just a few months before the book came out. I have tried to relive what I learnt about her emotional life as I nursed her – tended
to her – watched helplessly as she floated into death. I miss her. I miss my beautiful, gentle sister. (265-66)

She is not the real author, but she tackles questions with ease. Being a Kannada writer she hits back at the people who criticised her for writing in English: “My British publishers said to me: ‘We like your book because it’s so Indian. We receive any number of manuscripts from India but they were all written with the western reader in view. Your novel has the genuine Indian feel!’” (264). She further explains that there is nothing wrong in writing in English for making money and considers it a “good enough reason” (264). At the same time she points out that writing in Kannada is not so profitable. This way Karnad defends those writers who write in English including himself. Though he has written most of his plays in Kannada, as a writer, he is aware of the fact that he scaled greater heights through his translations. He translated most of his plays into English and at the same time preserved the Indian flavor. Raja Rao, one of the founding fathers of the Indian novel, also defends writing in English as long as it is suits the Indian conditions:

English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians. . . . Our method of expression . . . will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it. (Kanthalapura 5)
Today, English has come a long way from being just a weapon used by the white man to subjugate the colonised. The presence of English on the cultural stage has been beneficial as in a way it has helped to preserve the linguistic diversity of the national fabric. Ramanujam Meghanathan observes: “English knowingly or unknowingly has played an instrumental role in maintaining the diversity of India’s language scene because the existence of English has meant that it is not necessary to select any one Indian language as a national language” (83). However, African writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, condemns the use of English and sees it as committing “Languicide”. In Decolonising the Mind he bid farewell to English and started writing in his native Gikuyu language, thus “resurrecting the African soul from centuries of slavery and colonialism that left it spiritually empty, economically disenfranchised and politically marginalised” (Warah). Like Ngugi, many writers see English as a danger to their native tongue and believe in holding on to their roots through their mode of expression.

Malini’s novel, which “burst out in English” (264), received worldwide attention after her death. Compared to the lukewarm response to her elder sister’s Kannada writings, her novel met with instant success. Manjula’s vendetta presents a microcosmic view of the tension and the rivalry that existed between the two sisters. It exposes a complex relationship ruled by jealously and bitterness. Manjula’s repressions are rooted in her low self-esteem. Her envy of her sister goes back to their childhood. It was compounded in adult life when Malini came to live with her and monopolised her husband’s attention all day.

While Manjula wishes to “live in the heart of Kannada culture” (270), her younger sister “breathed, laughed, dreamt in English” (271). Malini is portrayed as the younger, attractive woman who suffers from meningomyelocele. Her ailment
confines her to a wheelchair, but even then she “radiated life” (269). The attention she received from her parents makes Manjula feel inferior. She says, “I have often wondered whether I would have been as bright if I’d received all that love and attention” (269). What disturbs Manjula even more is the closeness between her husband, Pramod, and Malini. Pramod, who is “caring, but useless” (282), is a software developer and spent most of his time at home. Though physical intimacy was out of the question, Manjula was curious to know what the two did all day and would often return from work at unexpected timings only to find them engaged in some animated discussions “like a married couple” (280). At times she felt like “someone external to the soul of this house – along with the cook, the maid and the nurse” (281). Pramod saw the nurse as the only person close to Malini after him. He would ask Manjula if they could bring back the nurse and would also go out with her close friend, Lucy, to expensive restaurants. Rather than his wife, he considered the nurse and Lucy suitable companions to ventilate his pain and anger. Manjula reveals that their relationship fell apart after he found out that she was publishing the novel and claiming its authorship.

The true reason for plagiarizing the novel was more than just winning recognition that she could not get as a Kannada writer. She wanted to hide from the world the fact that she loathed Malini and wanted her to die:

It was venomous. I was camouflaged as the first cousin, and not sister. But it was me all right and the portrayal was rancorous. I was a shallow woman, a pretentious mediocrity, a gushy conniving and devious relative who had taken her in for inheritance. But there were no adjectives. Just facts. The events were from life. They were
accurately described. The conversations were recorded verbatim. I couldn’t deny them. (284-85)

Instead of becoming a ‘laughing stock’ (285), and being remembered merely “as a footnote in the life of a brilliant author” (285), she decides to turn things in her favour. It is her way of taking revenge and for filling a void which was created because of the extra attention and love her sister received. She hopes to wipe away all the bitter memories and bask in the glory of her new identity as a bestselling author. Her image however reminds her of the bitter truth:

IMAGE. Wait a bit. Perhaps . . . she did win in the end?

MANJULA. How do you mean?

IMAGE. If she meant to prove to you that you were a fraud, she certainly succeeded.

MANJULA. You – you – I’ll show you.

(She rushes to the screen and looks for the cable connecting it.) (286)

The image unmasks Manjula and presents her true self. The act of trying to disconnect the cable is symbolic of hiding her guilt, of silencing the truth. Rather than following each and every gesture and movement of Manjula, it acquires its own identity and confronts her. It finally succeeds in the end:

IMAGE. I am Malini Nayak, the English novelist. Manjula Nayak, the Kannada short-story writer, was decimated the moment she read
my novel. She thus obliterated all differences of ink and blood and language between us and at one full stroke morphed into me . . .

Of course, I shall continue with the name of Manjula Nayak. As Manjula Nayak, I have been invited as Visiting Professor to seven prestigious American Universities. I use that nomenclature for my passport, my bank accounts, property and financial investments. However I am in truth Malini, my genius of a sister who loved my husband and knew Kannada and wrote in English.

(Suddenly all the screens start speaking loudly, some in Kannada, the others in English. The cacophony is deafening. The revolving stage moves Manjula out into the dark. Then one by one, the sets switch off, leaving the studio, dark and empty.) (287)

Sibling rivalries have been discussed in detail in literature. According to Eva Rueschmann:

The pattern of antagonism and competition between sisters abounds in classical literature and myth . . . some of the more famous examples of sisters in literary and dramatic history include . . . Antigone and Ismene in Sophocles’ play; Cordelia and her sisters Goneril and Regan in Shakespeare’s King Lear; Clarissa and Arabella in Richardson’s Clarissa, Dorothea and Celia Brooks in Eliot’s Middlemarch; Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in Austen’s Sense and Sensibility; and in modern literature Olga, Masha, and Irina in Chekhov’s play Three Sisters; Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen in D.H. Lawrence’s Women in
The theory of sibling rivalry has also been explored by psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. Adler talks about the importance of equal treatment of siblings in the family. He believes rivalry between siblings is grounded in each child’s need to overcome potential feelings of inferiority. Freud too talks about rivalry between siblings in terms of hatred and jealousy: “The elder child ill-treats the younger, maligns him and robs him of his toys; while the younger is consumed with impotent rage against the elder, envies and fears him . . .” (Sherwin-White 7). While it is clear that Manjula felt inferior to her younger sister, nowhere does Karnad give details of how Malini was treated. The rivalry between the two is merely confined to Manjula’s shocking revelations.

