CHAPTER - III
ELUCIDATING MYTH & HISTORY

Max Muller considers myth as the disease of language (Mythology: An introduction.23). Going by this perception myth is the polar opposite of history that deals with reality. Edmond Cassirer, following Mueller contrasted between mythopoeic perception view and mathematical – logical perception. The former is the subjective understanding of the world whereas the later, objective. Wole Soyinka has contested this kind of neat and bipolar classification which opposes myth and history. He argues that there is a continuum between myth and history. (Myth, Literature and the African world.30)

There is a need to resituate the theatre in the view of the above situation. Both myth and history have the dimensions of enactment. Ritual deals the enactment of myth just as actual lives of men and women constitute the enactment of history. Theatre is the meeting place of the subjective and objective, the personal and impersonal. It is for this reason, theatre becomes a valid form of communication. Theatrical experience is a delicate balance between the inner and outer. Though history is considered more objective than myth, drama and theatre have proved the dialectics between myth and history, the two great sources of imagination in
theatrical art. Perhaps it is in this sense that Aristotle argued that poetry is truer than history.

There is an alchemic process in drama and theatre that transforms bare facts of history into gripping episodes of mythical imagination when the plain prose narrative of the histories of *Lear* and *Macbeth* in North’s Chronicles are contrasted with the passionate and penetrating treatment of the same events in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* and when the ordinary details of Swedish history are transformed into universal issues, *Master Olof* by August Strindberg, the transformation of history into myth can be clearly understood.

Similar creative transformation can be observed in Sanskrit drama. Shudraka’s *Mrichikatika* is based on known facts of history. According to the rules of Bharata, being an illustration of the genre of genetic composition called ‘prakarana’, it has to be based on real life facts or situations completely imaged by the playwright. What is engaging about *Mrichikatika* is not its conformity to the facts, real or imagine, but the aesthetic form imposed on the sequence of events through dramatic imagination.

Aristotle said “plot is the soul of tragedy.” (*Poetics*.62) E.M. Forester, in his analysis of fictional imagination, lays great emphasis on the new order that fictional imagination imposes on the actual sequence of
facts. Just as in visual arts, the space of painting or architecture has not confirmed to the actual contours of space but reorganizes the spatial particulars into a new artistic design. A literary or a dramatic work organizes temporal events into another kind of organization or arrangement as required by the artistic demands of fiction or a drama. Aristotle calls it plot and Natyasasthra refers to the same phenomenon as samvidhana.

Mirchikatika begins with the chasing of Vasantasena by the Pratinayaka Shakara, when darkness is descending. When she tries to escape from his clutches, she meets Charudatha. The instant flowering of their reciprocal love is the theme of the rest of the play. This happens through the deft handling of imaginative scenes like the exchange of jewels etc. Into this main plot is oven the sub-plot of the political conflict between Aryaka and Palaka, the protagonist and antagonist of the struggle. The confusion the political realm runs parallel to confusions in the romance of the hero and heroine. At the end of the play the reunion of Charudatta and Vasantasena is timed together with the happy turn of political events whereby and unjust king is replaced by a just king. What constitutes the beauty of Mrichikatika is not just a sequence of events but the new synchronicities, paralles and contrasts introduced by the playwright, Shudraka. Thus there is always a reorganization of actual history into
meaningful plots, whether it is an ancient classical drama or the plays of Shakespeare.

Even more fundamental than this is the marking of the beginning middle and end which is followed by the aesthetic structure of the play in between through the creation of plots and sub-plots. This new order is not historical. The concept of beginning, middle and end is a priori. The plot or ‘samvidhana’ of the play is not part of historical events but a product of a historical aesthetic imagination. It is not objective in the sense of the scientific and the historical but it is a subjective phenomenon. The next step is related to the aesthetic structure of dramatic and fictional work to the elements of mythical imagination.

Myths, among other things, speak of the first and last things. The cosmogenic myth that narrates the birth of a God, race or an object is the foundation of the mythical structure. Similarly there are a whole variety of mythical narratives of the end. According to Pagan mythologies like those in India, both Vedic and Non-Vedic, all beginnings and ends are provisional because the temporal order of the cosmos is not linear but cyclical. The myth of recurrence of four yugas is a manifestation of the same principle of cyclical recurrence as the belief in reincarnation is common to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and many primitive religions.
However, according to Judaic mythology the creation and end are once-for-all events.

The mythical perspectives of the linear and cyclical temporality influence the cosmogenic theories of modern science also. Jean’s Big Bang Theory is a manifestation of linear temporality whereas the opposite view contained in the theory of Constant creation, which is now abandoned, is a manifestation of cyclical mythology. The linear and cyclical mythical versions of the objective truth contained in history co-exists because both are aspects of human experiences. Individuals are born and pass away but species continue and individual flower may blossom and whither but flower as a species will outlast the death of so many flowers and trees. To opposite and complimentary mythical temporality constitutes the chief elements of fictional and dramatic imagination. A play, story or a novel has a beginning and end. But in between there are replications, parallels and contrasts of characters and situation. This process involves the embedding of the cyclical temporality into the liner temporality. It is in this sense that drama and theatre are the meeting places of the mythical and historical, the repetitive and non-repetitive, the cyclical and linear.

