PREFACE

Girish Karnad, one of the greatest of living Indian dramatists, is a versatile genius. His rise as a prominent playwright in 1960s marked the coming of the age of Modern Indian playwriting in Kannada, just a Badal Sarkar’s in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar’s in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh’s in Hindi. He is the recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India.

For the last four decades, Girish Karnad has been composing plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He has translated his major plays into English, and has received critical acclaim across India. His plays have been translated into several Indian languages and directed by eminent directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B.V.Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan and Amal Allana. He is also active in the world of Indian cinema working as an actor, director, and screenwriter, both in Hindi and Kannada, earning numerous awards along the way. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

Girish Karnad found a new approach like drawing on historical and mythological sources to deal with the contemporary themes and the existentialist crisis of modern man, through his characters locked in psychological and philosophical conflicts. His famous and best-loved play
Tughlaq (1964) is about an idealist 14th Century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughlaq. The play is seen as an allegory on the Nehruvian era which started with ambitious idealism and ended up in disillusionment. This play established Karnad as one of the most promising playwrights of the country. Another monumental work Hayavadana (1971) was based on a theme drawn from The Transposed Heads, a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, the story of which is originally found in Kathasaritsagara. Karnad employed the folk theatre form of Yakshagana most effectively in Hayavadana. Naga Mandala (Play with the Cobra, 1988) was based on a folk tale related to him by A.K.Ramanujam; this play brought him the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989.

The Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis subsequently commissioned him to write the play, Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain). However, Taledanda (Death by Beheading, 1990) came out before the commissioned work; it is set in the backdrop of the rise of Veerashaivism, a radical protest and reform movement in 12th century Karnataka, though Karnad uses it to deal with current issues.

As I am very much interested in the plays of Girish Karnad I tried to collect all the critical interpretations on his works to understand him perceptively. I am very much surprised to find out that his use of myth in all his plays is not taken up as a comprehensive study by any critic. There
are some essays on his use of myth in one or two plays. So I felt that a comprehensive study of his use of myth in all his plays has to be taken up for my doctoral work. I have chosen all his works translated into English including his historical plays in which he almost travels on a slippery land between history and myth.

My thesis entitled, “Elucidating Myth and Human Psychology in Girish Karnad’s Dramaturgy” is divided into six chapters. The scope of this research is to study the use of myth in the plays of Girish Karnad. Girish Karnad has rightly perceived that our myths govern the consciousness of Indians, and even their basic attitudes towards everyday life are influenced by the great epics The Ramayana, The Mahabharatha, The Bhagavata, the Puranas, and story cycles like the Jataka Tales, Panchatantra Kathasaritsagara, Vikramadityacharita, and others, which are replete with myths and legends of our land, and which have, in turn, generated countless myths and legends in various parts of our country. Therefore, Karnad found that using myths to deal with contemporary issues was a sure way to capture the imagination of the reading public and audiences, and draw their attention to vital issues of modern times. Karnad obviously believes that literature is concerned with the exploration of both social realities and individual consciousness. Karnad could see that Indian myths are not static but evolutionary structures that could easily and aptly
be bent to suit the needs of the writer. Through his works Karnad, master-dramatist affirms that Indian myths are vital, meaningful and inspirational to revitalize Indian drama. Besides establishing the unbreakable bond between the self and the society, Girish Karnad through the use of Indian myths in his plays, resolves the tension between a unique self and the community consciousness.

I have all the plays of Girish Karnad translated into English for this study. They are: Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Nagamandala, Taledanda, Bali: The Sacrifice, The Fire and The Rain, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan and Yayati.

