Chapter IV

Contemporizing History

As an organized and documented account of the nation’s past, history enjoys an unparalleled position in the literature of the contemporary age. It throws light on the lives of people, their ways of life, belief systems, and so on. Literature and history are connected to each other. History often provides content, structure and form to literature. Besides, both history and literature are primarily narratives. As narratives, they represent reality indirectly. So, imagination plays an important role in the narration of history and literature. An understanding of a literary work in its historical context reveals the cultural identity pf the people.

The relevance of history and its incorporation in the literary texts attain a renewed prominence in the 1990s. This critical focus in historiography is explained by theories like New Historicism and cultural materialism. These
theories throw light on the nature and constitution of history: New Historicism deconstructs the notion of objectivity in history. Theorists like Hayden White emphasize the element of subjectivity in historical narratives. The subjectivity is constructed by the historian’s selection and employment of historical events. This makes history a site for political and cultural mediation. Thus history is a product of social/political formation. In this regard, John Brannigan comments in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism:

New historicism and cultural materialism share a common preoccupation with the relationship between literature and history, and share an understanding of texts of all kinds as both products and functional components of social and political formations. (3)

Brannigan means that literary texts are considered products of specific historical conditions. History is not seen as something outside the literary text; it is implicit in the structure of the text. Literary texts form a medium for cultural politics as they mediate the social, political and cultural formations.

History as a site for political/cultural mediation results in the multiple perspective of narrativization of history. In all societies there is a
mainstream history narrated from the perspective of the dominant groups/power structures. This is called empirical history which is basically the history of the community living at the centre of the nation. The marginalized communities who live at the periphery are represented by absence or silence. They find that the mainstream history is not their history. They have a different perspective of history. Thus, there are many histories. The histories re-written from the perspectives of the Subalterns are called genealogies. The perspectives of narration are cultural constructs like gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, religion and so on. Both New Historicism and cultural materialism explore ways how genealogies are constructed. They also examine how history can be appropriated as a means of repression and subjugation. Both these theories evolve strategies to retrieve a lost cultural identity by rewriting history of the community.

A New Historicism view of Karnad’s plays gives new insights into his treatment of history. New Historicism examines how a text is constructed from its context or how a text can be evaluated in its contexts. In this regard, it is a modification of the positivist view of Hippolyte Taine: “la race, la milieu, et la moment;” a text is influenced by the socio-psychological background of the author and the period in which he lives and writes. In Karnad’s case, the social and political atmosphere of India has played an important factor in shaping his history plays. His *Tughlaq* essays the rise and
fall of a fourteenth century Indian ruler, Muhammad ud Din Tughlaq, but it is a reflection of the political scene in post-independent India. Tale-Danda is based on a twelfth century reform movement, Veerashaivam, in Karnataka; it is also an outcome of the political situation in India in the 1990s. The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, written at the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, deals with the themes of anti-colonial resistance under Tipu Sultan. His plays are the products of specific historic conditions in Indian context; they act as inseparable part of Indian history in the making.

Karnad makes a decisive shift in his dramatic practise from myths/folktales to history. He engages the pre-modern and modern history through the plays Tughlaq, Tale-Danda and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan. Tughlaq, Karnad’s second play, has inaugurated the second genre in his dramaturgy and it has emerged as a modern masterpiece. The play portrays the rise and fall of the fourteenth century Indian ruler Muhammad ud Din Tughlaq: the most idealist visionary to the cruellest tyrant in Indian history. The play abounds in the sense of alienation faced by Tughlaq in an age unfit for his idealism which ends him as one of the greatest failures. Through Tughlaq, Karnad discusses the existential conflicts of men in modern age and the sense of alienation it produces. Though purely historical in content, the play locates contemporary concerns, and refers to contemporary political figures and incidents, offering a social criticism. The
issues discussed in the play reflect the political situation of India in the Nehru era. They also have some relevance in contemporary Indian situation.

Karnad repeats the use of history, though pre-modern, in *Tale-Danda* to discuss the issues which are extremely relevant in the contemporary Indian society. The play deals with the rise of *Veerashaivam*, a radical and reform movement in the twelfth century Karnataka, which stood for an ideal society based on equality, humanity and mutual friendship. Aiming at revolutionizing the society by overthrowing the age-old practices of caste system, the movement ended in terror and bloodshed because the power-hungry rulers did not accept the change. The play is a caustic criticism of the political situation in contemporary India where the issues of caste and communalism are all pervasive. Karnad received both the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1993 and the Central Sahitya Academy Award in 1994, for *Tale-Danda*.

*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Karnad’s first original play in English, also takes its content from modern history: from the unparalleled history of Tipu Sultan whom Karnad has been obsessed with. In many respects *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* follows the model of the history plays established in *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda*. Karnad portrays Tipu in multiple and contradictory roles – as a heroic figure of anticolonial resistance, a
legendary warrior and as a Machiavellian schemer. In the play, Karnad deals with the dreams that the Sultan had recorded in his secret diary, presenting the gap between Tipu’s dreams of liberty and the reality of colonial bondage. The contemporaneity of the play lies in the image of a polity in crisis, the internal dissensions and in the indulgence of foreign powers.

In response to the necessities of the age, Karnad transmutes themes from contemporary society, thus making a major shift in his dramaturgy. Karnad’s plays based on contemporary themes also display the connection with their historical positioning. In *Anjumallige* (Frightened Jasmine), and in his recent plays *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*, Karnad uses contemporary issues. All the three plays are a true reflection of the social milieu of the time they are written. *Anjumallige*, not translated into English, depicts Britain during the early 1960s and the other two are set in the technologically advanced present day India. In all the three cases, Karnad effectively places his plays in the historic present whether he returns to the past or uses a contemporary setting.

The later plays of Karnad remarkably deal with contemporary themes and situations. Hence the monologue, *Broken Images* introduces a new theme into his dramaturgy. It deals with the politics of language in Indian
literary scene: the implicit conflict between English and indigenous languages. The monologue tells the story of Manjula Nayak, a successful Kannada writer, who transforms into a literary phenomenon through her first novel in English. As the plot unravels Manjula is exposed as an impostor who has passed off her dead invalid sister Malini’s novel as her own. Karnad uses the technique of the character being interrogated by her reconstructed self to throw light on the reality behind her success. The central issue in the play does not involve drama at all, but the radically unequal status of fiction written in two contemporary languages, English and Kannada.