According to Karnad, the play’s relevance “is self-evident to anyone who knows what is happening in India’s literary landscape where vernacular writers feel they do not get the attention that writers in English get, that there is a definite ‘class system’ operating here” (John). Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker points out that while writing the monologue Karnad is aware that novels enjoy greater popularity compared to plays. Hence, he portrays a novelist:

Karnad could have chosen to portray a fellow playwright in Broken Images, but he is well aware that a play in English, however successful its author, cannot compete with a novel in English, because of the qualitative differences between novels and plays as literary artifacts.
Fiction in English by Indian and Indian diaspora authors now commands a global readership and appears in academic curricula around the world; Indian plays in English occupy a distinctly subservient position, not only in reaction to print genres such as fiction, non-fiction, and criticism in English, but also in relation to plays in Indian languages . . . (Dharwadker xxx)

Tutun Mukherjee opines that “the Image on the plasma television screen . . . is not as part of a general theatre technology but as an aesthetic and dramatic component integral to the plot and characterization of the play. . . . The Image becomes a performing intelligence, a mediated metaphor of the protagonist’s mind” (338-39). Sudhir K. Arora feels that the Image too becomes a character and does not lack “the human touch” (230).

Though Manjula cannot be forgiven for the crime she committed, the reader cannot help but sympathise with her. She represents those writers who believe in using the vernacular language, but fail to make a mark in the literary world. The only solution a situation like this offers is to write in the native tongue and then translate the work so that it caters to readers both at home and abroad. This would not only give the work a wide readership, but also the recognition a writer deserves.
**Wedding Album (2008)**

So far, Karnad had painted vivid pictures of Indian culture and its history by placing it in the mythological framework. In *Wedding Album* he takes a giant leap and gives his readers a slice of middle-class life in the twenty-first century. Earlier Karnad had used history to interpret contemporary themes, but *Wedding Album* stands clear from his earlier experiments and portrays a realistic picture of contemporary India. It analyzes the great Indian wedding from all angles. Considerations like religion, caste, creed, class, money, respectability, family etc. are of prime importance when a wedding is being arranged. The western world has long been fascinated by the eastern institution of arranged marriage. Karnad, while focusing on the undercurrents of tension and anxiety that prevail throughout the mega event, also highlights positive aspects like family participation and unity, obedience and cooperation, importance of sincerity and true commitment in marriage.

The play revolves around the Nadkarnis – a typical South Indian Brahmin family – who are looking for a suitable bridegroom for their youngest daughter, Vidula. However, things are not as simple as they appear on the surface, for almost every member of the family has a dark past which weaves together multiple sub-plots with twists and turns. As the first scene introduces us to the soon-to-be bride Vidula, it establishes the theme of marriage which dominates the whole play. When the play opens, she introduces herself in front of the camera which becomes a medium of communication between the bride and the groom. At the same time, it shows the role technology plays in our daily lives. Earlier Karnad used technology in *Broken Images*, but here he takes it to a completely new level. Today’s generation considers it their duty to keep themselves updated with the latest technological developments and cannot imagine life without it. However, Vidula’s question takes us back to the time
when things were a lot simpler: “How did people get introduced before video cameras were not invented?” (7). Vidula is highly self-conscious while recording her introduction. She constantly turns to her brother Rohit for support:

VIDULA. What do I talk about now?

ROHIT (offscreen). Tell him about your family. He knows already, but you tell him.

VIDULA (to the camera). My father was a doctor in the government service. We are three of us. Eldest sister is Hema and lives in Australia. Then Rohit, who is shooting this film. He is a writer – writes stories and scripts for teleplays. Then there’s me. Rohit is the smartest of us all.

(Looks at Rohit and giggles.)

At least he thinks so.

(Rohit tut-tuts.)

Of course, Hema and I don’t agree.

(Giggles. Suddenly serious.)

Apparently there was another brother between Hema and Rohit. He was retarded. Mentally. Don’t know what he died of.

ROHIT (offscreen). Listen! Are you trying to impress him or scare him off?

VIDULA (to Rohit). Let him know the whole truth. Perhaps he is a believer in genetics. Heredity. (To the camera) You know how it is.

There are some things no one talks about in the family.

ROHIT (offscreen). Tell him about yourself.
VIDULA. But let me assure you I am not retarded.

(Laughs.)

At least I don’t think so. But my IQ is . . . let’s skip it. What else?

Oh, yes. My cooking isn’t great either. Fortunately no one has worked out a CQ yet – Cooking Quotient.

(Giggles.) (6-7)

Rohit encourages Vidula to highlight her virtues and achievements so that Ashwin would be impressed. Vidula, on the other hand, underplays them so that he does not have high expectations: “I would grade about 80 on the CQ. But since I am no good at working in an office, I suppose I’ll learn to be good in the kitchen. (To Rohit) Do we have to do this? I feel quite silly. (To the camera) You can see I am no good at this sort of thing” (7).

Till now Vidula and Ashwin have not met in person and have just communicated through cell phones and video. They are to meet only a week before the wedding and then decide if they should get married. Her mother is enraged by the situation they have got themselves into: “Then why is he coming a week before in advance? Why not on the morning of the wedding? Tell him that. They have seen each other on video. Talked on the mobile. Why meet at all beforehand? They can be introduced to each other in the Registrar’s office” (25). Rohit sees no reason to panic as all their relatives could be informed by email “the moment Vidu and he give the nod” (25). Karnad shows two schools of thought here – one belonging to an age which believes marriage to be a sacred bond and requires proper planning, the other sees it as a mere agreement between two parties; a deal which could be simply called
off if things do not work out. As Rohit says: “We live in a modern world. A divorce is okay. It’s no shame” (86).

Rohit appears to be an open-minded individual who is free to make decisions on his own, but the truth is he is controlled by the patriarchy. The pressure of marrying someone from his own community and not a Christian girl weighs heavily on him, and he finally gives in to the will of the elders. He allows himself to be blackmailed through pampering. The Sirurs offer him all kinds of facilities – they finance his trip to Germany and make sure his stay in Bangalore is a comfortable one. With his sisters married and abroad, he has the responsibility of looking after his parents. Indians are more possessive about their sons and offer a support system to them to ensure a secure and bright future:

MIRA. Go abroad for training, if you wish. They can give you . . .

ROHIT (annoyed). Are you trying to bribe me?