One can identify a cross – section of plays across the world as historical drama. Apart from Mrichikatika, Visakadatta’s Mudrarakshasa
is also founded on actual history. A sizeable portion of Shakespeare’s
drama is made of histories. Apart from King Lear and Macbeth, we have
plays based on Roman history (*Titus Andracines, Julies Caesar, Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra*); plays based on British history (*Henry plays and Richard plays*). August Strindberg enriched Swedish drama with
a series of plays based on the life and times of *Gustav*, the pioneer of
Swedish Reformation. Many modern playwrights have also attempted
historical plays. Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* is one such play, so also Albert
Camus’ *Caligula*. All these plays create gripping dramatic plots out of the
sequence of actual historical events and elicit from them meanings and
messages pertaining to their own times and congenial to their own
individual talent. Brecht sees in the life-story of Galileo how scientific
truth has to be preserved in times when superstitious tyrannies prosper.
Albert Camus, in his treatment of Roman history through the story of the
dictator *Caligula*, depicted the absurd nature of all human experience.
This injection of new meaning into the historical narrative happens thanks
to different kinds of dramatic structures imposed on the material. Brecht’s
epic theatre achieved this effect by embedding the dramatic into the
narrative. The theatre of the absurd does what it does by emphasizing
manifestations of non-causality in human experiences. While discussing
*Myth and literature*, Northrop Fry observes,
“We cannot study the genre without the help of the literary social historian, the literary philosopher, and the student of the history of ideas and for the archetype we need a literary anthropologist. But not that we have got our central pattern of criticism established, all these interests are seen as converging or literary criticism instead of receding from it into psychology and history and the rest. In particular, the literary anthropologist who chases the source of the Hamlet legend from the pre-Shakespeare play to Saxo and from Saxo to nature-myths, is not running away from Shakespeare, he is drawing closer to the archetypal form which Shakespeare created.” (Myth and Literature, 92)

Modern Indian playwrights in different Indian languages have deployed the sense and background of history in many important plays. The famous Bengali playwright Girish Chanda Ghosh wrote a popular play about Siraj-ud-Ulla, a Bengali ruler who fought against British imperialism. The well-known, Hindi playwright, Jaishankar Prasad wrote historical plays like Samudra Gupta. In Punjabi, there are several plays written about the twists and turn of the history of Sikhism. Vijay Tendulkar’s Marathi play Gashiram Kotwal centres around the history of Peshwa’s in Maharashtra. The Tamil Playwright Indira Parthasarathi has written three famous historical plays; Aurangazeb and two more plays on the history of saints,
Nandanath and Ramanujan. In Kannada there are several plays about the twelfth century Veera Saiva movement by three major playwrights of Karnataka, P.Lankesh, H.S.Shivaprakash and Girish Karnad. Further, both Shivaprakash and Girish Karnad have written too widely performed plays of the life of Tipu Sultan. Girish Karnad’s epoch-making play, Tughlaq which set him on the successful course of theatrical renowned is also a historic play.

Girish Karnad, except in his Anju Malliage, draws Broken Images and Flowers and Photo Album always draws his materials from the history or mythology. In fact his historical and mythological plays are much more popular and widely performed than his contemporary plays. The complexity of his historical and mythological plays is unmatched in his treatment of contemporary lays. He has the better knack for eliciting contemporary meanings from historical or mythological materials than from contemporary material.

Karnad’s Tughlaq gained historical importance because it became a fascinating allegory for the well meaning ironies of Nehruian politics. The disillusionment of middle class intelligence with the first independent state is the stuff of this play. It is therefore, resonated with the experience of the first post-independent generation. After its historic production in the
surroundings of Lal Quila in Delhi by Ibrahim Elkaji, this play has grown in fame and influence.

*Tale-Danda* goes back to the twelfth Veerashaiva Protestant movement of Karnataka. This play was written in early nineties. Prior to that they had been two other widely discussed plays on the same subject, The first was *Sankranthi* by P.Lankesh (1973) and *Mahachaitra* by H.S.Shivaprakash (1985). Lankesh’s *Sankranthi* has already been considered a masterpiece of literature and theatre. Shivaprakash’s play also praised for its poetic excellence by Girish Karnad himself. It became highly controversial during the early nineties as it was bitterly attacked by religious fundamentalists and stoutly defended by progressive groups. Lankesh’s play underscores the ironies of the saint Basavanna’s socio religious reformation. His explicit purpose of espousing the Dalit cause leads to the ironic sacrifice of a Dalit young man. Shivaprakash’s play by making Basavanna the absent hero, (*Parokshanayaka,* ) emphasizes the collective nature of movement and the politics of cast struggle involved. Girish Karnad’s play takes a departure from both these plays by focusing mainly on the character of the emperor Bijjala, who becomes a saint of the struggle between forces of order and anarchy.
The choice of a theme to write a play depends upon the various social and psychological obligations of a dramatist. Karnad points out that he has chosen the story of *Thughlaq* as it

reflected the slow disillusionment his generation felt with new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence and the coming to terms with cynicism and real politics”

(Author’s introduction, *Three plays*, 7).

While presenting the analogy between the rule of the fourteenth century Monarch of Delhi, Mohammed-Bin-Tughlaq and the contemporary democratical rule led by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, Karnad has to tread on a slippery lane between myth and history.

Medieval Muslim historians like Zia-Ud-Din-Barini regards Tughlaq as a dangerous heretic, Orientalistic British historians like James Mill and Vincent Smith regard him a type of a brilliant but unprincipled Oriental despot eliminated by the British Rule in India. History is always based on the facts but it is not an exaggeration to say that the history is always written by the winners or the Victorious people and still the history of India is not concretized as the past was recorded only by the non-Indian historians. Indian history can be considered an example of the world history. Hence, the proportion in which the fact and fiction are combined
to make the history can’t be traced out. The case of the history of Tughlaq is a perfect example to this as still many versions of this nature can be surmised from the various sources. Tughlaq is considered a very great scholar and a great intelligent and at the same time he is popularly called “Mad Tughlaq.” Thus the semi-historical and semi-mystical elements are used to write a play which the audience can apply to their own situation. As Bhagabat nayak rightly observes, “For Karnad, history is no longer a static background for the play; rather it is timeless, alive, absurd and mysterious in its entirety” (Girish Karnad’s plays, 153). Karnad comments on history twice in the play. In the second scene Mohammed tells Barani, “Barani is a historian – he is only interested in playing chess with the shadows of the dead.” Tughlaq’s words obliterates the barriers between the myth and the history. Barani, the historian, states (in VIII scene), “History is not made only in state craft, its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned man.” The historians’ words give a right perceptive to the history.