Indian Drama in English is one of the significant contemporary literary genres. The appraisal of Indian Drama obviously shows that while Drama in various Indian regional languages has shown a marked development, it has lagged behind in Indian English. As a matter of historical evidence Drama in English has traveled, transformed and metamorphosed rapidly beyond the recognition. Drama has encompassed all the Marxist, Post Modern, Post Colonial, New Historicist, Feminist and Deconstructionist approaches of literature and criticism. Acquiring all these literary and critical changes Drama has become theatrical performance. The 19th Century renaissance in Drama initiated by Norwegian Dramatist Henrik Ibsen in the form of ‘theatre of Ideas’ has
consolidated itself in Shavian Dramaturgy and Brechtian Dramaturgy. The immediate reason for the immobility Indian Drama is the absence of living theatres. The living theatres that have rapidly promoted the Shakespearean Dramas are terribly absent in Indian culture. This absence has not allowed the playwrights to write systematic and comprehensive plays on the issues of contemporary culture. Another important aspect to be considered seriously is the activity of translation. The popular regional plays are locked for a longer time without being translated into English. This makes us to understand that the readership in English is poor and the idea of reaching out the wider audience remained a distant dream for the playwright who tried to write in English.

The problems encountered by Indian Drama in English are dismantled gradually. The problem of live theatres and the act of translation are taken up at a war foot. Overcoming these two problems helped Indian drama to flourish on par with the other genres of literature. Suddenly all the big cities like Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta appreciating and encouraging places for Indian Drama in English. This phenomenon has provided a space for the entry of Indian Dramatists like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mahaswetha Devi etc., who tried their best in providing parallel reflections of Post Colonial and Post Modern tendencies of theatre. This group of radical Indian Dramatists in English
have tried their best to explore into the past history of India and succeeded in offering a dialectical inquiry into the conventions Indian culture, religion and literature.

Girish Karnad is ranked as the front runner of this particular phenomenon that completely changed the Indian Drama in English. Taking the background of Indian mythology as a spring board to his dramas, Karnad has succeeded in generating a philosophical and intellectual revision of the folk tales, stories only to find relevance with contemporaneity. Carrying the Indian Dramatic flavour, Karnad has tried to depict the contemporary social problems encountered by common man. As Indian society is a caste ridden, Karnad has offered a dialectical probe and dialogical solution to the incomprehensible problem of Caste. Caste in its confinement to regional diversity is genuinely portrayed only to offer the Universal solution. In this process, Karnad approaches Caste like race, gender, freedom and inequality. The very attitude of considering ‘Caste’ like other problems sustained the hegemony of Caste over Indian culture. The imprisonment and inescapability of Karnad is considering ‘Caste’ as specific issue to be deciphered is reflected in the non response of Western criticism. However, Girish Karnad is considered as a dramatist who revolutionized the Indian Drama from the clutches of conventional religious and cultural hegemony. He has tried his best to explain the inner
and real essence of Indian traditions and culture. The enrichment of the
categorization and the intellectualization of the audience is achieved by
Karnad. In this process Karnad’s contribution is realized beyond theatre.
It is satiated in feature films, documentaries and television serials. He has
represented Indian in the west as an emissary of art and culture.

The present study is aimed at providing multidimensional
perspectives of Karnad’s dramaturgy. The study is centralized in offering
a strong impact of his rebellion against the cultural hegemony. Obviously
it is understood that Karnad did not choose this form for communication
but was rather chosen by it. As a conscious writer, Karnad has moulded
and shaped the discourse of Indian Drama and sculpted its perfection. His
plays have well made plots, interesting characters, authentic dialogues and
visual impacts. To achieve the multiple purposes, Karnad has used the
strategies of folk theatre. The cultural forms of Folk culture are modified
to suite the modern stage, ignoring the classical tradition to the complete
extent.