MOHAN. No, no, no . . .

GOPAL. Rohit, let’s be reasonable. You, today’s youth, you are Americanized. You want to stand on your feet. Which is admirable.

For my generation, it was the duty of the parents to ensure that their children had a comfortable life. Harmonious and comfortable.

We really see no bribery there. We don’t mean it.

MOHAN. We admire the drive in you. But we must place the facts before you. (35)

This possessiveness is also seen in Vidula’s elder sister, Hemakka. As Rohit points out, she keeps calling her son and not even once mentions her daughter: “Haven’t you
noticed? She never talks about her daughter. Has never rung her since her arrival. It’s always the darling sonny boy. Ketan. Ketan” (54). Their neighbour, Vivian, who is two years younger than Ketan, adds to Hemakka’s worries when she learns that he has read Madame Bovary and Lady Chatterley’s Lover. She is shocked to read his personal letters addressed to her, but at the same time enjoys the attention:

(\textit{She pushes him out. He marches out with a dignified adult tread. Hema hurriedly glances through the letter and a blush spreads on her cheeks. She smiles to herself as she shoves the two letters into her handbag, then takes them out, folds them carefully, and puts them inside her blouse. Suddenly she remembers what she was about and calls out.}) (45)

Through Vidula’s wedding, Kamad reveals the deepest secrets which the characters have buried within themselves. Vidula, for instance, has an affair with a “voice” whose name is “Kuchla the Jezebel” (64), while her family members think she visits the café everyday just to play video games. Kamad once again uses technology to show how today’s youth get trapped in the cyber world and have relationships. The “timid” (72) Vidula celebrates her freedom in the dark cabin and is even bold enough to face two men who barge in to the café and accuse her for being “a disgrace to our ancient culture” (69). She cleverly gets rid of them by calling them rapists and molesters. Her reaction is a result of an old childhood memory when she was sexually harassed by their cook, Nagappa. The incident leaves a permanent scar on Vidula and through her character Kamad addresses the issue of child abuse which is widespread throughout the country. In 2011 the Parliament of India passed “The
Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Bill" with the hope of curbing this problem.

While Vidula manages to keep things under wraps, an old skeleton tumbles out of the closet when her birth certificate mentions her uncle, Ramdas Nadkarni, as her father. Ramdas's invisible presence haunts the entire play. Appa talks fondly of his late brother, even though he knows he was “ungrateful . . . jealous” (74). His very name makes her mother uncomfortable and she feels it would be better to leave the certificate as it is to avoid “extra running around” (54). All this suggests that perhaps she had an affair with Ramdas. Rohit also cannot forget his relationship with Isabel and tries to contact her when his wife is not around. His boss, Pratibha Khan, calls this “harassment” (61) and asks him to leave her alone:

ROHIT. You expect me to invite her home when my wife is there? To discuss our past relationship?

(Pratibha picks up her handbag.)

PRATIBHA. Rohit, I am forty. I am from Orissa. I came to Bangalore for reasons of my own and built up my business. Three years ago, I married a man ten years my senior. A Muslim. I married him when the anti-Muslim riots were at their worst. Because he offered me affection and security.

(Pause.)

There’s nothing I don’t know about harassment. (61)

Being a television producer, Pratibha knows what her audience wants. When Rohit suggest that they should use Vidula’s story as an episode for her television
show she feels that today’s youth would not accept it. She instead finds his house maid’s life more interesting. Radhabai concealed from the Nadkarnis that her daughter was actually a concubine. After being thrown out of her master’s house she was seen on the streets, half-mad. Destiny brought her to the place where Radhabai worked, but she disappeared by the time Radhabai went to meet her: “Radhabai called out. But her daughter couldn’t hear her. . . . But by the time she reached there, the daughter had disappeared. Vanished into thin air. Radhabai never saw her daughter again” (53). Rohit and Pratibha use this incident and try to make it as melodramatic as possible.

ROHIT. . . . We start with the sky overcast. Ominous clouds. It begins to rain. Radhabai runs on to the terrace to collect the clothes. . . . Sees the daughter, recognizes her and runs down. It’s pouring by the time she reaches the gate.

PRATIBHA. Very nice. The clothes keep falling off her shoulder as she races down. Superb.

ROHIT. So when she reaches her daughter, it is lashing with rain. All that struggle to take the daughter in – the daughter screaming and pushing her away – all that happens while the rain turns into a thunderstorm.

(Pratibha claps approvingly.)

Ultimately the daughter pushes her and runs away. Literally melts away in the rain.

PRATIBHA. A super shot to end the episode with. Her melting away.

(58-59)
Kamad comments on the shallowness of television scripts. He discusses how everyday incidents are presented in an exaggerated manner to enchant the viewers in order to step up Television Rating Points. For an uneducated woman like Radhabai, television represents a source of entertainment and at the same time fills her with a sense of guilt for abandoning her daughter, a shocking truth which she reveals in a monologue:

I was paralyzed. Why is she here? What if my mistress sees her? What’ll happen to me? I ran and hid in a corner of the terrace. I buried my head in my knees and curled up, so she wouldn’t recognize me. I don’t know how long I was hiding there. The noise faded. The street became silent again. I crawled back to my kitchen. Safe. (93)

She lied because she was scared to lose the luxuries of her master’s house which she had grown used to. The kitchen is Radhabai’s fortress; it gives her an identity and a feeling of superiority over the other members of the family. Though second in command, she keeps arguing with Vidula’s mother over the right amount of salt and chilly powder, or when it comes to preparing curry or fish. All these details add to the realistic flavour of the play. Mother threatens to send her away, but knows it is not possible to manage without her. Food plays a vital role in the everyday lives of people. Hema even invites Govinda Rao and his daughter to lunch to “soothe their feathers” (49). This shows how food is used to control people. While the female members cook, the male members consume it, thus assigning traditional gender roles.

Aparna Nath and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar point out:
Food becomes a way of expressing culturally gendered behavior in the way its functions are coded as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’: a woman’s work is to prepare meals and cook for her family, while men only eat the food their women have prepared. This gives rise to gender hierarchy where men, as ostensible end-users of the products of cooking, consume services rendered by women. (93)

All the characters in the play are perverted in one way or another, thus giving a microcosmic view of the damaged moral fabric of society. Karnad offers a solution to the crumbling value system through Ashwin who makes an appearance in just one scene. In a long speech he tells Vidula that his purpose is to walk the path of redemption by returning to religion and rediscovering ancient values:

Gradually – and mind you, it has required a lot of painful soul-searching – yes, even painfully, I have realized that Hinduism can indeed save this world from moral chaos. . . . No dial-a-solution philosophy is going to help the world. We have to look into our hearts, and discover our ancient values afresh. Begin at the beginning. (81)

He admits that he has “drunk life in the US to the lees” (80), but finds the culture over there shallow. He hopes that Vidula would join hands with him and sees this union as a mission to rebuild those values. He believes that “in places like Dharwad . . . the belief in innocence, very idea of purity, still survives” (81). It is ironic that he wants to “save the West” (82) rather than returning to his own roots. It is the comfort and
luxury that he finds in the States which he does not want to let go off, thus showing his hypocrisy.