Karnad’s Tughlaq contrasts the self-sacrificing, spiritual and ethical politics of the times of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru and the despotic, megalomaniac and cruel politics of the times of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi. It also focuses its attention on the conflict between the secularism and the forces that subvert that ideology during the period. Thus Girish
Karnad’s main intention is to present the conflict between higher ideas and the practical implementations and the individuals’ relationship with the God and the social – ritualistic religious forces.

Bhagabat Nayak points out that –

Karnad’s protagonist in the play is a faithful portrait and profile of the sultan Mohammed-Bin-Tughlaq (1325-1351), a one dimensional scholar and most idealist ruler of medieval India. (Girish Karnad’s plays. 156).

Karnad develops his character as an idealist, a staunch follower of Islam, a philosopher and a true statesman who wants to bring and a good world for the people.

Tughlaq’s obsessive concern for creating a utopian society paradoxically made him turn his kingdom into a ‘Kitchen of deaths’ and himself “the lord of skins”. He has complete confidence in his abilities and thinks that he can create a heaven single handedly. By depicting an archetypal aspect of the human predicaments, Karnad transforms Tughlaq into a classic hero like Hamlet, Dr.Faustus and Galilio.

Karnad seems to be more influenced by Albert Camus’ Caligula, a play based on the life of an emperor who is also considered the maddest of the Julio-clandian dynasty. Like Caligula, Karnad’s Tughlaq also deals with the dangers of philosophical absolution’ (E.Freeman, The theatre of
Both Caligula and Thuglaq get alienated existentially and becomes tyrant using the power absolutely and indulging in senseless cruelty. Both of them are for above their contemporaries by virtue of their intelligence and they challenged their societies by forcing new ideas. Like Camus, Karnad also takes more liberties with the history and the mythical overtones of their themes become quite obvious. Karnad uses the mythical elements to make the history contemporaneous. In an interview with Rajinder Paul, Karnad says:

> What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq’s history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi… and one of the greatest failures also. And with in a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as short comings with in him, such as his impatience, his cruelty. His feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early fifties India had also come very far in the same direction. The twenty year period seemed to me a very striking parallels”.

(Rajender Paul, Girish Karnad Interviewed” Enact, June 1971. 32).
Tughlaq becomes an archetypal character as in him there is, it is not difficult to trace out, a conflict between the idealist and a Machiavellian strategian. As his means and ends don’t match together he is doomed to be a failure. “He is divided between populist rationality and political reality, individual autonomy and inclined audacity, truth and falsehood, hypothesis and hypocrisy” (Girish Karnad’s plays. 157).

Tughlaq wants to improve the human condition by ameliorating the life of his subjects. He is an egoist who believes his intellect alone and tries playing the whole political game single handedly. To achieve a socio-political stability, he resorts to institutionalize murder. Jawaharlal Nehru, in he The Glimpses of World History, presents his character with a lot of perception and understanding. He writes

Tughlaq was a most learned and accomplished man both in person and Arabic. He has studied philosophy and logic, even Greek Philosophy. He knew something of mathematics and science and medicine. He was a brave man, and was for his times quite a paragon of learning and a wonder. And yet, and yet this paragon was a monster of cruelty and seems to have been quite mad! He came to the throne by killing his own father. He had fantastic notions of conquering Persia and China. (The Glimpses of World History. 214).
Karnad conceives the character of Tughlaq as a tragic caricature to pose a number of questions about the nature of man and his efforts to realize his dreams. In the predicament of Tughlaq, Karnad found a contemporary man who is disillusioned. In terms of politics it is a gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence and the coming to terms with cynicism and real politic (*Three plays.7*).

Tughlaq believes that he is superior to the other kings as he thinks that he alone has an ideological and philosophical quest. As it is a quest in a neurotic self he gets alienated himself from the others and his psychic distance from nature consequently dehumanizes him. Tughlaq can’t visualize that nothing good comes out of an evil. He thinks that there is nothing evil in his method of getting to the power of killing his own father as his aim is to bring out an enmity between the Hindus and the Muslims. He thinks that the end is important than the means and so practices hypocrisy and dualism to bring out a welfare state. Neither the Hindus nor the Muslims trust him as his method of state craft is filled with betrayal, suspicion and infidelity. He never allows others to criticise him and uses force to make them subservient. Thus he spreads only dehumanization and infidelity.
He resorts to violent means to fulfill his dreams. He forces the entire citizens of Delhi to move to Daulatabad and introduces the copper currency without realizing the consequences. The perpetual manipulations and the craving for the supreme power land him in madness. He finds freedom only in loneliness. “His madness is a product of the abnormality and cunningness which have a therapeutic effect on his metaphysical reason” (Girish Karnad’s plays.160).

Tughlaq’s life turns into a misery as a result of the conflict between his self and soul. He becomes an eccentric, insane, hypocritical short-tempered and violent ruler because of his self-defeating nature and weak strategies. His virtues which aim at utopia and vices which drag him to damn failure are always at fight with each other. His sincere attempt to have a peaceful kingdom makes him a hero. His ambition, anxiety, anger and anguish transform him into a villain. The struggle between the personal ideology and the isms of statecraft, spiritual thinking a spatial maneuver, optimistic carvings and existential longings and domination and suffering make his life an ordeal. He craves for a companionship as a man but estranged from the others because of his own acts. Though he aims at a socialistic goal, his nature makes him a tyrant. To quote the words of Bhagabat Nayak,
Living in the cocoons of his ideology he has captivated himself like a lion in the cage of a squirrel and dares the carrions of his subjects in the name of reform. He thus appears in a state of physical suicide preferring to enjoy the coldest solitude in Nietzschean sense” (Girish Karnad’s plays, 161).

The very attempt to make politics and religion as complementary to each other always ended up as a failure in history. In his “My Experiments with Truth”, Gandhi writes. …

To see the universal and all pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meamest of creation as one self. And a man who aspires after that can not afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my denotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say with out slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means (Nvajivan Publishing House, 2008.385).