Karnad’s latest play, Wedding Album, deals with the contemporary reality. It is in fact an answer to the charge laid against Karnad that he evades contemporary reality because of his preoccupation with history, folktales, and myths. In Wedding Album, Karnad handles the issue of an awaiting arranged marriage of a Karnataka based middle-class Saraswat family girl, Vidula, to a suitable expatriate boy. The seemingly simple traditional, safe atmosphere in the play is unravelled by the narrative to reveal a more complex, modern, tech-stimulated world of today, which portrays the hidden anxieties, hypocracies, selfishness and so on.

Whether dealing with myth/folktale or history/contemporary concerns, Karnad shows himself as a true postcolonial playwright. Most of
his plays embody the basic concerns of the postcolonial societies such as alienation and the resultant search for identity. Karnad’s *Tughlaq* brilliantly portrays the alienation faced by Indian society in the post-independence period. The play is a textual paradigm of the slow erosion of the ideals of equality and secularism in independent India. The co-existence of conflicting religious groups in a single society inevitably leads to the situation. Alienation is a state of mind faced by the ruler and the subjects alike as in *Tughlaq*.

Karnad himself describes Tughlaq as “the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures” (*TP*, 7). *Tughlaq* is portrayed as an idealist in the beginning of the play who stands for a nation based on humanism, equality and secularism. Like the nationalists of the era, Tughlaq started with much hope and aspiration to build a Utopian society that is free of all distinctions and injustices. The hope of a bright future for the nation/kingdom is similar in the Indian people and in Tughlaq. His contentment at the equal treatment of his subjects is echoed in his words:

> . . . how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light our path towards greater
justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life. (CP 1, 7)

He reiterates his secular ideals while announcing his decision to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad:

. . . Daulatabad is a city of Hindus and as the capital, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom . . . I shall build an empire which will be the envy of the world. (CP 1, 8)

Tughlaq’s religious tolerance and revolutionary policies at an age of religious fanaticism were unacceptable for both the Muslims and the Hindus. It earned him the title “Muhammed the Mad” (TP, 7). The transgression of the rules of Islam seemed foolish to Muslims and his tolerance seemed cunning to the Hindus.

Tughlaq is portrayed as a man estranged from his society. As a representative of the Muslim elite ruling over a majority Hindu population, Tughlaq feels alienated from his subjects. His alienation gets intensified due to the lack of acceptance from his subjects. His attempts to build an ideal empire fail. This is because both his subjects and colleagues fail to comprehend his secular ideals at an age of religious fanaticism and hostility. His frustration is echoed in his words: “But then how can I spread my branches in the stars while the roots have yet to find their hold in the earth?
His anguish and agony are unspeakable. His anxiety is always revealed in his words: “But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven’t even opened their eyes to the light of today” (CP 1, 48). Tughlaq aspires to raise his subjects from a divided pluralistic society to one that is secular and perfect, but he fails completely.

Tughlaq is portrayed as a man ahead of his times. His progressive plans like introduction of copper currency and shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad are reasonable and innovative, but he fails to convince his subjects. His craving to be understood and accepted by his people is echoed in his words to the Amirs:

I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don’t understand me, ask me to explain myself and I’ll do it. If you don’t understand my explanations, bear with me in patience until I can show you the results. But please don’t let me down, I beg you. (CP 1, 49)

His repeated failure to win the confidence of his subjects results in slow disillusionment and distancing from his ideals, leading him to a state of existential alienation. His existential anguish at being misunderstood and betrayed is revealed in the scene of Shihab-ud-Din’s death. He says to Barani:
Why must this happen, Barani? Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors? What is happening? Tell me, Barani, will my reign be nothing more than a tortured scream which will stab the night and melt away in the silence? (CP 1, 52)

The disillusionment dehumanizes Tughlaq; he turns from a perfect idealist, who aspired to build a flawless kingdom, to a brutal tyrant. His transformation gets reflected in his words to Najib, regarding the punishment for those who plotted against him:

. . . see that every man involved in this is caught and beheaded.

Stuff their bodies with straw and hang them up in the palace-yard. Let them hang there for a week. No, send them round my kingdom. Let every one of my subjects see them. Let everyone see what . . . . (CP 1, 52)

Tughlaq’s transformation is complete and the alienation in him takes him to the extent of not punishing a criminal like Aziz. Aziz, though for fowl use, understood and practised his ideas. He supported the religious tolerance of Sultan in the disguise of the Brahmin, who sued against the state. He welcomed the Sultan’s introduction of copper coins and made profit by counterfeit copper coins.
From a highway robber he transformed as the descendant of Kalif to bless the Sultan and his kingdom. Aziz says:

Yet I am Your Majesty’s true disciple. — I ask you, Your Majesty, which other man in India has spent five years of his life fitting every act, deed and thought to His Majesty’s words? (CP 1, 94-95)

Even after realizing the full history of Aziz, Tughlaq lets him go off and even offers him a state job. Tughlaq accepts his act as a foolish one, yet he cannot resist that. He explains his act: “All your life you wait for someone who understands you. And then – you meet him – punishment for wanting too much!” (CP 1, 96). His hunger for acceptance makes him forgive Aziz and even rewarding him with a state job.

Alienated from society and the individuals around him, Tughlaq is also estranged from the orthodox religion followed by his contemporaries. Being an existentialist in religion, Tughlaq comes to conflict with the orthodox believers. His tolerance and ideals are viewed by the fundamentalists as a transgression. The conflict is well portrayed in the scene between Tughlaq and Sheikh Imam-ud-din. He tells to the Imam:

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 . . . I’m sorry. But it can’t be done. (CP 1, 27)

Being a well-read man, Tughlaq cannot deny the teachings of Greeks and that of Buddha. Though a strong believer in Islam, Tughlaq cannot accept Koran as the sole receptacle of truth.

Social and religious alienation in Tughlaq paves way for his existential alienation. The turning point in Tughlaq, which completely transforms him to a tyrant, is the betrayal of Shihab-ud-din whom he trusted. His adherence to cruelty can be seen as his last attempt to guide his people to his ideals. He comments: “I was too soft, I can see that now. They’ll only understand the whip” (CP 1, 53). If violence and tyranny are the only means to reach his end, Tughlaq tries his luck in that too. Tughlaq admits: “I killed them – yes – but I killed them for an ideal” (CP 1, 77). The cruel acts of killing his father, brother, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, Shihab, imprisoning and murdering the Amirs and the Sayyids are all part of his attempt to accomplish his mission.