In the Foreword to the play Amit Srinivasan opines:

\[ \ldots \textit{Wedding Album} \text{ works as modern myth, whose condensed logic straddles both the real and the tech-simulated world of today, to help us confront our mixed-up amoral, craven, unhappy selves.} \ldots \textit{Wedding Album} \text{ encourages us to examine the growing fundamentalism of the Hindu middle class family, which is largely ‘missing’ from social science scholarship on India today.} \text{(ix)} \]

According to a newspaper review the play is “a fitting tribute to the family drama that revolves around every Indian wedding and proves that modernity and social class have little to do with the universal concerns and drama of the Great Indian Marriage” (Acharekar). Lilette Dubey, who directed the play, feels it has a “Chekhovian flavor” and addresses “issues pertinent to our times” (Dubey). Anton Chekhov too, in his plays, presented life as he saw it with a touch of humour.

\textit{Wedding Album} is a realistic depiction of the India we live in today. With finesse Karnad shows the perversions that each character fosters and strips them in front of the readers, but not without a touch of humour. Their search for happiness takes them to the darkest corners of their souls which they hide from one another. Only Ashwin emerges as an honest character who pours his heart out, but wishes to remain a victim of the ‘melting pot’ culture. The whole play becomes a soap opera where a “wedding” finally takes place amidst the anxieties and complications, leaving the reader with a realistic album.
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Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

KARNAD'S OEUVRE: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW
Conclusion

Digging out the lost identity of a colonised nation from its ruins not only requires a lot of effort, but also careful planning as it involves meticulous rebuilding of the nation’s culture, traditions and disciplines which had sunk into oblivion as a result of the coloniser’s bid to make the third and fourth world perfect. Girish Karnad, acclaimed Kannada and English playwright, took up the task of writing back about the identity and individuality of India with the help of history and myth. Through his historical plays he shows that Indian history needs to be revisited and reassessed. Karnad explores historical facts that were erased and twisted by the colonisers. Hindu myth, on the other hand, becomes a means to dissect human nature. He endeavours to find a solution to all the problems that plague the society.

_Yayati_ (1961) marks the beginning of Karnad’s journey as a playwright. The play combines the indigenous and the contemporary and thus furnishes the age-old myth with new meanings. Through this mythical fable, Karnad conveys to the reader the necessity of self-control, the recognition of right and wrong, and the importance of determination and self sacrifice as being relevant in today’s materialistic world. He also throws light on the issue of gender equality and the suppression and belittling of women in the traditional patriarchal Indian society.

The entire action takes place in a single chamber which belonged to Yayati’s former queen. Though dead, she controls and haunts the characters through her memories. King Yayati is a powerful and majestic figure at the outset of the play. He crushes those who are weaker than him. The entire clan is bruised and sickened by his arbitrariness. Caught in the dizzy spiral of ambition, greed and temptation, he crumbles when he realises acquisitions bring no fulfillment. _Yayati_ can be thus considered as a representation of the human being’s desire and craving for worldly
pleasures and ambition. Man has inherent weaknesses and while some achieve success, others give in to greed and fail to realize their wrongdoings. Karnad conveys to his audience the need for self-control, responsibility, the need for careful and socially and morally correct decisions, and the acceptance of one’s mistakes. Herein comes the impact of the Existentialists on Karnad’s thoughts. Man’s existence, his loneliness, his passivity in the face of upheavals, and his efforts to overcome them through correct choices and responsible behaviour, are issues dealt with the existential stream of thought and shades of their influence are seen in the play.

Karnad presents a chaotic family, grappling with frustrations and unfulfilled desires. The characters find themselves in a void, a meaningless existence, and each tries to cope with it in a different way. Karnad weaves mythical magic on stage to confront his audience with complex issues of life. It is true that he twists the tale to suit his needs, but the end result is multidimensional, deep and effective, providing food for thought and enhancing our outlook.

Girish Karnad in Tughlaq (1964) places a fourteenth century ruler within the postcolonial framework to project his ideas of secularism, unity and peace. Through Tughlaq, Karnad reclaims the past which had fallen prey to historical amnesia of the occidental historians. He shows that for a nation to maintain peace and prosperity, it is necessary to strike a balance among its different governing bodies marked by social customs, religion, cultural values and languages. If any one of these pillars is weakened, the whole edifice starts to crumble. When the British stepped on Indian soil to pursue their mission of ‘the white man’s burden’, they left no stone unturned to dismantle all that the nation had achieved in its glorious past. Religion, for example, was seen as a sensitive target which could be manipulated by their hegemonic strategies in order to create deep fissures. With Muslims and Hindus making up most
of the population of the country, unity was an essential factor to drive the coloniser out where Indians themselves were being treated as the ‘other’ in their motherland. One such ruler who believed in the idea of a secular nation was Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

Kamad chooses a ruler from the pages of history who had inherited a vast empire. History declared him insane, but reassessment states otherwise. Tughlaq was a visionary who lived in the future rather than the present, and this became the reason of his downfall from the first to the last scene of the play. It is Tughlaq ‘the man’ that we see working selflessly for his people. He pleads for their support and trust, but each time they conspire and rebel against him. He too fights back, but at the end finds himself lonely at the top to witness the ruins. It is his alterity that results in the destruction of his kingdom. Kamad reconstructs and restages medieval India from the post-colonial perspective in order to fill in the yawning gaps that were left open a long time back.

Tughlaq experiences the same fears, anxieties and joys as would any ordinary person. We can understand the joy that he has in solving a famous chess problem. The game of chess symbolizes the complex nature of human existence. Tughlaq’s primary drive is to succeed and chess intrigues him because of the manipulations of its pawns. He uses the game to remain awake and also to refine his strategies. At a stage he tells Barani: “Forgive me if I let you down, Barani, but I must play this game my own way . . .” (Kamad, Tughlaq 22).

In Tughlaq we find a nation divided into different groups where one tries to dominate the other. Tughlaq’s originality is far beyond the understanding of his adversaries and this is the reason they treat him as the ‘other’. In danger of being colonised he does not allow them to impose their supremacy and to subjugate him.
The coming together of the nobles of the court to bring down Muhammad bin Tughlaq once again shows how internal colonialism works. In this case the people involved are not outsiders, but those belonging to the Sultan’s court. This shows that his followers were always doubtful about his ways.