But Gandhi’s life itself is also an example to show that the result is a disaster. The very attempt to bring politics and religion closer is laudable, but the history tells that it is quite impossible. Tughlaq fails to get a cue from the history as he expects religion to guide politics but not the vice versa as the oldest trick in the world. But he uses power to imprison the
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religious men’. Shaik Iman-Ud-Din rebukes him “God has given you everything – power, learning, intelligence, talent... but you are trying to become another God” (Three Plays.164). The relationship between the man and the God is always an eluding one as no single answer is a satisfactory one. Christian martyrs think that they have become instruments in the hands of the God and they should loose their will in the Will of God. (Murder in the Cathedral,) Hinduism celebrates the detached action, where man should act but should not have any passionate attachment to it. Islam asserts that the God is supreme and the worship of other Gods is a hearsay. But Tughlaq has his own concept of God. He argues, “There is dirt and sickness in my kingdom... why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men” (Three plays. 164). But he asserts that “he has never denied the words of God... because its’ his bread and drink (Three plays. 164). Imam-Ud-Din rightly accuses accuses him, “Religion! Politics! Take heed, Sultan, one day these verbal distinction will rip you into two.” Tughlaq accepts the criticism, but argues

And my kingdom too is what I am – torn into pieces by visions whose validity I can’t deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha (Three plays.165).
Tughlaq doesn’t tell that the God is dead as Nietzsche proclaims, but he is more inclined to the existentialistic doctrine of Sartre “who buries the idea of God as a useless and costly hypothesis by banning prayer in fear of his life and in fear of sin.” (Girish Karnad’s plays, Page 161). The consciousness of sin is self destructive and leads to a psychological disturbance. So Tughlaq intentionally drives out the conscience and resorts to fascism.

Tughlaq, like the guilt of Macbeth, suffers from many criminal acts. He killed his father and his brother and this is the guilty of sacrilege. Though he is a religious man, he used even the religion as tool to meet his political powers. Islam gives lot of importance to Namaaz (Prayer) and it is a prerogative of every individual. But Thuglaq dared to ban it for his political purposes. He behaves like an existentialist in religion thereby entering into a conflict with the orthodox and fundamentalists of religion. Though he accepts the supremacy of The Quran he refuses to depend only on God and prayer. He argues,

Why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men?

“And then adds,”..no one can go for on his knees: I have a long way to go. I can’t afford to crawl – I have to gallop… (Tughlaq .164).
Tughlaq is a man of extremities. In order to fulfill his ideals, he never hesitates to take up rapid decisions. The shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is only an example to it. He shows handful of reasons for the shifting of the capital, but cannot realize that the higher ideals are always impossible to be fulfilled. He almost behaves like Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* who is prepared to take up dubious methods to prove his supremacy. He is unable to find out the relationship between people and the place to which they belong and associate. Moreover he, who thinks that he is a perfect intellectual, can’t realize that there is no need to force the people of Delhi to go to Daulatabad to shift the capital. The reforms of Tughlaq in the realism of statecraft proved highly advanced and radically desirable. The introduction of the copper currency in the place of silver dinars is one such foresighted move, but it is a failure as he doesn’t take necessary precautions. In the introduction to the play, U.R. Anantha Murthy rightly observes that “the whole play is structured on these opposites, the ideal and the self, the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue.” In a way the character of Tughlaq is made up of these polarities and it is what makes him an archetype. His ideals demand a long way to get fulfilled and one can only pass step by step to reach it. By the time one proceeds a step, strange and unexpected consequences overwhelm the situation. When it is tackled in a way that it can be solved soon to progress further a wrong has to be committed. It can be called evil or fragnosticism.
Thus it is inevitable to land up in an evil and nothing good will came out of the evil. As Tughlaq himself rightly points out his state of affairs is a “honey comb of diseases” (*Three plays*, 195).

Bhagabat Nayak rightly compares Tughlaq with the protagonists of Albert Camus’ *Caligula* and *Myth of Sisyphus* who vacillate between the individual longing for order and the irrationality that destroy the individuals’ (*Girish Karnad’s plays*.164). Tughlaq wants to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. But as a human being he works out a heinous strategy to realize it. Thus he has a “divided self”, the aspiration to realize the idealism and the instinctual inclination towards political maneuvering that is why he reminds one of captain Ahab of Moby Dick. He is also monomaniacal, like the archetypal protagonist of Melville’s novel, in the deadly pursuit of his dreams. As P.Dhanavel rightly observes, “a megalomaniac halo surrounds the protagonist… as he keeps on employing various kinds of inhuman trickeries to keep himself in power” (*The Indian Imagination of Girish Karnad*. 34).

Karnad portrays Tughlaq as a modern existential protagonist who gets alienated from every things. Sharing his youthful aspirations with a young guard Tughlaq recalls nostalgically,

One night I was standing on the ramparts of the old fort here. There was torch near me flapping its wild wings and
scattering golden feathers on everything in sight. There was half built gate near by, trying to contain the sky with in its cleft. Suddenly something happened – as though some one has cast a spell. The torch, the gate, the fort and the sky – all melted and merged and flowed in my blood stream with the darkness of the might….. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke, was the sky. I have searched answering bay of street dogs... For that moment since then and here I am still searching for it. But in the last four years, I have seen only the woods clinging to the earth, heard only the howl of wild wolves and the answering bag of street dogs.... (Three Plays, 154).

Thus by using a metaphorical language, Karnad transforms the agony of a historical character into the plight of a mythical personage, an archetype. Karnad is successful in transforming the history of Tughlaq into a myth which is applicable to the contemporary period. Many critics like Bhagabat Nayak describe it as an allegory, some others delineate it as a historical play based on truth and realism. But the mythical dimensions of the play are so quite striking that Tughlaq is compared with many archetypal characters including Hamlet and Macbeth. K.S.Ramamurthy is absolutely right when he says that Karnad’s Tughlaq is:
at once an idealist and crafty politician, a humanist and a tyrant, a man who has murdered sleep and yet not a Macbeth haunted by supernatural solicitations, a man who thinks and broods too much Aspects of Indian Drama in English with special reference to Tughlaq, (Litt. Critt, 5:1, June 1979.22).

