CHAPTER - VI
KARNADIAN DRAMATURGY

Observing the contemporaneity, one can understand the transformation of Drama to theatre and the shifting of theatre to a relatively minor one. Theatre is presented through films and digitalized presentations. Though, one finds it difficult to draw a line of demarcation between Modern Drama and post Modern Drama, it is understood that the phase of Indian Drama in English is prone to such changes. On the lines of Poetry and Fiction, Drama is also subjected to the fluctuations of Modernity and post Modernity. There are many writers for Indian Drama in English who are identified with the ideas of Post Modernism and Post Colonialism. Though the list goes with the names of Badal Circa, vijay Tendulkar, Mahaswetha Devi etc., it is Girish Karanad who made a genuine representation of Post Modern and Post Colonial thematic concerns to the complete extent. Post Modern theatre is considered as a radical form as it goes against the grain of dominant cultural and technological forms. It has authentically challenged the boundaries of classical drama and completely transformed Drama into ‘performance’. As the performance reaches the realms of Dance, art happenings, pop concerts., the influence of post Modernism is subjected to critical attention. Tim Woods in *Beginning Post Modernism* (1999) identifies the post
modern contemporary Play wrights such as Howard Barker, Caryl Churchill, Howard Brenton, Brian Friel etc. Tim woods is of the opinion that in Post Modern Drama the relation of history to political sphere, the contemporary reality and the inequalities of social power based on gender discriminations are discussed. It frequently questions the ideological practices of contemporary society. The plays Girish Karnad subscribe to the prescriptions of post Modern Drama to the complete extent.

In the plays of Girish Karnad theatre it is discursive space Where the issues of History, culture, literature are subverted and deconstructed. Almost all the plays of Girish Karnad violate the classical and conventional notions of Drama. It is pertinent to observe that Drama right from the Greek times to the times of Karand has radically and tremendously changed its intuitive shape and spirit. Karnad has welcomed the changes in Drama and tuned himself to the ideas of Henrik Ibsen’s ‘Drama of Ideas’ and Bertolt Brecht;s ‘Epic Theatre’ and ‘philosophical people’s Theatre’. Karnad’s plays are the confluence of Post Colonialism, Post Modernism, New Historicism, Feminism & Deconstruction. Karnad’s plays possess infinite openness and an elaborate space deferring concluded and perpetual meaning in the aspects of culture and literature.

John Mecleod in *Beginning Post Colonialism* (2000) observes that Post Colonialism emphasis in the exploration of the Past history. As the
Past history of the colonized nations is distorted, dismantled and disfigured by the Colonial countries, the past history has to be retrieved with sole aim of proclaiming the glory of the Past history. Perceiving the Post Colonial proposition, Karnad exposes the dichotomy in the past history as: glorious and inglorious. As inglorious history is the experience of majority of the people in India, Karnad pooh poohs the subtlety in the glorious history of India. Hence is Karnad’s exploration into the past history and culture documented in religious scriptures like Ramayana and Mahabharata. The play taken up for this study *Hayavadana & Nagamandala, Tippu Sultan and Bali* are exemplifications for the subversion History and culture.

*Nagamandala* is the play that centralizes on the concept of subversion. P.P. Ajaykumar in his article “Aesthetics of Subversion: Theme and Form in Nagamandala” examines that the subversive theme is employed through subversive form. Taking the folk tales, it subverts the monologic nature of narratives. The play subverts the conventional artistic norms by using the non naturalistic techniques. Fulfilling the Brechtian notion of ‘Epic theatre’ the play maintains a distance from involving the audience emotionally and offers a deeper meaning. Karnad uses the mythical associations of snake prevalent in Indian society to convey the absence of masculine potentiality and humanity in the human beings. As human beings are over ridden by the materialistic notions, the animalistic
qualities are acquired by them. In such a dire situation, women who are in need of compassion, concern and understanding from their husbands are driven to depend on the imagination. As a result of the imagination Naga becomes an ideal erotic lover and fulfills the inner desires of Rani. The traditional history of India where mythological stories formed the beliefs of the people is exposed to convey the Indians nature of transcending the reality, by Karnad. The world reality is subverted by the Imaginary world in the first half of the play & paves the way for the ultimate subversion of Imaginary world by the world of reality. Appanna’s transformation after the snake ordeal of Rani creates artificial peace and stands out as an imaginary resolution. The play also subverts the blind faith of the people in the conventional norms of the society. Eventually, the play subverts and deconstructs the patriarchal notions morality, chastity and middle class superstitions of family life.