The contrast between man’s expectation and the harsh reality of existence is presented in the play. In this context, Christine Gomez observes: “It is only when the idealist becomes disillusioned, on seeing the unbridgeable gulf between aspiration and reality that he moves towards
existential alienation” (Dodiya, 117-118). This is true in the case of Tughlaq too. He aspired for a rose garden, but what he received is a rubbish dump; he wanted to rule Utopia, but ended up in a “kitchen of death,” where he himself is the “lord of skins.” Gomez rightly observes that Tughlaq can be seen as a play dealing with the alienated outsider:

. . . an alienated outsider figure, estranged at various levels, from society and the individuals around him, from traditional religion, from existence and the human predicament in this world and from himself.

(Dodiya, 114)

As far as the theme of alienation is concerned the play is open-ended and inconclusive. But Tughlaq is a round character who stands on the same plane of alienation with the protagonists of Camus.

Alienation is also faced by the majority of the citizens in Tughlaq’s kingdom. Being ruled by a Muslim ruler, the majority Hindu population feel alienated. The Sultan’s professed religious tolerance and the abolition of jiziya, a discriminatory tax for non-believers prescribed in the Koran, are viewed with suspicion. The all-pervasive alienation echoes in the very beginning of the play. In Scene One, a Hindu citizen says:
We didn’t want an exemption! Look, when a Sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, ‘Pay up, you Hindu dog’, I’m happy. I know I’m safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, ‘I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being’ – well, that makes me nervous. (CP 1, 6)

The secular views were misinterpreted by the Hindus as part of the cunning strategies of the Sultan. The alienation can also be seen in the Muslim subjects. They feel alienated under a Sultan who seems more concerned about the welfare of the Hindu population. His religious tolerance is perceived as foolishness by the Muslim subjects and religious transgression by the Islam fundamentalists.

The sense of alienation felt by the subjects, Hindus and Muslims, results from the incomprehension Tughlaq’s modernist, secular ideals. The lack of conviction in the legitimacy of his proclamations is another reason for their alienation from him. Despite his act of enforcing five prayers a day, and upholding the value of prayer, Tughlaq’s accession to the throne is through fowl means: by killing his father and brother at the time of prayer. Hence, his ethics and proclamations are viewed with suspicion by the
people. When a young man remarks that Tughlaq “isn’t afraid to be human,” another subject questions the legitimacy of his act: “But does he have to make such a fuss about being human? Announces his mistakes to the whole world – invite the entire capital?” (CP 1, 5). Tughlaq’s proclamations are perceived by the subjects as hollow and a mere show off.

The alienation of the people from their Sultan destroys even the earlier hope expressed by the youth in Tughlaq’s reign. The young man in Scene One of the play expresses the hope in Tughlaq to build a Utopian society, “The country’s in perfectly safe hand – safer than any you’ve seen before . . . This King now, he isn’t afraid to be human –” (CP 1, 5). But the very people who address the Sultan as human, calls him a murderer in Scene Eleven. Starved to death, the citizens shouts: “Kill him – kill him – show him what we can do –” (CP 1, 85). Their aspirations turn to pure disillusionment that finally leads to alienation.

The postcoloniality of Tughlaq lies in its exploration for a unified secular India in a pluralistic, multi-religious culture. Tughlaq began his reign with the same aspirations and ideals which guided the nationalist movement in India. The ethical norms that guided the independence movement, like secularism, equality, religious tolerance proved to be a challenge to the multi-religious, multi-lingual, caste-ridden Indian society. The gradual
erosion of the same ideals in the post-independent period echoes in Tughlaq’s attempts to build an ideal kingdom and its downfall. The opening words of a citizen in *Tughlaq*, “God, what’s this country coming to!” echoes the political and social situation in contemporary India (CP 1, 5).

Started with high ideals, the Tughlaq’s reign offers a parallel to Indian situation, as identified by Karnad:

In a sense—the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the 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 politik. (TP, 7)

The crisis of the secular nationhood in a multi-religious, multi-lingual society lingers in the both contexts. The irreducible social inequalities and religious differences form the central issue in both the play and in the postcolonial Indian situation.

*Tughlaq* is a postcolonial play in which Karnad obliquely discusses the entire political history of independent India. His characters and form provide a perfect allegory of Indian politics since independence. Though not placed on particular figures and incidents, Karnad portrays the changing picture of India from Gandhian era to the contemporary times. Tughlaq’s earlier idealism and religious tolerance remind us of Gandhiji’s ideals. His
aspiration to build an ideal secular state is reflected in his acts like the abolition of jizya, the discriminatory tax against Hindus, and in the power offered to the subjects to question even the Sultan. In the first Scene, Tughlaq is shown as a just leader who wants the support of his people, but only if they have faith in him: “This is only an invitation and not an order, only those who have faith in me may come with me” (CP 1, 8). This echoes Gandhian tolerance.

As the play progresses a gradual shift from Gandhian ideals to Nehruvian aspiration is seen in Tughlaq. He displays the modernist and progressive views of Nehru to build an ideal Indian nation. The introduction of copper coins and the decision to shift the capital from Delhi to Dauladabad are reforms aimed at “building a new future for India,” and it echoes Nehru’s role as the architect of independent India (CP 1, 49). Unlike his early Gandhian tolerance, Tughlaq at this point shows his craving to be accepted by his people: “. . . I need your support for that . . . But please don’t let me down” (CP 1, 49). The shift is portrayed effectively by Karnad.

Karnad skilfully modifies the character of Tughlaq from the earlier idealism of Gandhi through Nehruvian aspiration to a master politician, thereby reflecting the more opportunistic and authoritarian politics of Indira Gandhi and her political successors. His tactics to win his side, the
plot he makes to eliminate his two rivals, the Sheikh Imam-ud-din and Ain-ul-Mulk, at one stroke, proves him as a scheming politician symbolised by the game of chess he constantly plays in the drama.

The contradiction in Tughlaq’s character gives a perfect parallel to the myth of Mrs. Gandhi as both a demon and a goddess in Indian politics. Dharwadkar also observes the parallel between the character portrayal of Tughlaq and Mrs. Gandhi: “She is closest to Karnad’s protagonist in her propensity for choosing evil out of a compulsion to act for the nation and in the self-destructiveness of her authoritarianism” (255). The events in the play after the death scene of Shihab-ud-din and the transfer of capital from Delhi to Dauladabad reflect the period of national Emergency enforced by Indira Gandhi from 1975-1977. As the crucial incidents in the play brought a complete transformation in Tughlaq and the social situation of the kingdom, the declaration of emergency resulted in the erosion of constitutional structures in India and a dislocation of politics from humane and moral action.

The portrayal of the religious conflict in the play, the conflict between majority religion and minority religions, echoes in post-independent India. In spite of its secular and democratic features of being the world’s largest democracy, Indian society remains
pluralistic; it is divided by different religions. The failure of the ethical norms that guided the independence movement like secularism, equality, and religious tolerance, to challenge the multi-religious, multi-lingual, caste ridden Indian society has resulted in the further disintegration of the nation.