In Tale-Danda Karnad takes up a historical event, the Bhakti Movement of Sharanas in Karnataka to confront a problem of modernity. The Sharanas tried to eradicate caste discriminations, and brought into practice the inter-caste marriages. "Veera Shaivism" believes that the caste, creed and hierarchial discriminations are preposterous. The denounced idolatry and empty rituals and believed the ethic of hard work. Although the Bakthi Movement ended up in blood shed, the social reforms made by Sharamas still raging a battle with the old and traditional malices of this country. To suit the contemporary times, Karnad took many liberities with the history of Basavanna. The many myths surrounding Basavannar helped Karnad to present a suitable personage for his purpose. In one of the editions of Tale – Dande, Karnad, in his preface, avows, “what is historically variable is very little…. And deals with characters who set in motion the whole Bhakti movement” (Tale-Danda, Manohare Grantama.16).

Though myth and history are considered diagonally opposite things by some critics, the others feel that myth represents a cultural heirloom
enclosing the history of the human species. And history too PROCURES the mythical proportions as many as the historical figures and the situations became the objects of different versions and sometimes diagonally opposite views. Buddha, King Ashoka and Chengiz Khan are only a few among the various such historical figures who have almost became mythical figures. Basavanna, the great sharana poet of the 12th century Kannada region, whose religious reforms forms the base of the play Tale-Danda is one among such cult-figures.

Girish Karnad points out that he wrote Tale-Danda in 1989

When the mandir and the “Mandal” movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questioning posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious feudalism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered.

Karnad’s observations asserts that a contemporary religious scuffle reminde him of Basavanna and his reforms. A student of Indian history may think that the efforts of Emperor Akbar who propagated a new religion called Din-Elahi based on the good aspects of all religions would have been a better theme to suit the contemporary situation. But Karnad’s intention to pose a number of questions about the relationship between the
man and the religion demands the story of Basavanna, though the solutions it offers are that of intra-religious than inter-religious.

‘Tale-Danda’ literally means death by beheading. In his brief authorial remarks, Karnad observes,

Offering one’s head, either completing a vow or in penitence, was a common practice in medieval Karnataka. Basavanna often uses the word to express his outrage at a particularly unpleasant situation or accusation, to mean something like ‘May my head roll’ or ‘I offer my head’ (Tala-Danta. i.)

The story of Basavanna reflects the typical Indian scenario as it deals with the varanasrama dharmas of Hinduism. Basavanna, the Brahmin, who is the leader of the reformist movement and Bijjala, the King who is a barber by birth provide the conflict necessary of a religious play. Karnad has experimented with the use of languages in the original Kannada version. He says:

In Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his cast, his geographical origins, even his economic status. In the original Kannada version of Tale-Danda, the language of the play engages with the implication of this feat for a situation in which a group of people are trying to fight caste and social
inequality. For obvious reasons, this aspect of the problems is not explored in the English translation. 

In the discussion about Girish Karnad’s plays, Prasanna observes that “Basavanna and Bijjala are ‘binary opposites’ whereas U.R. Ananta Murthy thinks they are good characters though they are “opposed to each other” (U.R. Anantha Murthy, Prasanna and Girish Karnad “Girish Karnad, the playwright: A Discussion” (translation by Sukanya Chandrasekara, Indian Literature 38:5. 134)

Girish Karnad has not followed the history to a certain extent as he wants to present the conflict between the traditional and revolutionary attitudes presented in the characters of Soideva and the Brahmins on the former side and Basavanna, Bijjale and Jagadeva on the later side. P.Dhanavel painstakingly catalogues the changes Karnad brought in the historical data. Among those details, the most important details are:

Instead of Bijjala, Sovideva checks the accounts and invites the wrath of his father. Instead of staying with the king, Basavanna resigns once for all. Instead of refusing to visit Jagadeva, Basavanna not only visits him, but also introduces him to the vision of Allama…. Instead of Bijjala being killed in the court hall, he is stabbed in the queen’s God’s room. Instead of being a normal king, Bijjla is finally seen as a
lunatic. Instead of Sovideva aspiring for kingship, the Brahmins thrust it upon him. (The History and Mystery of Girish Karnad’s Tale-Danda, Literature Unit, 105).

Dhanapal rightly brings out a comparison between Karnad’s Basavanna and T.S.Eliot’s Beckett in Murder in the Cathedral and G.B.Shaw’s Joan in St.Joan which are also historical plays bordering on the mythologies. The depiction of the relationship between the physical and metaphysical is also one among the similarities between these plays. That Eliot and Shaw present their religious beliefs in a highly successful rational method is well established by the universal appeal of their plays including India. Karnad almost follows the same method and transforms Basavanna as an archetypal protagonist like Beckett and Joan. In a way Karand’s Basavanna is closer to Eliot’s Becket than Shaw’s Joan as Murder in the Cathedral and Tale-Danda have existential overtones. Eliot’s method of referring to the eternal design and the divine order of the world, Shaw’s depiction of Joan’s ability to hear the ethereal voices, almost corresponds to Basavanna’s introduction of the vision of Allama to Jagadeva.

Karnad’s Tale-Danda presents a conflict between the individual and the society and ultimately the failure of the both. Karnad chooses a king, who was a barber by birth and who married a kshatriya princes and who could prove his efficiency by manipulating the Brahmins as a symbol of
the complexity of the growth of caste system. For him, Basavanna, the Brahmin who became a Sharana to establish an egalitarian society devoid of caste, creed, colour and sex his characters more as representatives than individuals. It is evident in the way that Damodara Bhatta, a priest defends the high caste cause in language. He proclaims,

Sanskrit is a language on diamond, unchanging, austere. Eternal truths can be captured in its immutability, Kannada our mother tongue, however, 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 saries out. It can only speak in inconstant moods. Its sensuality is addictive and the sharanas use it to pimp for their vulgarities”. (Tale-Danda 57).