Prayer is a recurring motif in the play. First he makes prayer compulsory in his land and then goes to the extent of banning it when his noblemen try to kill him during prayers. This becomes a classic case of politicizing religion. It is ironic that he even killed his father and brother while they were offering prayers. Prayer is meant to purify the soul and bring man closer to God. Tughlaq, as well as his noblemen, use it as a means of controlling others. Karnad, however, endows Tughlaq with humane aspects that invoke sympathy in the reader. By moving beyond the boundaries of historical records, chronicles and narratives about the despotic Sultan, Karnad provides some plausible rationale for this enigmatic individual.

Karnad presents the ruler as an isolated individual battling for idealism incomprehensible to contemporary society. He is alienated and psychologically punished for remaining firm. Karnad views a despot from a twentieth century viewpoint. He asserts a certain protection to his hero by naming him after the last Messenger of Islam (Peace be upon him). Historically, this character was been referred to as Tughlaq, but by calling him ‘Muhammad’ Karnad redeems him and absolves him of historical charge.

After employing myth in Yayati and history in Tughlaq, Karnad experiments with a traditional form of folk theatre in Hayavadana (1971) in order to revive the colonial past through indigenous theatrical modes. As the title suggests the play deals with the functions of the head, the supreme part of the human body. Without the head the body is incomplete and without control. The balance of the head determines the
sanity or lunacy of an individual and gears him to either fight destiny or be overpowered.

Karnad takes up the question of identity in *Hayavadana* from the post-colonial perspective and shows the battle between the coloniser and the colonised in the form of mind and body, strength and weakness, reason and emotion. At the same time, he analyses Indian society through the use of myth and tradition ingrained in Indian culture. Hayavadana, the half-horse and half-man, signifies the inherent bestiality of man. While the others chatter about the ‘talking horse’, he identifies the power of the primeval force in the horse and prioritizes it over crude intellect spent in quarreling over jealous rivalries. In the course of the play, he realizes that it takes the best of the two men i.e. Devdatta’s head and Kapila’s body to make a perfect man. Karnad also highlights that man’s efforts to control his bestial instincts are often futile. Padmini blunders her way to a liberation which proves too much for her. Devadatta and Kapila, after the transpositioning of heads, reel under identity crisis. Karnad explores the dilemma of the newly liberated who have not yet come to terms with their newfound liberty.

Girish Karnad’s *Bali: The Sacrifice* (1980) digs deep into the issues of superstition and animal sacrifice which were prevalent not only in the pre-colonial times, but continue to dominate the psyche of the individual even today. At the same time, Karnad takes up the subject of traditional gender roles assigned by the patriarchy to men and women. Karnad questions the social construct and attacks the principles put forward by Rousseau in the eighteenth century. Women sacrifice themselves and bury their hopes and desires because that is what the patriarchy demands. In the eyes of the patriarchy, women are inferior beings and the only place fit for them is the hearth. Their only job is to live and serve indoors, rather than
participate in the public sphere. They are considered as ‘man’s other’. The patriarchy expects that men are to take control if a situation goes out of hand, and if they are unable to do so it implies failure of manhood. Penny A. Weiss sums up the expected role of men: “Men are trained in craft, taught to judge independently, prepared to be citizens and soldiers in a participatory democracy, and allowed to express their thoughts and desires openly” (81). The King in spite of rigorous training fails to do this. He becomes an anti-hero as he is passive and unable to commit himself to any ideal. When he comes to know of his wife’s affair with the Mahout, he waits for directions from his mother who is very thorough in her knowledge of patriarchal conventions. The King’s inactivity represents the dysfunctionality of patriarchal dictates. He finds himself caught in the web of religious commitments and traditions. He practices the patriarchal policy of keeping women apart. For the Queen’s sake he gives up his religion and converts to Jainism.

The Mahout is portrayed as the most interesting character in the play and acts as a foil to others, especially the King. Unlike the others he is not a stereotype, but rather an iconoclast. He is a man who makes his own rules and is not concerned about what people think of him. Though he belongs to the lower strata of the society, he is proud of his position in the kingdom: “People mock at mahouts. Call us ‘low-born’. But where would all your princes and kings be without us, I want to know. What would happen to their elephants? No elephants. No army. No pomp and splendor. No processions. No kings! Ha!” (Karnad, Bali 196). Like the King’s mother, he too is superstitious and blames the eclipse for his ugly looks. However, he feels that god has compensated his looks with a gifted voice; a voice which brought many women to him. The King admires him for his knowledge of women: “What a pundit. A veritable sage. A guru. A man of divine wisdom . . . and beauty” (Karnad, Bali 233).
Karnad comments on the way of thinking of the royals and the common man by shedding light on the rational and the irrational. As the title of the play suggests, the central theme of the play, apart from hypocrisy of marriage and patriarchal ideologies, is the meaninglessness of sacrifice and the irrelevance of rituals. Even though the Queen sacrifices herself for the sake of humanity, she too commits an act of violence by ending the life of her unborn child and with that shattering the King’s dream of a future heir. Yet she emerges as a new woman who is “self-possessed and cerebral enough not to surrender to pressures of conformity” (Dharwadker xxxiv).

The theme of Bali is played out at many levels. The King is sacrificed to his responsibilities. He has no independence; everything in his life is governed by his commitments to the state and to his family. The Mahout, in contrast, is absolutely free. He makes love to the Queen and is accountable to none. He has no family and no friends. The filth and squalor of the surroundings and unwashed smelly self of the Mahout suggest that he has been sacrificed to poverty. The Queen sacrifices herself at the end of the play. Prior to this, she was sacrificed many times over. She was sacrificed to the community that condemned her as barren. She was verbally slaughtered by the King’s mother for her association with the Mahout. The dilemma of the modern man has been captured in all its aspects.

In Nāga-Mandala: Play with a Cobra (1988), Karnad continues his quest to write back and attacks the hegemonic ideologies of the colonial world. He employs the magic realist technique to repair the fissures within society and projects a Utopian world for the common man. Magic realism is omnipresent in the play. The particular image of flames becomes an effective post-colonial tool where the irrational dismantles the colonial history and becomes a way to familiarise people with the rich culture of a nation. Karnad’s magic realism becomes a tool for explaining the wisdom
of the uneducated, the rural, and of women. He counters the hegemonic notion that wisdom can come only through books and higher education.