The partition of India in 1947 and the formation of separate Pakistan was the first blow to the nationalist ideals of building a secular “imagined community” called India. This was followed by a sequence of conflicts in the name of religion: the Muslim and Sikh separatist movements in the North, the increase in Hindu nationalism and the issue over the Ayodhya, the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992, and the Bombay riots, the Godhra train burning incident and the resultant Gujarat riots in 2002, the unresolved terrorist violence in Kashmir and the threats from various Islamic militant organisations, and so on, demonstrate the failure of the secular ideals in the contemporary Indian society. In this regard, Dharwadkar views:

The post-independence experience in India as a whole, however, confirms that the religious issues in *Tuglak* pose a question important to all “traditional” or “diverse” societies experimenting with the democratic structures:
whether religion can be, or indeed can be prevented from becoming, the primary basis of nationhood. (258)

In the play Tughlaq attempts to treat religion and politics in different planes, but fails in the case of the Indian nation. Religion is a sensitive issue in the case of a pluralistic society like India. Both its implementation and its prevention as the primary basis of nationhood lead to conflict.

Karnad’s play is a perfect parallel to the political situation and atmosphere of post-independent period. In this context, N.K.Ghosh observes in “Girish Karnad’s Tughlaq: History in the Future Tense”:

The untenability of idealistic and visionary politics makes the play perennially contemporary. In a society poised between secular and fundamentalist ideologies, the parameters of Tughlaq’s world bear close resemblance with the discourse of the modern Indian political and cultural experience. (Pandey, 116)

Thus, the play discusses the two major issues of contemporary importance. One is the ideology of secularism in a pluralistic society and the forces that subvert that ideology. Another is the distinction between the political principles: the idealism and vision of Gandhi and Nehru, and the
authoritarianism and opportunism of Indira Gandhi and her successors. Karnad’s Tughlaq embodies both these conflicting principles within himself and voices the internal conflict and alienation faced by the Indian population in the postcolonial era.

The conflict between idealism and reality, leading to disillusionment and alienation, also forms a central concern in Karnad’s play Tale-Danda. It portrays the rise and fall of an idealist group called the sharanas, the members of the Virasaiva movement of twelfth century Karnataka. Committed to the ideology of humanity, equality and brotherhood, the sharanas, under the leadership of poet Basavanna, dreamt to create an unmatched age in the history of Karnataka. In order to avert the differences in society they spurned Sanskrit and talked in the language of the common man; condemned idolatry and temple worship; believed in the equality of sexes and celebrated hard work. They opposed the caste system and made it practicable by arranging the marriage between a Brahmin girl and a cobbler boy. This act of inter-caste marriage to ensure the equality among the castes provoked the orthodox sects and the movement ended in terror and bloodshed.

The play discusses the central concern that engaged Karnad in Tughlaq: idealism should reconcile with the reality of the age. Blind
idealism can only lead to utter chaos and devastation. The high idealism of the *sharanas* and the complete division of the society is portrayed at the very beginning of the play. The *sharanas*’ aspiration to build a casteless society is revealed through Jagadeva, the Brahmin turned *sharana*, who challenges the orthodoxy regarding his friendship with Mallibomma: “Are you all listening? All attention? This is my friend Mallibomma. He is the son of a tanner. And I am taking him inside our house. Are you satisfied? Come on, Mallibomma –” (CP 2, 10). This idealism of the *sharanas* is carefully placed in the midst of a highly caste-ridden Hindu society. Jagadeva’s words reveal the impact of his act: taking a tanner into a Brahmin home. But the tanner’s presence in the Brahmin street itself is shown as upsetting the social order, as revealed in Mallibomma’s words: “I shouldn’t have stepped into this Brahmin street” (CP 2, 8). It is reinforced by Jagadeva mother, Amba’s reaction at Mallibomma’s entering their home, “. . . come in, please. I’ll have the house purified later” (CP 2, 10). Mallibomma’s presence in the house needs purification. Hence, in *Tale-Danda* the *sharanas* appears to be a group of idealists who is blind to the extreme divisions of the society. This kind of brotherhood among the different castes was inconceivable in the caste ridden society of the twelfth century India.

The *sharanas*’ ultimate act of bringing equality in society, the arrangement of the marriage between a Brahmin girl and a cobbler boy,
proved to be an ultimate blow to the basic order of the Hindu society. The act shook the orthodoxy and it even shocked Basavanna, the sharana leader. The proposed alliance is not as simple as the groom’s mother sees it: “A sharana boy marries a sharana girl” (CP 2, 44). Like any other Indian state, the twelfth century Kalyan (Karnataka) is merged in caste system and the concepts like equality and brotherhood among different castes is beyond imagination. Hence, an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin and Sudra is sure to wound the sentiments of the fundamentalists of the religion. The seriousness of the situation is echoed Bassavanna’s words:

But this – this is real. The orthodox will see this mingling of castes— as a blow of the very roots of the varnashrama dharma. Bigotry has not faced such a challenge in two thousand years. I need hardly describe what venom will gush out, what hatred will erupt once the news spreads. (CP 2, 45)

He also makes the position clear: “We are not ready for the kind of revolution this wedding is. We haven’t worked long enough or hard enough!” (CP 2, 51). King Bijjala’s words also reflect the possible consequences of the act: “The wedding pandal will turn into a slaughter house. The streets of Kalyan will reek of human entrails” (CP 2, 55). The predictions of King Bijjala came true as the Kingdom turned to Rakt Kalyan, as the Hindi title of the play indicates.
The *sharanas* began as the advocates of non-violence. Their restrained, non-violent approach is conveyed in the scene before the treasury: “how disciplined they were, how restrained! For four days they sat there, surrounding the building, ungrudging, even cheerful, until Basavanna himself came on the scene and send them home” (CP 2, 15). Their ideology -rooted in non-violence is conveyed through Basavanna’s words: “Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation” (CP 2, 36). These high ideals get disillusioned gradually. The non-comprehension of their ideals by the people and the realization of the fierce opposition to their ultimate act for equality - the marriage, their still increasing support and strength, make them deviate from non-violence. They too get ready to face the opposition, as reflected in Damodara Bhatta’s words: “... the *sharanas* are too spoiling for a fight. Houses have turned into armouries” (CP 2, 62). The blind idealism in a caste-ridden society of Kalyan, the disillusionment and alienation it produced, made the *sharanas* deviate from their early state of idealism, and turned to violent reactions.