Karand presents Basavanna not only as a mystic, spiritual seer but also as a revolutionary and a pragmatic leader. He enjoys a unique supremacy which even the king does not have. Damodara Bhatta explains,

It was a mob no less than fifteen thousand strong that encircled the Treasury. Yet you should have seen how disciplined they were how restrained! For four days they set there, surrounding the building, ungrudging, even cheerful, until Basavanna himself came on the scene and sent them
home. It was a prodigious display of loyalty to Basavanna.

Would the sharanas be as loyal to the king? One wonders?

(Tala-Danda, 9)

Basavanna and his philosophical religious and spiritual ideologies are given a secondary importance in Karnad’s play as the dramatist is more interested in the sociological situation of his own period and thus the story of Basavanna is more a vehicle for his humanitarian principles. He has lot of respect for the man and he relays more on a humanistic approach to the things. He declares, “Inscriptions need eyes to decipher them. Panegyrics need tongues to sing them. Meaning is generated by this moving body and it is this human body that should be our primary concern” (Tala-Danda, 18). He moulds Basavanna and Bijnala not merely as hearlders of a new humanitarian religion, but also as practical leaders who can assess the things with utmost detachment. Karnad makes use of history to infer the essence which sometimes horrifies and disturbs every one. Bijnala thus relates his history:

But I am a Kalacharya. Katha Churra. A barber. His majesty King Bijnala is a barber by caste. For ten generation my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight and bribed generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so
they could have the caste of Kshatriyas branded on their foreheads. And yet you ask the most Permadi, by caste? And the reply will be: a barber!”. Then Bijja infers,” One 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-ashepherd-a scavenger! (Tale-Danda, 14-15).

Bijjala, who is a king, is not allowed to forget his low birth by the traditional society. The only people who treat him properly were the sharanas. So he gets inclined towards them naturally. He says, “Look at those he has gathered around him: pets, mystics, visionaries. And nothing airy-fairy about them, mind you (Tale-Danda, page 13). All hardworking people from the common stock (Tale-Danda,15)

Bijjala’s words assert the disillusionment of Gandhiji after the partition of India and also the incompatibility between the Muslims and Hindus. The writer as well the critics point out ‘Mandir and the Mandel’ movement of the 1990s which prompted the writing of the play. But a close look at the play definitely reminds one of striking resemblances between Basavanna and Bijjala on one side and Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru on the other. But Bhagabat Nayak observes,

The Bijjala-Basavanna relationship reveals a deep insight into the matter. Basavanna foresees an ugly prospect for the
society while Bijjala suffers, like the old Duke in Shakespere’s plays, and fails to resist the sharan radical attempt inspite of his boldness. (*Girish Karnad’s plays*, 149)

As Bhagabat Naik perceptively analyses Bijjala appears more like an agnostic in Karnad’s play, “Like the secular and liberal rulers of contemporary India he does not mix up caste and religion with politics.” (*Girish Karnad’s plays*, 151). Inspite of his liberal thinking he is a typical king for whom the son is also an enemy. Karnad can be rightly placed in the grand Indian tradition, as he closely follows Rabindranath Tagore in the delineation of the relationship between the religion and the man. In his beautiful essay *The Religion of a Poet*, Tagore proclaims,

> Mans reverential loyalty to this spirit of unity is expressed in his religion, it is symbolized in the names of his deities. That is why in the beginning, his Gods were tribal Gods, even Gods of the different communities belonging to the same tribe. With the extension of the consciousness of human unity is the truth of Man’s God (*The Religion of Man*. 41).

Like Tagore; Girish Karnad is not in favour of the ritualistic and dogmatic religion. To denounce the agitation regarding the inter-religious scuffle, Karnad chooses the inter-caste disturbances of the twelfth century and
laments, “it seems 800 years have solved no problem. We are here exactly where we started” (Tale-Danda, P.v).

Like Shakespeare who uses the supernatural element in a highly effective way in his tragedies like Hamlet and Othello, Karnad refers to the miracles of Basavanna in Tale-Danda in a striking manner. At the end of the second scene he simply makes a cursory reference to the miracles of Basavanna. The people believe that the crime of misusing the Royal Treasury was dissipated by Basavanna miraculously. Kallappa, a sharana state, “A miracle. There was a miracle. And the whole city was witness to it.” (Tale-Danda. 6). At the end of the seventh scene, Bijjala complains “A Brahmin girl chooses to marry an untouchable and two hundred thousand people cam out in support of it! That is the only miracle Basavanna has ever performed. But it is a miracle.” (Tale-Danda, 65).

Karnad presents the difference in the approaches to the traditional issues by Bijjala and Basvanna. Discussing the filial love, Bijjala asserts,

Do you have even the faintest idea of what a son means? My dear fello, there are over a hundred and ninty-six thousand sharmas in the city of Kalyan who light a lamp every evening in your name for having them a new life. And though they all know you have a son, a good half of them don’t even know what that poor devil is called. What kind of father are you?
Have some sense, Basavanna or, at least, read the sacred texts to acquire some. A son is the final goal of human existence! It may be that he drinks your blood and chows your bones to mash. But he is the one who’ll keep your soul fed till eternity. *(Tala-Danda.20)*

But Basavanna firmly answers. “For a Sharana physical parentage is of no consequence. A person is born truly only when the guru initiates him into a life of knowledge” *(Tala-Danda, 20)*

Biyyala can’t understand the source of the strength of Basavanna. He can’t understand the difference between the worldly and spiritual forces. He may humbly say, “I am an ordinary king. I want no truck with Gods. I go by the laws of the land…” But his humility is only a cover of his megalomaniac politics. Basavanna simply believes,