Chapter one titled as “The Evolution of Indian Drama” examines the
circumstances that paved the way for the consciousness of recognizing
Drama in English. It tries to establish that the consciousness of Drama in
English is in relevance to the social consciousness of freedom movement.
The chapter offers the scholarly information about the first generation of
writers of Drama in English and their confrontation with the social issues of pre independent society. The contribution of Indian drama in English in creating the consciousness that inflated the sentiments of Nationalism cannot be ignored. The chapter has offered a conceptual clarity in understanding Indian Drama in English by disagreeing with the co option of Sanskrit Drama as the origin of Indian Drama in English. It should be observed that scholarly persuasion of exploring the genesis of Indian Drama in English cannot consider Sanskrit Drama as the sole representation of India Drama. It has to acknowledge without hesitation the existence of Dramas in many of the regional languages of India. Offering the clarity in the genesis of Drama in English, the chapter has offered the required information about the first generation of Indian playwrights whose works are translated into English either by themselves or by others. Stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P.Kailasam, Harindranath Chatopadhyaya and Bharathi Sarabhai have written the best known plays with a unique blend of simplicity and complexity. It is argued that the early playwrights have carried the Elizabethan tradition of Drama. It is only in the Post Independent period playwrights like Lakhan Deb, Gurucharan Das, Gieve Patel, Pratap sharma etc., tried their artistic assets into professional perfection. It is argued that the contemporary Indian Drama is dominated by the translations into English from other regional languages. The chapter has offered a brief bio critical information about
Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Mahaswetha Devi and Vijay Tendulkar. The thematic concerns of their works are discussed to some extent. These evolutionary circumstances are shown as the positive signs for the emergence of Girish Karnad. The chapter has tried to offer a brief synoptical view of all the works of Karnad by the identifying the specific works on which the rest of the dissertation concentrates.

The second chapter titled as “New Vistas” critically examines the popular plays Fire and the Rain, The Dreams of Tippu Sultan & Bali. The chapter offers a plain narration of the story of the plays with textual illustration with a brief critical outlook. The chapter establishes that these two popular plays are considered as the best plays in the light of Karnad’s attempt to bring the appreciation and criticism of the religious rites and customs of Indian society. The two plays have concentrated in highlighting the women’s perspectives. In the light of the centrality of women Karnad succeeds in making a vehement indictment of Indian religious rites and customs linked with the psyche of Indian womanhood. The two plays have taken up highly complicated and philosophical aspects of humanism, masculinity and feminity. Though Karnad succeeds in his style to offer rational solutions to these incomprehensible questions, he seems to be unconsciously imprisoned within the Brahminical intellectuality. The
chapter ends with an indication to offer a better criticism of the two plays in the fourth chapter.

The third chapter titled as ‘Elucidating Mythical History’ offers the critical analysis of the plays Tale Danda & The Dreams of Tippu Sultan. The thematic narration of these plays is offered with textual illustrations. The discussion of these plays is only to establish the artistic perfection of Girish Karnad and his virtuosity. The different themes of these plays have proved that Karnad is contemporary in trying to deal with cultural and ideological confrontations at the National level. The Fire and the Rain has exposed the victimization of women linked to the performances of Yagas and religious rites of Hinduism. The Dreams of Tipu Sultan has resurrected the image of Tipu as the secular king. Karnad dismantles the attempts of communal sections to defame the secular image of Tipu. Karnad uses ‘Dream’ as a subversive and discursive space.

The Fourth chapter titled as “Myth & Psychology” examines Hayavadana & Nagamandala in light of contemporary critical theory. The critical relevance of Post Modernism, Post colonialism, New Historicism, Feminism is established in this chapter. Simplifying the elements of Post modern dramas and offering the evolution of Dramas into theatrical performances, new insights are established in reading Hayavadana and Nagamandala. These two plays are argued from the point of portraying
Women and Dalits as objects of sexual desires. The depictions of Rani, Padmini, Kapila is in tune with colonial depictions. Illustration of this perception is established from the psychoanalytic perspectives. It is argued that by depicting Women and Dalits as the objects of sexual desires Karnad is reiterating the colonial framework and hence is the reason for the silence of Western criticism on karnad’s works. The Fifth Chapter “Myth and Ritual” examines Fire and the Rain and Bali: The Sacrifice. The sixth chapter “Karnadian Dramaturgy” examines the plays in the light of Post Modernism, Post Colonialism, New Historicism, Feminism and other related contemporary streams of literary criticism.