The *sharanas* began to question the tolerance of their leader, Basavanna and the younger group under Jagadeva makes a plot against Sovideva. The plot fails as they find that the palace is vacant except for the dethroned king, Bijjala. The disintegration in them makes them kill Bijjala. Jagadeva’s frustration is echoed in his words: “He is our only chance, don’t
you see? If we go out empty handed, we’ll go down in history as incompetent clowns. Not just our enemies but our own people will laugh at us” (CP 2, 95-96). Disillusioned at their failure the sharanas feels alienated and estranged from the society. Their alienation leads them to resort to violence.

The fall of the sharanas from the ideals strengthens the opposition. Prince Sovideva, with the help of Priest Damodara Bhatt and Manchanna Kramita, seizes power, dethroning King Bijjala, for the support he offered to the sharanas, and decides to put an end to the sharana movement. A brutal slaughter of the sharanas follows, beginning with the public torture and murder of the parents of the bride and groom. The extent of carnage is echoed in Sovideva’s orders to prosecute the sharanas:

Pursue them. Don’t let them escape. Men, women, children –
cut them all down. Set the hounds after them. Search each
wood, each bush. Burn the houses that give them shelter.
Burn their books. Yes, the books! Tear them into shreds and
consign them to the wells. Their voices shall be stilled for
ever — (CP 2, 101)

Hence, the movement that started with the dream of building a casteless, classless society ended in bloodshed. It also paved way for the return of
age-old orthodox traditions by the crowning of Prince Sovideva as the king.

The fierce return of the caste system is indicated at the end of the play:

> From this moment all *sharana*ś, foreigner, and free thinkers are expelled from this land on pain of death. Women and lower orders shall live within the norms prescribed by our ancient traditions, or else they’ll suffer like dogs. Each citizen shall consider himself a soldier ready to lay down his life for the king. For the king is God incarnate! (CP 2, 101)

The adherence to high ideals in a society which is not fit to accommodate the ideals, led to the tragic downfall of the community of *sharana*ś. The efforts to build a casteless, classless society resulted in a return to even a worse division of the society. Thus, the play offers cautionary and prophetic qualities similar to that of *Tughlaq*.

*Tale-Danda*’s contemporary relevance lies in the fact that caste and communalism continue to persist as the dominant source of violence in contemporary Indian politics. Caste appears as the basis of Hindu religious organisation and the play hints at the relevance that one’s caste exerts. It is reflected in King Bijjala’s word who is a barber by caste: “One’s caste is like the skin on one’s body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber – a shepherd – a scavenger!” (CP 2, 21). —Bijjala’s affinity towards the *sharana*ś is an
outcome of his caste consciousness. It is only before the *sharanas* that he feels like a human, an equal. The significance and worth of caste system are echoed in the words of the orthodox Damodara Bhatt:

> One’s caste is like one’s home – meant for one’s self and one’s family. It is shaped to one’s needs, one’s comforts, one’s traditions. And that is why the Vedic tradition can absorb and accommodate all differences, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. And even those said to be its victims have embraced its logic of inequality. (CP 2, 63)

This emphasis on one’s caste is relevant and even prominent in contemporary Indian society. Through the pre-modern history of India, Karnad hints that the present could be understood through the context of the past; history repeats.

The social situation in contemporary India is no better in the case of divisions based on castes. Karnad observes this in the notes to *Tale-Danda*:

> “In Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, a man has to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his geographic origins, even his economic status” (CP 2, 3). In a way, the *sharana* movement with its emphasis on a unified and casteless society of Hindus, corresponds to a later period in the history of Independent India; India in late 1980s. This period marks the shift from the secular ideas, the ideas on which the nation was built, toward a
more religious (Hindu) nationalism. The rise of the right wing BJP as a strong force in the national politics and the consequent enforcement of the Hindus find a parallel in the *sharanas*.

The emphasis on secularization in the post-independence period actually results in further fragmentation of society. Religious fundamentalism, both Hindu and Muslim, which strengthened in present day India, can be viewed as a result of this. The play’s account of conflict between different castes within Hindu religion can be viewed as the conflict between different religions in the present day India. In this regard, Dharwadker observes, in the Introduction to *Collected Plays* Vol.II:

> The events within the play offer a covert commentary on both facets of the present crisis because Karnad seeks to enforce the identity between communal and caste violence, and to show that the effects of intra-religious conflict are very similar to those of inter-religious conflict. (xiii)

The distinction between Brahmans and the Sudras in *Tale-Danda* can be effectively interchanged by Hindus and Muslims. Thus, the conflict between castes can be interpreted as the conflict between Hindus and Muslims of contemporary India.
The immediate relevance of the play is the increase in religious fundamentalism in Hinduism in the 1980s. Karnad observes in the preface to the play:

I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the Mandir and the Mandal movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanatics that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered. (np)

The implementation of the Mandal Commission report resulted in a countrywide revolt from the upper-castes. The same year witnessed the Reth Yatra of L.K. Advani which culminated in the destruction of the controversial sixteenth century mosque in Ayodhya, the Babri Masjid. The justifications of the act that the Mosque previously had been a Ram temple and had been demolished by the Muslim rulers are questioned by Karnad through Basavanna’s words:

Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and mortar is a monument to stupidity. (CP 2, 36)

The conflict between the castes and the violence it produced is reminiscent of the demotion of the Masjid and the atrocities in the name of Bombay
riots. In the play, Karnad uses the context of caste struggle to emphasize the struggle between different religions in India. The play thus portrays the postcolonial Indian society and politics through a framework of the past. Karnad reconstructs the past to critique the religious fundamentalism that remains well-entrenched in contemporary Indian society.

*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is a play by Karnad which deals explicitly with the theme of European colonialism in India. It was commissioned by BBC Radio in 1996 to commemorate fifty years of Indian Independence. The play centres on the fabled persona of Tipu Sultan as the Tiger of Mysore. Karnad’s portrayal of Tipu essays his unparalleled status as the invincible ruler, a military giant, a heroic figure of anti-colonial resistance, a business enthusiast and yet a fallen ruler deceived by his own people. His multiple and contradictory roles in the play are appropriately explained by Dharwadkar:

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 defeated soldier who enters into humiliating treaties with the enemy, and the gullible commander who is eventually betrayed by his own side. (CP 2, xxiv)
The play oscillates between the apparent present and the past: the present, where Hussain Ali Kirmani, the court historian, and Colin Mackenzie, the Oriental scholar, are trying to reconstruct Tipu’s life; the past, about how Tipu lived and what he aspired for. Karnad also makes a good mix of reality and dreams by including Tipu’s dreams, which he had recorded along with his interpretations of them, in a book. The play follows the model of history plays established by Karnad in Tughlaq and Tale Danda.