The play deals with the introspection of a playwright who was a failure. Nighttime visions, illusions, dreams and hallucination ignite his imagination and help him to create a story and also provide him with the beginning of a new one. The location of the temple is recurrent in Kamad’s plays. He presents it as a place where anything that is human is sacred, whether it is the act of having an illicit affair (Bali), or the act of shedding blood within the four walls of the holy place (Hayavadana). At the same time, it becomes a place of gossip for the lamp flames.

The rendering of the myth as a play exposes the subconscious fears and desires of the male-oriented society. The Story, who narrates Rani’s tale, emphasises the feminist perspective of the tale. Classical Indian Drama was primarily male-oriented. It dealt with the exploits of epic heroes. The playwright’s night in the temple with the flames and the Story reoriented him and he could revive the legacy of myth and folklore to explore contemporary realities, particularly the issues of the marginalised like women, sudras and nature. The original myth was extremely phallocentric. Kamad’s version combines the myth and a modern vision.

Kamad’s purpose is to voice his concerns about the patriarchy and to create a society where men and women are treated as equal. He believes, like other feminist thinkers, that the patriarchy is creating a degenerate society where both the sexes suffer, and this results in a chaotic world. He blasts the myth of the patriarchal concept of the perfect woman, for the perfect woman cannot exist. He dwells on the thought that magic is the only way to attain the state of perfection. He thus blends magic and realism to comment on the established patriarchal norms with the hope that in the future attempts are not made to confine the human mind.
Karnad’s *Talé-Danda* (1990) can be considered a prologue to *Tughlaq*. While *Tughlaq* shows the importance of a secular nation, *Talé-Danda* explores the chasms that exist within religion. It identifies the need to find solutions and attempts to unite communities. Set in the twelfth-century, the play revives the social upheavals and religious reforms of the period and connects them with contemporary Indian situations. Once again the dramatist meanders through mazes of history, myth, religion, antiquity and modernity. Construction of identity according to one’s caste becomes the most important theme in the play. The play conducts a debate about culture and cultural politics. The realm of such politics is to consider which culture is the dominant one and which is subordinated. Karnad writes with the vision of a social reformer. He challenges the vices of the caste system and desires an equal society.

Karnad gives a stereotypical representation of women in the play. In the twelfth century women stifled in confinement. The conservative society placed them within domestic boundaries and treated them as unintelligent and inferior. The married woman was forcefully subjugated by her in-laws. *Sati* or immolation of the widows on the husband’s funeral pyre was practiced. King Bijjala’s wife, Rambhavati, strips herself of initiative and desire and complies with the dictates of patriarchy. Her daughter-in-law never appears in the play. She is invisible and voiceless. Bijjala’s attitude towards the women is framed by internalized patriarchal beliefs. Basavanna’s follower, Jagadeva also treats his wife as a mere object. He refuses to see her when she requests him to visit his ailing mother. So, in the royal kingdom as well as in the Sharan household women are treated with disrespect. It is only Basvanna’s wife who enjoys a better position. Their relationship is bound together with love and understanding. The couple represents evolved humanity, thus giving the play its postcolonial texture.
The debate regarding the inter-caste marriage, which is a pivotal episode in the play, resonates with patriarchal conventions. Aware of the consequences of such a union, the bride’s mother, Lalita, hopes that the marriage would be stopped. However, her husband forbids her from saying a word. As per rules of patriarchy she is easily persuaded into silence. The elders of the community hesitate to give their blessings to Kalavati, daughter of Madhuvarasa, a Brahmin who is marrying Sheelavanta, the son of Haralayya, a cobbler. Basavanna, along with some Sharanas leads a goodwill mission and the marriage is solemnized. The newly crowned Sovideva directs the soldiers to kill all those who were involved in the inter-caste marriage. Terror breaks loose as the soldiers carry out his orders. The riot that ensues contains the vengeance and senselessness of any contemporary upheaval. Basavanna’s carefully thought out ideology crumbles before the insane reaction of the public. He is unable to protect his followers. However, his vachanas in Kannada lived on and served an inspiration to later writers.

Myth again forms an integral part of Karnad’s The Fire and the Rain, but this time his focus is on the degradation of the environment and also of mankind’s condition. The myth is alive, energetic and ever changing. The dramatist expands the myth with sub-plots, descriptions, and narratives of morality and immorality. Archetypal situations connect the ancient and the modern. The plot works through a trilogy. Each part has its own protagonist and its own specific events. He uses dramatic devices like the prologue, flashback, epilogue and the mask. The forest and wilderness become the home of Karnad’s characters in The Fire and the Rain. Nature is palpably alive. Karnad entwines the dark recesses of the forest with the dark recesses of the human mind in his attempts to decipher codes of ancient wisdom.
Karnad combines the mythical, the magical, and the elemental and identifies drama as a pre-historic art form.

By setting the play in the forest Karnad makes a return to nature and brings forth the important role of forests. An eco-critical reading of the play suggests how forests act as a life-saving force and at the same time it portrays its richness and diversity in terms of the inhabitants' beliefs, customs and values. Karnad associates the cloistered, secretive Brahmin with the dark depths of the forest and the tribe of hunters with the open grounds. The dark depths symbolize narrow-mindedness whereas the shades of the trees and open grounds indicate tolerance.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, the question of social justice towards the environment echoes from the jungle which has long been a victim of “inflated egos” of learned men who ignore the question of humanity. The moral resolve of each and every character in the play is tested, but except for Arvasu and Nittilai, all the others fail. Revenge becomes the most prominent theme as all the male characters in the play, except Arvasu believe in blood-shed. Though the play does not contain the basic elements of a revenge tragedy, it nevertheless has a strong element of vengeance that encompasses the whole play. The proximity to nature brings out the barbaric element. Nature is at its most savage and brews venom in characters who dwell in the forest.

In the end, humanity triumphs in the form of rain. It is Arvasu and Nittila’s purity which results in the rejuvenation of the lands. The condition of Nittilai and Vishaka can be looked upon from an ‘ecofeminist’ perspective where a parallel can be drawn between the oppression of women and the arid land. Eco-feminists believe that women are more connected to nature and are in a better position to understand and interact with it. They look at the domination and degradation of nature similar to their own subjugation. Eco-feminists also claim that if women are treated as equals, it will
result in environmental improvement. However, this is not the case with Nittilai and Vishaka.

The play is marked by underlying tensions and conflicts that characterize change. The crumbling of the patriarchy is visible in the evil distortions of Raibhya’s character. He is filled with hatred for his son, Paravasu when he is appointed Chief Priest. Instead of passing on his mantle to him he wrecks vengeance on Vishaka. Yavakri, with his achievement of a decade of meditation, resents being ignored by the King and harbours a grudge about Paravasu’s appointment. He, too, tricks and seduces Vishaka. Thus, he disproves his own claim of being knowledgeable and enlightened. The trials and traumas of the characters of this medieval scenario point to the chaos in the contemporary human jungle. For Karnad the solution lies in Raibhya’s symbolic statement: “It’s not the wild beasts one has to watch out for – it’s the human beings” (Fire 138).