I don’t have in me

Bhakti enough

To equal a sixth

Of a mustard seed

I am an eke, a swallow-wort

Among mangoes

How can I shamelessly

Call my self a devotee
In front of the Sharanas

Of our lord of the meeting of rivers? (Tala-Danda, 21)

The Sharana movement is a historical fact which took up a Herculean task to obliterate the caste bias in India. Sharanas assert, “There is no cast among sharanas, neither Brahmin not cobbler.” But Basavanna perceptively relates, “The orthodox will see this mingling of castes as a blow at the very roots of varanasharma dharma. Bigotry has not faced such a challenge in two thousand years…..” (Tale-Danda, 38). The Mandal-Mandir conflict of the contemporary time is a reminder of the words of Basavanna. The play Tale-Danda by presenting the heroic battle of Basavanna, not only projects an analogy of the contemporary times from the history but also proclaims that the grim struggle for equality is not over and a further revival of the spirit of Basavanna is essential now. Tale-Danda presents the negative aspects of the reformist movement also. Jagadev, one of the sharanas is an extemnist who wants to fight against what so ever comes in his way. He never hesitates to seek the revenge even in a violent way. His extreme nature and his approach to his goal is similar to those of the people associated with Mandir-Masjid conflict of our times. But Basavanna declaims him by saying, “Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because some one else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and motor is a monument to stupidity” (Tale-Danda, 29)
Jayadeva misinterprets the story of Allama told by Basavanna to him that “Kill him (Bijjala) and meaning will take care of itself” Karnad observes,

We may notice several drawbacks of the Punjab terrorists in Jayadeva….. Looking down upon women, slashing the finger and applying blood on the forehead, practicing abstinence not speaking to the wife, all these are standard patterns. (‘Performance Meaning and the Materials of Modern theatre’ interview with Aparne Dharwadker, New Theatre Quarterly 44. 1995.355)

Karnad portrays the conflict between the state and the religion in Tale-Danda. Like Eliots Murder in the Cathedral, the dichotomy between the mundane a spiritual issues is analysed by choosing history as a basis. But history provides a scaffold where as the mythical belief provide the form to Karnad’s play. Sovidava’s attempt to prone that Basavanna was guilty was historical truths, but the way that he gets out of the problem is called a ‘miracle’ sharanas belief in the super human strength of Basavanna clearly establishes the power of myth over the other things.

Though history is based on the factual date and myth on the belief, both of them can be used for understanding the present. By intertwining history and myth, the dramatist aims at the grasping of the idea quite
essential for the present. Karnad presents the higher ideals in the portrayal of Basavanna. Basavanna says,

Some day this entire edifice of caste and creed, this poison-house of varanasharma, will come tumbling down. Every person will see himself only as a Human being. As a Bhakta. As Sharana. That is inevitable. But we have a long way to go….. (Tale Danda. 50)

There are many myths surrounding the history of Basavanna and the innumerable miracles he performed were catalogued in history though many of them do not have worldly proofs. Thus there is always a myth in history and history in myth. Karnad is a twentieth century dramatist who can’t believe in the super-natural. But he thoroughly knows that the super-natural has a tremendous popularity even today. So he has always made use of the supernatural in a way that it casts a spell on the audience and at the same time remain realistic in his presentation. Tale-Danda is also one among the examples to prove that point.

Tipu Sultan has been a legendary hero for the people of Karnataka. The history of Tipu, though he belongs to a close period to that of us, i.e., early nineteenth century is full of gaps. Many plays are written based on his life but they give different versions of his life and character. Girish Karnad also points out, “In Karnataka, Tipu has continued to inspire folk
ballads and I have, in my life time, seen three Kannada stage versions of his life, two of them by itinerant troops of rural actions” (Preface, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, Bali-The Sacrifice. 3).

That Karnad has more fascination and a kind of psychological attraction to the myth rather than history is well proved by the three historical plays he wrote as all these three have more inclination to the mythical imagination rather than historical accuracy. The very title of the play reflects the conception of the playwright. Karnad was more fascinated by the way Tipu recorded his dreams in a secret dairy. He located a copy of it at the University of Chicago’s Regenstein Library. The folk ballads and the records of the dreams of Tipu motivated him to study the history of Tipu. But Karnad uses the history only as a scaffolding for the character formulated by the ballads, the diaries of Tipu and finally and above all Karnad’s main interest of delineation of the predicament of a man in general. In the introduction to Karnad’s collected plays (Volume II), A.B.Dharwadkar also accepts the same when he says:

It draws upon a range of historical sources to present convincing portraits of the principal characters, but creates an imaginative plot and resonant dialogue to contain their experience. It deals with a controversial protagonist who can be characterized in radically opposite ways, depending on the
observers’ view point – as a heroic figure of anti-colonial resistance (comparable to the Rani Jhansi) in one perspective and a treacherous but fallible (and even foolish), adversary in another. (*Collected Plays*, XXII).

Same critics like Bhagabad Naik interpreted Tipu as an ‘Aristotelian tragic hero’ (*Girish Karnad’s plays*, page 175). But his last dream is something which has to be analysed carefully. Referring to the dream he had, Tipu tells an old man “….. I know from Hadret Nizam’s book, Sikandarnamah that the emperor of China had sent a present of a white elephant, a horse and a female slave to the Great Alexander… My interpretation of the dream is that God Almighty and our Prophet will make another Alexander” (*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, 20).

Like Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* who wants to be a Napoleon, Tipu’s ambition to be an Alexander is the reason for his fall. As he does not have a source for redemption as it happens to Raskalnikov, his story concludes with his fall. Karnad projects Tipu as a statesman and also as a manipulative strategion. Thus the problem with the character of Karnad is that he has a dual nature and the very effort to combine the both is disastrous. Dreams are evaluated as disguised fulfillments of suppressed and repressed wishes. In the *Interpretations of Dreams*, Freud points out that the sleep which often accompanies dreams is
simply an act of censorship performed by the mind to protect the dreamer from the shock of the naked wish.