Among the different roles played by Tipu Sultan, his role as an anti-colonial hero is most prominent. In the play, Tipu Sultan is presented as a nationalist who recognizes and resists the colonizer’s schemes of suppression. In the early years of British colonialism, the Indian rulers were content with the trade relations and friendship offered by the British. More than mere traders they had seen the English as friends which the latter exploited. Unlike others, Tipu realizes the ultimate aim of the British in India: to become the rulers of India and to plunder its riches. He tells to his Queen:

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 some day they’ll wake up
and throw out the Europeans. So the only way the Europeans can ensure their profit for all time to come is by becoming rulers themselves. You see? It’s them or us. (CP 2, 210)

Tipu tries hard to convince other rulers like the Marathas about the treacherous ways of the British. He is a ruler with extraordinary political insight and military acumen. He warns Hari Pant of the Marathas: “Cornwallis has saved me because without me in South India, you Marathas would become too powerful. You are being carefully contained . . . Make sure it’s not your children next.” (CP 2, 229). He tries to convince Hari Pant that the English have returned the territories which were their early possessions and in return Marathas have given them new territories. The English try to contain the Marathas from becoming more powerful.

Tipu Sultan exhibits the traits of a nationalist and a freedom fighter in his defence of the foreign forces. In this context, Dharwadkar observes:

Karnad’s Tipu is a proto-nationalist who resists as long as he can the Englishman’s schemes to rob the land, even as he understands that the English ‘believe in the destiny of their race’ and are willing to die in faraway places for their dream of England. (CP 2, xxv)
The internal tensions, the hostility between the Hindu and Muslim rulers, and their failure to recognize the foreign powers led to the fall of Tipu. Karnad poignantly portrays how a complex, civilized and prosperous culture is betrayed into subjection due to the pursuit of self-interests by key functionaries.

Like Tughlaq and the sharanas, Tipu Sultan is also a man ahead of his times. His potential to foresee things, his interest in inventions, and foreign trade, and so on are betrayed in his fascination for Europe: “that’s what makes Europe so wonderful - it’s full of new ideas - inventions - all kinds of machines – bursting with energy. Why don’t we in our country think like them?” (CP 2, 199).

Tipu’s aspirations and visions were beyond the comprehension of his contemporaries. He was frustrated at the non-comprehension of his trade policies by his subjects:

Oh, will none of you ever learn? If profits are only seven pagodas while the expenses on clerk and accountants come to ten, how can anyone survive in business? How long will these traders be able to carry their bullion to other places? Don’t you worry! They’ll come back to us – crawling. (CP 2, 195)
Tipu’s interests extend beyond the scope of trade, administration, war and politics to all things new, scientific and innovative. He was a man with a keen, enquiring mind and a desire to learn and move ahead. Tipu’s expertise in trade and his urge to become self-sufficient are well conveyed in his words:

We need glass. We need guns. We need c**annons. Shall we keep buying them from abroad? Even for that we need money . . . For centuries we begged and borrowed silk from the Chinese. And everyone predicted disaster when I got a few eggs from China. And now we have a flourishing industry of our own. Shall we sit back like the stupid Nizam and the Marathas who continue as though the English never existed – indeed, as though the Europeans never existed? (CP 2, 195-96)

Tipu is portrayed as a man of great intellect. He is eager to learn and experiment his knowledge and is portrayed as a visionary. In this regard, Dharwadker also views:

. . . the tragedy of Tipu’s fall is not only that it made way for a full-scale colonial takeover, but that it destroyed a visionary who shared the modernizing impulses of the European Enlightenment, and could meet the English on their own terms. (CP 2, xxiv-v)
Tipu’s understanding of the new ideas of Europe, political economy, link between commerce and Empire, and his desire for an up-to-date army shows that he too shared the modernizing ideas of the Europeans.

The play juxtaposes the heroic figure of Tipu with that of the politically shrewd British. The main English characters of the play like Lord Cornwallis, Lord Mornington, Arthur Wellesley are portrayed as calculating, pragmatic and ruthless. Karnad shows the military strategies used by the British to fortify their foundation in India during the early stages of colonial expansion. He reiterates the familiar argument that the success of the British in India was not a direct result of their expertise in military and warfare; but they succeeded in making the Indian rulers turn against each other.

In the play, the British makes use of the internal conflicts like the one between Tipu and the Rajahs of Travancore as a reason to corner Tipu, in the name of their “friendship” with the Rajahs. Charles Malet, the representative of Lord Cornwallis succeeds in injecting Nana Phadnavis of the Marathas to turn against Tipu Sultan, in spite of an existing Peace treaty. He makes the unwilling Nana to be a part of their trap for Tipu: to attack Tipu from different directions. It is an act designed to punish in Malet’s words, “a man who we believe is the enemy of all mankind” (CP 2, 207). Thus, the Company, the Nizam and the Marathas declare war on Tipu independently.
Tipu’s fall prefigures the fall of India and it is the result of lack of unity among Indian princely states. The play reflects the implementation of Macaulay’s findings that the strength of India lays in its spirituality, belief systems; the only way to break the nation into parts is to strike at its very strength. The British did the same in boosting the enmity between different princely states.

*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is a postcolonial play as it discusses the primary issues regarding colonialism: conflict between the East and the West, between Whites and non-whites, and the colonizer and the colonized. The conflict between the two worlds, the western and the Indian, and the denigration of the natives are portrayed effectively in the play. The European conception of the superiority of Whites is evident in most of the scenes depicting a confrontation between the two. Though the British shows respect to the Indian rulers, their acts are underlined with a sense of contempt. Lord Mornington’s reference to the other native rulers while discussing the plot to expel Tipu conveys this: “Tell the Nizam and the Marathas we shall expect their presence, though it scarcely matters either way” (CP 2, 232). The Western conception of themselves as the proper “self,” the ideal and that of the colonized as the “Other,” the savage, is hinted in the play.
In the play, Tipu Sultan acts the “Double” to the British, rather than being their “Other.” Tipu displays the same urge to build a powerful empire and also shares their spirit in trade and commerce. He tells his son:

. . . I’ve had two teachers in my life. My father, who taught me war, and the English, who taught me trade. They taught me that the era of camel is over, that it is now the age of sailing ship. And they dislike me for being so adapt a pupil. (CP 2, 209)

The success and strength of Tipu cautions the British. It is reflected in the words of Mornington, the new Governor General of India:

Tipu is building a trading empire on the European model and succeeding eminently. We have driven the French and Dutch out of India, contained the Portuguese. Is there any reason why we should tolerate an upstart native? The longer the peace, the stronger will Tipu become. (CP 2, 230–31)

The words of Mornington reflect his resentment in the power and strength of Tipu both as a ruler and as a trader. As the colonization will not support a dangerous “Double,” the English decides to terminate Tipu.