The play may be considered a post modernist text that is concerned with the fragmentation of human identities. The equilibrium of the world is destroyed. A persistent drought converts the world into a wasteland. Nature, once all powerful, cannot replenish its lost potential and its harmonies. The playwright merges with Indra and enters his own play and communicates with his own characters. Expression of human values like love, dedication and integrity provide a healing touch and the rain comes pouring down filling the world with earthy fragrances.

Karnad’s trilogy of historical plays culminates with The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (1997). Though not written in a chronological order, his final historical play may well be placed after Tughlaq, while Talê-Daṇḍa precedes both. The otherwise remote and intimidating monarch is presented as a dreamer in the play. The combination of a dream play and history gives a unique account of a ruler who fought
four wars to free his nation from the shackles of the British. Karnad, through the play, redeems Tipu Sultan's dignity as an individual and as a ruler. Karnad takes into account four dreams with the intention of delineating not just the character of a ruler, but also the man without the crown. Karnad brilliantly explores a historical context through a subjective consciousness. Tipu's vulnerability as revealed through the entries in the dream register, invoke the sympathy of the readers.

Karnad uses the flashback technique, beginning with the Sultan's death in the last Anglo-Mysore war and ending with his last dream in which he sees victory against the British. Kirmani and Mackenzie play the role of the chorus and comment on the incidents that finally lead to Tipu's fall during the siege of Seringapatam. They comment on each episode as the play keeps oscillating between the past and present. Faith in dreams as supernatural messages is an old Indian tradition. They probe the hidden recesses of the mind. They are a medium for the expression of the unconscious that appears in a disguised form. For instance, in the last dream, defeat is disguised in the form of triumph, and treachery is masked as loyalty. This shows that dreams may be capricious and they sometimes reverse the truth.

Through one of the dreams Karnad also comments on contemporary incidents which he could foresee. The idol's speech brings to mind the Nirbhaya rape case which once again questioned the safety of women in the country. In December 2012, a twenty-three year old woman, along with a male escort, was brutally assaulted by a group of men on a bus. She was gravely injured and died thirteen days after the incident. The incident blasted the common notion that women should use public transport and not go out alone at night.

In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Tipu is portrayed in multiple roles and not just as a ruler. There is an endless chain of signifiers where one signifier leads to another –
a Sultan, a warrior, a loving husband, a friend and a father. Tipu bravely faces his own downfall. He embodies the eternal helplessness of man against forces beyond his control. One of the most perceptive monarchs in history, he dreamt of creating a new world. Though he did not succeed in this venture, he could foresee the future: “The danger is: they’ll teach my children their language, English. The language in which it is possible to think of children as hostages. All I can try to do is agree to their conditions and conclude the treaty in a hurry – before my children learnt to think in those terms” (Karnad, Dreams 217). As per the prediction of the Sultan, British imperialism used language as a tool of colonisation.

Karnad attempts to reinstate Tipu Sultan in his true position. He invests Tipu with a keen intuition that translates itself into his dreams. The dreams provide Karnad with a flexibility that permits him to comment on contemporary issues, alongside historical ones. Tipu Sultan’s dreams incorporated and prophesied the predicament of the contemporary world where globalization has erased boundaries and nationalism has given way to global culture. However, contemporary man continues the face the tussle between human values and worldly achievement. Karnad weaves together dream, memory and interpretation in a sequence that is both poetic and eloquent. Tipu emerges as a victim of marginalisation. He was marginalized by history, by the British and by destiny.

After presenting an array of characters on stage and dealing with a variety of themes, Karnad explores the genre of monologue which is more challenging as, when staged, only a single character has to hold the attention of the audience for a defined period of time. In both the monologues, Flowers and Broken Images (2004) the character lays bare his or her soul through a series of events coupled with flowing speech. In Flowers, Karnad deals with the philosophy of religion and tries to answer
questions pertaining to God, justice and mercy. The old questions are cast in contemporary modes as the protagonist discovers flaws in ancient wisdom and raises new debates regarding faith and morality. He also explores the conflicts of love and lust, idealisation and profanity, power and morality. Issues like women’s position in society, gender roles, social and family structures, religious and princely hierarchies are also discussed. The monologue is meditative as well as expansive. The action of the play takes place in the priest’s mind and descends before the audience through memories, predictions, associative thinking, dilemmas, anxieties, regrets and fear psychosis.

In Flowers the priest worships the linga and treats it as an independent living entity, “talking to it, singing to it, even discussing recent political developments, and most of all decorating it with flowers” (Karnad, Flowers 243-44). The chieftain admires the priest’s skill of inventing new ways of adorning the linga everyday and is well-known in the village for his devotion to the job. Flowers form an important part of Hindu worship. Daily fresh and specific flowers are offered to a Hindu deity as it is seen as an act to acquire the deity’s blessings and to ward off negative energies. After falling in love with the courtesan, Ranganayaki, the priest on her request decides to show his skills on her bare body which becomes a daily practice just like the pooja rituals. Courtesans have a long history in Indian culture. They were independent women who entertained kings and aristocrats and in return they enjoyed royal patronage. Though educated and skilled in various arts such as singing and dancing, courtesans were looked down upon and were considered outcasts.

By portraying stereotypes Karnad once again touches upon the position of women in Indian society. On the one hand is the priest’s wife who endures everything silently, and on the other is Ranganayaki who is merely an object of pleasure for men.
Unlike the queen in *Bali* or Padmini in *Hayavadana*, the priest’s wife suppresses her desires and performs the duties that are expected of her. Through the love triangle of the priest, his wife and the courtesan, Karnad comments on the patriarchal perspectives on marriage and love liaisons.

Karnad also refers to the marginalisation of courtesans. Considered to be morally degraded, they are not even allowed to enter a religious shrine. The priest makes it clear that had he the authority he would have made love to Ranganayaki inside the temple. He prefers to be in her company and like the everyday *pooja* he performs he sees his visits as a ritual. Ranganayki offers a sharp contrast to the priest’s wife whose body has been damaged by child bearing and domestic labour. This is the reason he chooses to be with Ranga instead.