C.A. Bijoy in his article “The Female in Girish Karnad’s Nagamandala: Male Gaze as the Formative Imperative” brings out the socio cultural issues as reflected in the gazes of Male, Female and society. The theatrical world emerges out certain historical and socio cultural undercurrents. Rani’s character is inextricably intertwined with Appanna, Naga and the three village elders. The images and meanings in the play reduce woman’s role to that of an object. The male dominated gaze creates
knowledge and unfinished subconscious desires. Woman is created as the other. The Female principle is unraveled through the vision of Appanna, the collective vision of villagers, the vision of Naga and the authorial gaze of the images of the play. In order to understand the Female principle further, cultural social and historical forces are to be understood. In the process of establishing female vision, Feminist identity is established. This has exposed the strategies of immoralisation and deification used by society to suppress and silence the Female. The conscious effort of the male characters and strategies to maintain the power balance is evident in the critical junctures of the play.

The similar perspective is expressed by George Payyappally in the article “Girish Karnad’s Nagamandala: Re (writing) The Indian Female Stereotype”. The article observes that myths and folk tales in a patriarchal society manifest male conscious fears and wishes. In order to subvert these aspects, Karnad presents the narrator of the play in the form of young woman dressed in red sari. Each flame is shared by female. To realize the act of subversion, Karnad creates Female context. It is through Rani the protagonist, Karnad dwells on the suppression of Indian woman and her liberation.

From another perspective, the play is viewed as indictment for the socialization of men and women in Indian society. Sreenath in his article
“Girish Karnad’s Naga Mandala: The concept of Love, Marriage and Chastity” says that the play is about the narration of emotional turbulence and turmoil within the nuptial knot. It redefines the concepts of love, marriage and chastity. It examines the ways the society keeps the conservative notions of these concepts and binds the characterization of the people in the society. The male assumptions over the body, sexuality and institutions of the family are understood as a sense of power of men over women.

Hayavadana is considered to be the play written under Brechtian influence. Gino George in his article “Brechtian influence on the songs of Hayavadana”- says that the influence of Bertolt Brecht the founder of ‘Epic theatre’ is obvious. Brecht’s assertion that music provides him a powerful mechanism in reclaiming Epic drama and indispensable in communication fundamental gestus of theatrical situation. The songs in Hayavadana are introduced with great variety in significant junctures. The frustrated expression of the characters and subvereted thematic intentions are lucidly conveyed in the play between music and lyric. Centralising on womanhood, the play demystifies the traditional attitudes of ‘pativratahood’. The play fulfills the Brechtian stipulation that actors must not only sing but show a man in singing. The songs in Hayavadana echo the absurditie in life. Kapila and Devadutta are compelled to experience
the absurd situation of sharing life with one woman. Extra theatrical discourses are generated in the songs and the images of death and disaster pervade throughout the songs. The songs are used to forecast and foreshadow many of the impending events. Karnad’s intention of depicting the story of modern emancipated women is realized the elements of Western Dramaturgy. Karnad has elevated the presence of audience from passive spectators to the intelligent audience.

On the similar lines of analyzing Nagamandala, Hayavadana is perceived as a complete Feminist play. The Feminism Promulgated by Karnad is found to be the resonance of Western Feminist movement, which is grounded on individualism. His experimental approach in Hayavadana is considered to be an endeavour to assert individualism. Fulfilling his initial attempt of demystifying the traditional myths, Karnad substantiates women centred perspectives of life. Karnad demystifies the concepts of ideal ‘wifehood’ and ‘motherhood’ and shatters the image of the women. E. Narayana Kaimal & Sheena Kaimal N. the article “Girish Karnad’s Hayavadana: A Feminist Reading” considers the play as the subversion of regular principles. They observe that the play has thwarted reader / spectator expectations. When the princess wanted to marry the stallion, the male pride is subjected to shame. In another instance of mother running away from child, the expectations of the spectators are shocked. The
emancipation of Padmini from the traditional ties where she considers Kapila’s physical frame to that of Devadatta’s intellectual caliber also delivers a surprise to the audience. Dismantling the moulds of tradition, padmini expresses her yearnings to ascend the heights of happiness. Padmini’s self willing character continues even after the marriage. But the end of the play appears as if karnad is not in support of complete liberation of woman. His message proves to be compromisation but not completeness.