The concepts of a “unified nation” and the lack of a “national idea” loom large in the play. Through Tipu, Karnad illuminates the importance of
a unified national idea which is explicit in the British. The conversation with Haider Ali in Tipu’s third dream illustrates this:

But the English fight for something called England. What is it?
It’s not a religion that sustains them, nor a land that feeds them. They wouldn’t be here if it did. It’s just a dream, for which they are willing to kill and die. Children of England! (CP 2, 226)

Tipu realizes that the English believe in the destiny of their race which is absent in the case of Indians.

The political situation in the play depicts the decentred nature of power relations in the absence of a national idea. It lacks a unified interest for the nation. All the princely states and rulers mentioned in the play, Tipu Sultan, the Marathas, the Scindias, the Nizam, the Rajahs of Travancore and Cochin are portrayed as rivals and engaged in fights. Whereas the conflict of beliefs made Tipu Sultan and the Hindu Marathas drift apart, personal egos prevent the Sultan and the Nizam of Hyderabad to make an alliance. The multi-religious, multi-lingual nature of Indian society facilitated the British in their strategy of divide and rule. The colonization of India by the British is the direct result of the absence of a “national” idea on the part of Indians.
The position of the colonial India depicted in the play is applicable in the context of the postcolonial present. The united secular ideals that fuelled the independence movements got disillusioned and scattered in the post-independent period. It witnessed a return to the earlier state of society based on communal divisions. The religious extremism, both among Hindus and Muslims, and the violent conflicts and riots in different parts of the country, are the result of this. Though India is a strong nation, the lack of a united national idea still lingers in its population. Karnad cautions that India lacks a cohesive force that binds the different sections of the nation together.

After dealing with the myths, folktales and history, Karnad tries his hand in the contemporary themes and concerns. The shift in his thematic sources can be seen as in accordance with the necessities of the socio-political situation. Regarding the early adherence to “roots” and later shift in focus, Karnad states in an interview that it was not a conscious effort but a natural expression of his mind: “Anyway, I have written long enough and am now old enough not to worry about the identity problem. I write just what I feel like writing” (Ahuja, The Tribune). Having dealt with the essential concerns of the post-colonial world, Karnad moves forward to deal with the concerns of the contemporary, globalized world. Hence, his recent plays, Broken Images and Wedding Album can be seen as Karnad’s reply to
his critics’ charges that he evades contemporary reality by his adherence to the cultural past.

The choice of language, an important characteristic of postcolonial writing, forms the basis of Karnad’s monologue, Broken Images. The play dwells on the politics of language in Indian literary space and the conflict between English and indigenous languages. The successful Kannada writer, Manjula Nayak’s transformation into a literary phenomenon with the publication of her brilliant debut novel in English gains attention in the postcolonial literary scene. Manjula’s choice of language essays two critical questions that concern the contemporary Indian literary world: the claim of modern writers that English is a natural medium of their self-expression and the deliberate adoption of English language for visibility and monetary values.

The monologue is presented as an interview that Manjula gives to a television channel. More than an interview, she is presented as giving an introduction to a tele-film version of her novel to be broadcast in the channel. The two questions Manjula takes up to answer are of prime importance to the play. The first one regards her choice of English as the
medium for her new novel, in spite of her being a Kannada writer. The second question concerns the authenticity of the sensitive portrayal of her subject: the story of a life-long invalid. Manjula’s attempt to give a convincing answer to the two substantial questions fails with her interrogation by her electrically generated image, her *doppelganger*. She is exposed as an impostor who has passed off her dead, invalid sister’s novel as her own.

The Image in the monologue is Manjula’s alter ego, her hidden other self, her conscience, her darker side, the reality. The image, as it tells in the monologue is her “Freudian Unconscious. Everything you censored. Repressed material. Forbidden impulses. Taboo recollections. A dream. Bad dream. Actually, I could be an Interpretation of a Bad Dream” ([CP 2, 274]). It is her conscience that interrogates her integrity, the authenticity of the novel and her life.

The interrogation exposes Manjula as an imposter, a fraud, an opportunist, a defeated wife, a rival of her own invalid sister, a shallow woman, and one who feels guilty inwardly. It also elevates her sister, Malini Nayak as a true genius: despite being an invalid, she was more attractive, intelligent, vivacious and had been more intimate to Pramod, Manjula’s husband. Hence, the interrogation breaks her sophisticated images that she has established through the novel of her...
sister. The dramatic conflict that occurs inwardly is successfully displayed by Karnad through the confrontation between Manjula and her image.

The debate in the play on the aptness of English as a medium reflects the basic debate that has existed in the Indian literary scene since independence. Regarding the conflict between Indian languages and English, Dharwadker observes:

During the 1950s and 1960s, the difference between the indigenous tongues and English was routinely cast as a choice between integrity and corruption, wholeness and fragmentation, rootedness and rootlessness, decolonization and recolonization. (CP 2, xxviii)

The adoption of English has been condemned as a “betrayal.” In the monologue, Manjula confesses in a regretful voice that she is being accused of betraying Kannada for English:

Intellectuals whom I respected, writers who were gurus to me, friends, who I thought would pat me on my back and share my delight — they are all suddenly breathing fire. How dare I write in English and betray Kannada! (CP 2, 263)

A Kannada writer’s choice of English, an alien language, is criticized by the intellectual medium. Manjula explains in the monologue: “I have been accused of writing for foreign readers. Accused! As though I had committed
a crime. A writer seeks audiences where she or he can find them!” (CP 2, 264). The writer is “accused” of writing for foreign readers. It is true that a writer can reach to a wider audience by writing in a world language like English. The relevant question is whether English can be an honest medium of self-expression for Indian writers struggling to find a postcolonial identity.