Karnad uses the disappearance of Ranga to restore normalcy. With her powers she metamorphoses into the *linga* and saves the priest from disgrace. His promotion is a tongue-in cheek comment on how saints are made. He, however, is overwhelmed by her intelligence and his wife’s power of love and commits suicide. The suicide is unexpected and rattles the reader. He sees the title of sainthood as a punishment rather than an honour, for it would keep reminding him of his transgression. His recapitulation embodies the universal experience of sin and retribution. Whereas an ordinary man would have reveled in the sainthood, the priest thinks of it as a burden. The values of loyalty, commitment and morality do not lose their validity even though he searches all realms of knowledge and prepares for the final penance.

Women in the monologue are portrayed from a male perspective. The two women are radically different from each other. The priest’s wife is a submissive nameless woman who performs the roles designated to her. She is engaged in housework all the time. She even seems to treat conjugal relations with her husband
as a chore. Ranganayaki, on the other hand, is comfortable with nudity. In her company he sheds all inhibitions and worships her like a goddess. In spite of his close association, the priest refused to eat in Ranganayaki’s house. He was a Brahmin and would consume only the food cooked and served by his wife. Here Karnad highlights the hypocritical attitude: “I would return home quite late, ravenous. Ranganayaki had given up teasing me about consuming her body but not the food in her house” (*Flowers* 251)

A certain evolution takes place in the personality of the wife in the course of the play. She not only takes the initiative in love-making when she is alone with her husband in the inner sanctum, but she also exercises her rights. When the priest is mobbed by believers after the miracle takes place, she rescues him: “No one, not even the Chieftain, questioned her authority. I fell into deep sleep and woke up refreshed. It was almost midnight, my usual hour for the evening meal. She served me food and supervised the proceedings, as usual, leaning on the door” (Karnad, *Flowers* 259). In two simple sentences, she declares her victory: “She is gone. She and her woman left town the very next day” (Karnad, *Flowers* 259).

Karnad uses myth to deconstruct manmade institutions like priesthood and kinship as power centres. Once again the hollowness is exposed like in *Nāga-Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain* and *Talé-Daṇḍa*. Through *Flowers* he shows that sin and retribution are defined by priests to their own advantage. The monologue also shows how man’s sudden awareness of his own vulnerability brings despair.

*Broken Images* provides a caustic comment on the response a writer gets from the media for using the coloniser’s language. Works of great worth published in Indian languages languished until translated into English. The deliberate marginalisation of vernacular literature during the colonial period impacted Indian
literary heritage. Thus the monologue explores the ethics of originality which has been a major debate in the literary world since the Romantic period. Today, English has come a long way from being just a weapon used by the white man to subjugate the colonised. The presence of English on the cultural stage has been beneficial as in a way it has helped to preserve the linguistic diversity of the national fabric.

With just a single character Karnad juxtaposes twenty first century technology with the language debate that has been raging for years. Karnad makes Manjula Nayak his mouthpiece and defends Indo-Anglian Literature for using English to reach out to a wider audience. The setting is reminiscent of Michael Foucault’s interpretation of a ‘Panopticon’; a building where each and every movement of an individual is watched. Similarly the media has become the new Panopticon; the ‘all seeing’ eye to which Manjula falls prey. She reveals her repressed desires and fears to her own image on the giant screen. What was supposed to be just an interview turns out to be a dissection of a character who steals her physically challenged sister’s novel and identity and presents it to the world as her own. It is her way of taking revenge and for filling a void which was created because of the extra attention and love her sister received. She hopes to wipe away all the bitter memories and bask in the glory of her new identity as a bestselling author.

Though Manjula cannot be forgiven for the crime she committed, the reader cannot help but sympathise with her. She represents those writers who believe in using the vernacular language, but fail to make a mark in the literary world. The only solution a situation like this offers is to write in the native tongue and then translate the work so that it caters to readers both at home and abroad. This would not only give the work a wide readership, but also the recognition a writer deserves.
In *Wedding Album* (2009), Karnad takes a giant leap and gives his readers a slice of middle-class life in the twenty-first century. Earlier Karnad had used history and myth to interpret contemporary themes, but *Wedding Album* stands clear from his earlier experiments and portrays a realistic picture of contemporary India. It analyzes the great Indian wedding from all angles. Considerations like religion, caste, creed, class, money, respectability, family etc. are of prime importance when a wedding is being arranged. The western world has long been fascinated by the eastern institution of arranged marriage. Karnad while focusing on the undercurrents of tension and anxiety that prevail throughout the mega event, also highlights positive aspects like family participation and unity, obedience and cooperation, importance of sincerity and true commitment in marriage.

Things are not as simple as they appear on the surface for almost every member of the family has a dark past which weaves together multiple sub-plots with twists and turns. As the first scene introduces us to the soon-to-be bride Vidula, it establishes the theme of marriage which dominates the whole play. When the play opens, she introduces herself in front of the camera which becomes a medium of communication between the bride and the groom. Karnad shows the role technology plays in our daily lives. Today's generation considers it their duty to keep themselves updated with the latest technological developments and cannot imagine life without it. Karnad also shows how today's youth get trapped in the cyber world and have relationships. Through Vidula's childhood memory Karnad also addresses the issue of child abuse which is widespread throughout the country.

The play also explores how individuals like Rohit are controlled by the patriarchy. The pressure of marrying someone from his own community and not a Christian girl weighs heavily on him, and he finally gives in to the will of the elders.
He allows himself to be blackmailed through pampering. The Sirurs offer him all kinds of facilities – they finance his trip to Germany and make sure his stay in Bangalore is a comfortable one. With his sisters married and abroad, he has the responsibility of looking after his parents.

Through Vidula’s wedding, Karnad reveals the deepest secrets which the characters have buried within themselves. All the characters in the play are perverted in one way or another, thus giving a microcosmic view of the damaged moral fabric of society. Karnad offers a solution to the crumbling value system through Ashwin who makes an appearance in just one scene. In a long speech he tells Vidula that his purpose is to walk the path of redemption by returning to religion and rediscovering ancient values.

*Wedding Album* is a realistic depiction of the India we live in today. With finesse Karnad shows the perversions that each character fosters and strips them in front of the readers, but not without a touch of humour. Their search for happiness takes them to the darkest corners of their souls which they hide from one another. Only Ashwin emerges as an honest character who pours his heart out, but wishes to remain a victim of the ‘melting pot’ culture. The whole play becomes a soap opera where a “wedding” finally takes place amidst the anxieties and complications, leaving the reader with a realistic album.

From powerful rulers to simple individuals, Karnad’s plays hold up a mirror to the society we live in today. In each of his plays there is an underlying moral message which is not just restricted to traditional Indian society, but rather it is immensely relevant globally and more so in today’s strife ridden and volatile world. Within every man and woman there is a miniature Tughlaq, Appanna, Nittilai or Vidula. It is up to us to deal with our conscience and shape our destinies.


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