Rajeswari N. in the article Girish “Karnad’s Hayavadana: Folk Theatre strategies in Experimentation” examines karnad’s concentration in exploring the rich potentialities of traditional Indian Dramatic models. The article appreciates the maneuverability of Karnad in using Native/Folk traditions. Karnad’s fascination for Yakshagana, the folk theatrical form of Karnataka finds its explicit realization in this play. The play commences with Nandi, the ritualistic invocation to Lord Ganesha and ends with Bharathavakya, the valedictory prayer. The Bhagavatha or the narrator figure performs the expository work. The preliminaries of Yakshagana begin with the worship of Ganesha. Bhagavatha narrates the inner workings or feelings of the dramatic characters. The Bhagavatha remains omnipresent and keeps the tone of narration of the play. The play has used extensive use of mask and the conventional elements of folk plays which
are integral to the action of the play. In the beginning Devadatta appears on stage wearing a pale colored mask and Kapila a dark colored one. Within the context of the play they connote superficial level of meanings. Later the transposition of masks convey a significant change. The four legged Ratha of Yakshagana is replaced by a chair on which Ganesha mask is placed. Karnad makes use of the deft use of theatre strategy adding to the technical richness of the play.

From another perspective, *Hayavadana* is considered as a re-reading of History. This perspective is illustrated in the article “And Did They Live Happily Ever After? – An Inquiry: Girish Karnad’s Hayavadana” by Krishna Kutty. *Hayavadana* is considered as a transcreation. It is understood that the act of re-reading creates the space for omissions and marginalisation. The transcreation brings in reminiscences of original story. Karnad’s story takes off from the end of the original story. The solution projected in the original story proves to be problematic. Karnad tries to answer the complicated question whether the head influences the body or does the body influence the head / mind? He also tries to answer another complicated question of predicting the position of woman who knows the husband’s body and mind. In the light of these questions Karnad retells and recreates the story. The transposition of the heads at the end of the play creates further complication. When the stories of Hayavadana and
Padmini are converged the dichotomy is established. In Hayavadana’s case the head changes the body, in Padmini’s case the head shapes the body. Karnad conveys that the victory of the heads is problematic and intensely dubious. Through this conveyance, there is a significant humor churned out. The audience, the actors, nationalisms, pilgrimages, characters become the subjects for the subtle humour and irony. The retelling of the story has invested Karnad with significant probes of philosophical and ontological concerns of life. This dramastic spectacle has ushered a thought provoking and a variety of valid interpretations.

Anni Cob in the article “Girish Karnad’s Hayavadana – a Struggle of Polarities” considers the play that offered a perennial quest for completeness to Padmini. They play is perceived as highlighting the Apollonian and Dionysian truths of existence. The co existence of extreme polarities is realized in the play. Padmini’s attempts of possessing Uttampurusha to achieve her goal of procreation and completeness is perceived as ecstatic achievement. Karnad’s enduring concern in investing a old legend with a new meaning is considered as a bold attempt. The play exposes the futility of ancient customs and culture in defining the problem of transposition.