Bhagabat Naik observes that Karnad’s aim is to “high let Tipu’s visionary zeal, political strategies, battlefield maneuvers, modernizing impulses and the populist trait and commerce policies” (Girish Karnad’s plays, Page 174). Thus the tragedy of Tipu is due to the conflict between his statesmanship and the ambition to be an Alexander. Dharwadker also says, “Karnad…. Casts his protagonist in multiple and contradictory roles – as a beloved ruler, legendary warrior, loving father and visionary dreamer, but also as the Machiavellian schemer who plots with the French against the English, the defected soldier who enters into humiliating treaties with the enemy and the gullible commander who is eventually betrayed by his own side” (Collected Plays, Volume II, XXIV).

Karnad portrays Tipu as an archetypal protagonist who vacillates between the higher ideals and the basic instincts, romantic visions and practical exigencies and foresighted schemes and survival approaches. The same person who wants to be an Alexander bargains for peace and batons enemies. Whether he has a passion for the socio-economic potentiality and civilisational plentitude as some historians recorded or whether he is a diplomatic or an impractical dreamer as the other historians observed remain unanswered questions. But such a complex character is
well suited for a dramatist like Karnad who wants to have an archetypal character encapsulating the basic human predicaments.

Karnad carefully develops the character of Tipu who has two teachers with whom he has love-hate relationship. Tipu admits that he has two teachers – his father and the English. His father taught him war but remained a measuring rod to contrast him. The English taught him the trade but remained a competitor throughout.

His secularism and modern outlook are the reasons for his extraordinary popularity. In a way he has the psychology of a person belonging to a minority. The influence of Hinduism on him is quite obvious. His finance Minister, Poornayya, is a Brahmin and he has belief in Hindu seers and astrologers. He is happy to receive the blessings of the seer of the monastery of Sringeri. At the same time he has a special concern for the Muslim rulers like the Nawab of Hyderabad. Most of the delegations he sent are to the Islamic countries like Instambul, Turkey, Arabia and Mascot. Tipu has to choose between English and French. The imperialistic domination of the English repels him and the modernity and the sophistication of the French attracts him. He takes the initiation and sends Osman Khan to Monsieur Pierre Monneron of Pondicherry and wants to send a sound delegation to the French King Louis XIV. Unlike the English who have learnt a lesion from each of their defects in India, he
becomes more impracticable and unrealistic. British getting succeeded in compelling him to sign the Treaty for Peace and forcing him to send his sons as hostages clearly establish Tipu’s failure as a King and diplomat.

Karnad meticulously portrays the degradation of Tipu from the mighty heights of a tiger to the degradation of a cat. British are clever enough to get the Marathas and the Nizam closer to them and corner Tipu completely by taking his sons as hostages. They denerve Tipu diplomatically, strategically and finally psychologically. He tells his wife, This land is ours and it’s rich, overflowing with goods the world hungers for, and we let foreigners come in and rob us of our wealth! Today the Indian princes are all comatose, wrapped in their opium dreams. But someday they will wake up and throw out the Europeans. (The Dream of Tipu Sultan. 36).

His world assert not only his anger and helplessness but also his self pity. Studied from the psychological point of view, his dreams reveal his ambitions and obsessions. His dialogue with her father reflect the bickering relationship between them. When Tipu asks his father “Shall I lash myself for you?”, Hyder replies, “No melodrama, I pray you. No hysterics please. You have gone soft. You spend too much time with your account books?” Then Tipu argues, “You spent your life on horse-back-making conquests.
I have to consolidate your gains. That cannot be done on horseback. The English are stronger now.” (The Dreams of Tipu Sultan. 51). Thus the rebuking of Hyder can be perceived as the introspective analysis of Tipu himself.

Tipu is haunted by the spirits of his wife and his father. He has to resort to the fatalism also. He says, “God’s will be done. Please do not spend you energies on these matters. Territories come and go. We fight, we gain, we lose. Proceed” (The Dreams of Tipu Sultan.40) Karnad presents the end of Tipu to present the way that the life progresses ironically. He is betrayed by his friends. Ministers and close men. The English boasted, “While dreadful fate of the fallen ruler could not be contemplated without any regret, it should show the Indian Princes the danger of inviting foreign invasion against the British power.”

Karnad portrays the quest of an individual in the character of Tipu. The Tipu reflects the nature of a man who struggles hard to fulfill his dreams. He keeps diary in which he records his drama constantly. The other book he always keeps with himself is Kautilya’s Arthasastra. Even the British finds out that these two objects are the strength of Tipu.

The Dreams of Tipu Sultan has many similarities to the Greek Tragedy in which the protagonist is always an archetypal character depicting the fundamental human predicaments. The dreams, the quest,
the strategies, the efforts and the ultimate failure of the Tipu reflected that he is a representative of humanity. The incompatibility between his ideals and passions is the tragic flaw of Tipu. The play is dominated by many minor characters that appear only for a while on the stage. But they play a vital role similar to that of the chorus in the Greek dramas. The play begins with a discussion between Mir Hussain Ali Kirmani, the historian and colonel Colim Nackenzie, the oriental scholar. They discuss the last battle of the Tipu and then the past is presented stage by stage.

As Kirmani, the historian has rightly points out, “it was not Tipu’s dreams but his predictions that came true” (*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Page 65). As he points out at another context, the great warrior’s “blood and tears dried up a long time ago but his wounds remain fresh” (*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. 7).

Thus the three historical personages Karnad chosen Tughlaq, Basavanna and Tipu have a mythical dimension. The historical basis provides the authenticity to these three plays where as the mythical element has given ample scope for depicting the archetypal issues related to the human existence. Fact and Fiction are so intertwined in these plays that the final product has the typical Karnadian touch. That Karnad has a firm inclination to the myths can also be clearly proved by a careful study of his historical plays.