Prologue
Girish Karnad is a successful Indian English playwright of the post-independence period, whose plays make use of history and legend to throw light on contemporary problems. He justifies this: "I don't think that there is any harm in exploiting a particular character or situation in history for the sake of saying something modern, particularly if using such a character or situation would make it easier for the writer to do so."

Thus, Karnad borrows his themes from Indian history, myth, and legend and employs in his plays the technique of classical and folk theatre of India. In his plays, he has shown strong impact of his rebellion against cultural hegemony as the latter has suppressed human nature and distorted human personality in terms of cultural deformities in which modern men and women are trapped. His plays elucidate the suffering of men and women, especially at the psychological level and generally at the socio-cultural level. It is this fact which has caused Girish Karnad adopt a style of his own putting dots, dashes, brackets, etc. and using masks, music, fables for what actually is intended and this communicates more and better than anything already told.
Undoubtedly, the author does not and cannot say what he wants, but the way he uses words, figures, images, and thereby unfolds the inner self. Fortunately enough, the craft of drama requires visualisation of feelings rather than expressing in speech. This is why, short dialogues are more powerful and silence is most powerful. Karnad has exceeded the talent of a common playwright. The untold is comprehensive by means of the context itself.

John Keats' oft-quotable lines of the poem 'Ode on A Grecian Urn' "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes play on." have inspired me a lot and ultimately that inspiration resulted in the present work.

Drama being an audio-visual art form presupposes the playwright's ability to evince a vista of human life that can equally entertain and enrich the viewers and readers. From this viewpoint, Karnad knows no failure at all in respect of its true dramatisation and academic depth, since he has delved into human life by means of Indian folk culture and
mythology. He considered man as the measure of all things in his plays in variegated dimensions. Karnad has immensely felt this need of re-interpretation of whatever we have as our legacy:

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

('Author's Introduction' to 'Three Plays', 1995 : 01)

What tempted me to choose Karnad's plays for semiotic study is his pervasive characteristics of leaving the sentences as far as possible untold (not unexpressed) to further the actors' actions and viewers'/ readers' imagination activate. He proved
thus, silence to be the most effective dramatic device. Undoubtedly, when we are in profound love and passion, anger and agony, grief and sorrow, gratitude and obligation, we do nothing but exhibit profound silence. And in silence, the whole body limbs except the mouth speak lots in terms of gestures deriving meaningfulness from the context itself. It is the semiotic approach that can unravel the inherent feelings, experiences, thoughts, etc.

Language per se unfolds the heart and the mind on the one hand and conceals the ineffable on the other. Symbols, similes, metaphors, fantasies, irony, imagery, etc. are of this sort known as literary devices creating stylistic effect as well as thematic grandeur. Karnad's deliberate use of masks and music add flavour to this effect and grandeur in that if not only fulfils the cultural-traditional need of the people of India but also enhances the folk manners of recreation and celebrity. In his own words,

"The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it
also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various conventions — the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds — permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. To use a phrase from Bertolt Brecht, these conventions then allow for 'complex seeing'. And it must be admitted that Brecht's influence, received mainly through his writings and without the benefit of his theatrical productions, went some way in making us realize what could be done with the design of traditional theatre. The theatrical conventions Brecht was reacting against — character as a psychological construct providing a focus for emotional identification, the willing-suspension-of-disbelief syndrome, the notion of unified spectacle — were never a part of the traditional Indian theatre. There was therefore no question of arriving at an 'alienation' effect by using Brechtian artifice. What he did was to sensitize us to the potentialities of nonnaturalistic techniques available in our own theatre." (Ibid., P. 15)
Karnad has originally written his plays in Kannada and then he himself translated — trans-created — them into English. In reality, Indian English — that English which does not and can not deform the Indianness of human spirit and literary genesis, but transmits our cultural heritage to the whole world along the message of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", i.e. the whole world is a family — a pro-version of ‘globalisation’. To quote Iyenger (1962: 3),

"Indian literature comprises several literatures ... and Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice no doubt, but it is as much Indian as others."

Incompleteness is the reality and perfection is far-reaching. This theme is one that encompasses the whole of Karnad’s plays. "Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?" (‘Hayavadana’, Act II) But I had to tolerate this incompleteness in the fruit of efforts in search of the book ‘Tale-Danda’, which, until the completion of
the thesis, could not be available and ultimately and unwillingly I had to console myself with meagre material quoted or discussed by scholars.

If "style is the man himself" is true, then Karnad's personality is the best judgement of his plays. His personality has been described by Dhawan as follows:

"Karnad is not impulsive by temperament, and does not resort to writing just at flash of an idea. He follows a golden mean of thought and action when he launches on a new play. Commenting on the character of Horatio, Hamlet says that those persons are indeed blessed in whom "blood and judgement are so well comingled" that they are not treated by fortune as a musical instrument on which Fortune may play at will and from which Fortune may be able to produce whichever tune she wishes to produce. The classical qualities of balance and restraint are true of the person of Karnad too. He is a genius as a writer, man of excellent disposition. And one in whom all the four elements, to use a Renaissance analogy, are so well mixed that Nature may stand up and say, "Here's a man". (1999 : 20)