John McLeod in *Beginning Post Colonialism* (2000) classifies Feminism into First world Feminism, Second World Feminism and Third
world Feminism. As these classified Feminisms fail to articulate and represent the issues of all the women across the globe encompassing the problems of Caste, Race & Social imbalances, Subaltern theoreticians like Ranajit Guha, Gyan Pandey, Partha Charterjee, Gayathri Spivak Chakravarthy have created Subaltern Feminist consciousness. Spivak Chakravarthy’s seminal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak? has created subaltern women’s consciousness which has displaced Dalit women’s consciousness from the academics quite for some time. The Subaltern women’s consciousness is considered to be an obstacle in the way of Dalit women’s identity. The subaltern consciousness is considered to be ideological strategy of West Bengal Marxist critics to undermine the importance of the issue of Caste and its influence in formulating Indian culture. Though Girish Karnad is considered to be an intellectual playwright who espoused the cause of exposing the failure of tradition, he seems to be following the pattern set by West Bengal subaltern critics. This is obvious in the way he deals with the problems of women and Dalits. He elaborates the conventional perceptibility of presenting women and Dalits as the objects of desire and passion. Rani in Nagamandala, Padmini in Hayavadana are portrayed as characters that find their destinations by fulfilling the bodily desires. Their search for an identity is related with physical satisfactions. In fact, the physical contentment decides their familial identities and social identities. Karnad visualize the
liberation of women through sexual desires. He fails to present the women above the desires and passions. This is how the conventional literature has offered a humiliating portrayal of women, where they are objects of flesh and representations of bodily desires. Padmini in *Hayavadana* is subjected to the bodily dynamism of Kapila. This presentation is an illustration of Karnad reiterating the conventional mould in a new fashion. In the presentation of Kapila, Karnad consolidates the presentation of Dalits as bodily manifestations. Dalit identity and characterization is related to the bodily dynamism. It is pertinent to observe that Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin and white Masks* makes clear the colonial cultural strategies of projecting Negroes as pathological dangers, Jews as intellectual dangers and women as objects of sex. Karnad merely substantiates the colonial view of sex. Karnad merely substantiates the colonial view of portraying Dalits as bodily figures. It is to be understood that the subversion lies in reversing the roles. Devadatta could have been presented as Kapila’s character and vice versa. The western Feminist criticism has observed it silence and absolutely there is critical engagement on the works of Girish Karnad from the west. To this silence of the west, the Post modern theories of Body provide authenticity. Karnad seems to be unaware of the post modern disjointed bodies, disassociated bodies, disassembled bodies, dissolving bodies etc. where the importance of the body is undermined and the elevation of the mind is upheld.
To examine *Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, one should return to History or recovery for the referent as New Historicism puts it. New Historicism is a critical discipline that initiated the method of retracing the genuine history. As History is used as a toll of mainstream ideology, New Historicism explores the reasons for concealing the truth of genuine history. Michael Warner phrases New Historicism as: “The text is historical, and history is textual”. Frederic Jameson in The Political Unconscious insisted “Always Historicise” (9). New historicists seeks historical scholarship. They are concerned with extra literary matters – letters, diaries, films, paintings, medical treatises. They look forward to reveal opposing historical tensions in a text. New Historians examine cross cultural lines in borrowing coincidences across disciplines. They consider this as phenomena of the text. As Karnad tries to reinterpret the history of Tipu Sultan, against the grain of mainstream historical misrepresentation, New Historicism proves to be an appropriate tool of criticism. The mainstream historical interpretation has portrayed Tipu as the communal king and dubbed his rule as the Islamic rule. Karnad by drawing the attention of the people, resists the misrepresentation and presents him as the secular king who stood for self reliance and self respect. He is the king who fought against the Colonial power till his death. He never tried to compromise the ideals of liberty, equality and independence. Karnad in this play tries to dismantle the communal portrayal of Tippu and depicts him as the king who even in
his sub-consciousness of the mind is cautious about protecting the ideals of Independence irrespective of religion, class and caste.

The first dream reveals the ambition of Tipu Sultan. It also reveals the secular fabric that Tipu has established in his rule. In his dream Tipu sees the dilapidated temple and wishes to enter the temple to ascertain the condition. He sees the images of women and inquires about their condition. Karnad proves that even in his inner psyche, Tipu has carried the secular thinking. Though Tipu’s ambition is a classical as Alexander the great, his confidence cuts above the British hegemony. Karnad proves that even in his inner psyche Tipu has not possessed the minutest idea of communalism. He has never acted as the representative of Islamic religion and culture. Tipu’s spirit of inquiry is an obvious exemplification of secularism. Karnad has succeeded in dismantling the misrepresentation of History.

The second dream establishes the fact the Marathas who are considered as the upholders of Hindi pride are in fact timid people. Mainstream History has presented Marathas as the warriors who fought against the insecure activities of Muslim Kings. Karnad tries to prove that Marathas are the people who compromised with British Hegemony. Marathas warring spirit was evident only in protecting the Hindu religion. Marathas attempts of protecting Hindu religion from the onslaught of
Islamic kings in represented as the war of Independence by the pseudo historians. Tippu’s dream that posits Maratha soldiers as women is a subversion mainstream perceptibilities.

The third dream reveals the failure of Tipu’s secularism. Tipu dreams as if he has won the war against the British with the support of all the sections of the society. Confidently taking the dream as the ultimate truth, Tipu plunges into terrific war with the British. It is only during the course of the war, Tipu realizes that all the sections, irrespective of religion, looked after by him all these years withdrew their support intentionally. The reason for their withdrawal is communal mind of the other sections of the society. It is the sectarian mind of other sections of the society that creates a situation where the great warrior of Independence is left alone to be defeated by the British. It is only at the end of the play. Karnad realizes that his rule is obstacle for the development of the society. The reality of the defeat is considered as a dream by Tipu. This obviously speaks of the truth being confused between dream and reality.

Karnad, to realize the task of subversion and challenge to misunderstood notions of the people, makes use of the dream. He considers ‘the Dream’ holds the spirit of subversion. The unchallenged notions of the society are contested by the Discursive Dreams. Every dream is effectively and strategically used by Karnad to achieve social goal.
and destiny of Dream. In the Freudian interpretation, the subconscious region in the mind speaks the truth and represents ego of an individual. Karnad dreams on behalf of the nation to reveal the truth buried in the psyche and ego of the nation.

Karnad’s recent play *Fire and the Rain* almost repeats the themes of *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala* as far the portrayal of women is concerned. Nittilai is presented as the character occupied in fulfilling the desires. The play centralizes on misunderstood brahminism represented in the character of Aravasu. The destiny of Aravasu, Paravasu and Nittilai is confined to performing of yagna. In India traditional religious culture, yagnas, yagas had a significant place in deciding the destiny of the society. Karnad is of the view the sacred religious rituals of Hinduism are related with the atrocities of women. Every yaga is related to the victimization of women. Yaga’s like Sarpayaga, Aswemedha yaga, etc, had women’s exploitation as the centrality. But the objective of Yaga’s is propagated as the welfare of society. Karnad while exploring into the reasons for understanding the importance of rituals posits the issues of contention of Brahmanism and humanism. The way the brahminical society has exhausted its intellectuality in the name of acquiring power and legitimacy to perform sacrifices is ridiculed.
Bali reflects the contemporary cultural situation. It highlights the concept of non violence observed in the lives of Jain kings. But unfortunately, the suspicion of masculinity over the feminity mars the theme of the play. The king doubts the chastity of the queen on the basis of her unconscious entry into the temple where the mahout rests. The attempt of the king in finding out the reasons for the presence of the queen in the dilapidated temple demand the psycho analytical perspectives. Karnad in his serious probe ridicules the practice of non violence by the Jains. Karnad explicitly brings out the hidden violence inherent in the minds of people. Practicing non violence religion will not redeem the society from the inherent practices of violence. Here, Karnad emphasizes more on the violence of mind. The Jain king practitioner and propagator of Jain religion, fumes violence through his mind by suspecting the chastity of his queen. The suspicion leads to the performance of sacrifice in another form.

The dramatic world of Girish Karnad is debated in the light Post modernism as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. Significant changes that took place in the contemporary theatre under the influence of Allan kaprow are reflected in Girish Karnad’s dramaturgy. Allak Kaprow emphasized on ‘anti totalisation’ and ‘non-teleological’ dramatic happenings. Kaprow has refused a fitting closure or ending. The plays of
Karnad subscribe to this perception to the complete extent. All the plays of Karnad refuse the closed endings and the totalisation of meanings. They echo the lines of Derridian Deconstruction that there is nothing outside the Text. The society becomes the Text. The world and the experiences of the individuals are considered to be providing a consolidated textual authenticity.

Karnad’s attempts are considered as the breakthroughs from the realist theatre. They are in tune with Tadeusz Kantor’s attempts of ‘Impossible theatre’. The collage method practiced in ‘Impossible theatre’ questions the exclusive right of the creator to shape the work. Such attempts of deconstruction are found in Karnad’s plays. Richard Foreman’s ‘Ontological hysterical theatre’ exemplifies the multiplicity of contemporary theatre. The sophisticated plurality of visual and auditory events are illustrated in almost all the plays of Karnad bringing the sense of post modern performance. All the characters in Karnad strive towards self containment and self sufficiency. Through systematic distortions and continuity of frustrations and coherences, on the lines of Foreman’s theatre Karnad’s plays exemplify a disruption of closure.

Nick Kaye in Post Modernism and Performance (1993) discusses the development of theatre that disrupted the structural and formal boundaries of theatrical representations. He has considered that the works
of Michale Kirby and Robert Wilson mounted an attack on the autonomy of the work. Karnad through all his plays questions the relevance of withholding blind beliefs on the conventional notions of Drama. Dance is another element of Post modern theatre. Sally Bane in *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post Modern Dance* (1987) says that Post Modern Dance breaks the conventions of western conceptions of classical grace ad harmony. Karnad’s use of Dance in theatrical performance is a resonance of Post modernism. But the conventional criticism associates Dance with the revival of classical culture.

Girish Karnad’s theatre is a total compendium of Augusto Boal’s *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974), which has produced serious exercises for a revolutionary theatre and theatrical strategies. His plays are not in passive complicity with any oppressive situations. They have succeeded in posing perennial and perpetual challenges to the ills of the contemporary society.

Karnad’s plays have offered a dialectical interpretation of incomprehensible problems of the contemporary society. His plays have succeeded in displaying dialogical process in arriving at the permanent resolutions of many deadlock social situations.

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