A legacy of British colonization, English language has now become an integral part of Indian life. In the modern scenario, English, which is deep-rooted in the Indian psyche, also provides an equally effective medium for self-definition. Many writers like R. K. Narayanan, Mulk Raj Anand, Nissim Ezekiel, and contemporary writers since Salman Rushdie, have claimed English as the natural expression of their social and private experiences. In the monologue, Manjula also comes up with a similar argument: “. . . if there was betrayal, it was not a matter of conscious choice. I wrote the novel in English because it burst out in English. It surprised even me” (CP 2, 264). In Manjula’s case, her justifications fail as she is exposed as an impostor. But it is true in the case of Malini Nayak, its real author, who “breathed, laughed, dreamed in English” (CP 2, 271). The reference can be viewed as Karnad’s defence to the charges laid by critics that the contemporary writers betray their regional languages by writing in English.
The central conflict in the play reflects Karnad’s early experiences as a playwright. Karnad shared the attitude of a Pundit referred to in the play: “no Indian writer can expresses herself – or himself – honestly in English. For Indian writers, English is a medium of dishonesty” (CP 2, 264). This reference reiterates his stand at the beginning of his career. For three decades he argued that he could be a playwright only in Kannada. Karnad explained his stand in an interview appeared in the Sunday Herald on 21 February 1999:

. . . a language is something you need to develop over a whole life time. After having written in Kannada about 25-30 years, I feel I know how to write in Kannada now . . . I don’t have time to go into a new adventure, looking at and mastering an entire new subject because to be able to speak is not enough. You have to go into the language, you have to go into its possibilities. (Qtd in CP 2, xx)

Karnad, for many years had remained a playwright in Kannada, though he himself translated his plays into English. But a shift occurred in Karnad’s dramaturgy after Agni Mattu Male; the primacy of Kannada paved way for English as the language of original composition as exemplified in The Dreams of Tipu Sultan. The shift in his choice of language is explained by Karnad: “Now I can’t say that I am foreign to English, it may be Indian English, but that is also part of my home
language now. We have fought in it, we have brought up our children in it...” (Kumar, Deccan Herald). His choice of English has resulted from new contexts in Karnad’s career as a playwright. Despite the correlation, Manjula Nayak can be seen as a displaced version or anti-self of Karnad himself, both in terms of gender and experience. Unlike Manjula, Karnad is equally successful as a Kannada author and an English playwright. The attempt can be seen as an imaginary leap into the world of his fellow writers.

The autobiographical element in the play lies in the conflict of languages that Karnad too experienced as a writer. While his contemporaries like Ngugi wa Thiong’o preferred native language, and Wole Soyinka preferred English, Karnad chooses to express himself in both the languages. Karnad’s use of both the languages is not a conscious choice; it reflects the hybrid model which he accepts in his dramaturgy. The medium Indian English effectively represents the postcolonial Indian self; it honestly expresses the double consciousness and the hybridization involved in the linguistic construction of the postcolonial identity. It also reflects Karnad’s mastery in two languages.

Karnad occupies a central position in the language debate. He is the only truly bilingual dramatist in contemporary Indian theatre. He started his career as a playwright in Kannada, though his mother-tongue is Konkani.
Karnad himself has defined him as a writer in Kannada and that he could only write in Kannada. But his plays of late 1990’s show a transition in his choice of language. Karnad’s plays *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Broken Images*, and *Flowers* were written originally in English and then translated into Kannada. The play *Wedding Album* is written originally in his mother tongue, Konkani. More than other contemporary Indian playwrights he appears to have benefited from the global reach of English without relinquishing his firm hold on the sphere of Kannada language.

The second issue that Karnad illuminates in the play is the effect of technology, globalization and monetary drives in contemporary writers. The predicament of an author in a market-driven economy is portrayed through the imposter-writer Manjula. She stands for a writer, who is accused of having “sold out” to larger markets. The monetary gains, even the “advance,” as she specifies, facilitated her to resign her job as college lecturer. As a writer or more as an imposter, she accepts the charge of the President of Central Sahitya Academy that Indians write in English to make money. Manjula hints at the less monetary returns from Kannada and favours money in the age of globalization. She explains her position in the play:

‘A response is good. But a meaningful response is better.’

Meaningful: *Arthapoorna*. The Kannada word for Meaning is


Artha — which also means money! And of course, fame, publicity, glamour . . . power. (CP 2, 265)

Manjula shows the sheer practical mind of “modern” people to take the shortest route to name and fame. Though she tries to argue that wide audience and monetary gains are not illegitimate pursuits for a writer, her drive for monetary benefits itself shows that she is not genuine.

However, the conversation with her television image or her doppelganger proves her as a fraud, a plagiarist. It shows her as a desperate, cunning, and shallow woman. In this regard, Dharwadkar observes:

The switch to English, hailed as an inspired act of self-fashioning on the author’s part, turns out in reality to be an act of dishonesty, desperation, and cowardice, the implication being that the material lure of English as a medium can only lead the Indian-language author to prostitute herself. (CP 2, xxvii)

What makes an author disgrace herself is not the choice of a foreign language for expression, but her deliberate choice for material benefits and larger visibility. Hence, the play criticizes not her choice of language, but her opportunism to cash in on a dead sibling talent.
In *Broken Images*, Karnad introduces the audience to the technologically mediated world of contemporary times. Themes of technology and the media intersecting with human lives are explored through the protagonist of the play. Realizing the importance of technology in the contemporary world, the *doppelganger* of Manjula is effected by mirroring her image on the television screen, suggesting a monologue with her alter-ego. Hence, the twenty first-century play makes tough demands on technology; as the monitor in a TV studio shows her image interrogating her live on stage. Karnad’s monologue, *Broken Images*, illuminates several contemporary issues. In this context, Sudhir K. Arora observes:

> The story of Manjula Nayak raises many debatable issues – of language, of traditionalism verses globalization, of the glamour, of material over spiritual, of justification of the plagiarism, of sibling rivalry, of manipulation of worldly mathematics and of technology in the life of man. (Khatri and Arora, 227-28)

Both the issues discussed in the monologue and the dramatic techniques gain added relevance in the postcolonial contemporary world of technology.

*Wedding Album* is a contemporary play in which Karnad explores the traditional Indian wedding in a globalized and technologically advanced
India. The play tells the story of the “Nadkarnis,” a normal urban middle-class family: an elder daughter Hema, who lives abroad with her professional husband, her brother Rohit, who is a software designer, a younger sister Vidula, happy enough to marry a suitable expat boy she has never met, the aging father rapidly losing his authority and then, the loving mother and the loyal cook. The family is portrayed as educated, liberal, modern, yet traditional. But the apparently simple, traditional, safe atmosphere in the play is unravelled to reveal a more complex, modern, tech-stimulated world of today, which portrays the hidden anxieties, hypocrisies, selfishness and so on.

In the play, Karnad deals with the most common, yet most important event in the life of Indians. Wedding in India, popularly called “The Great Indian Wedding,” is expected to bring out the union of two families; it is also an occasion for great celebration. However, the picture perfect smiles are often known to camouflage the anxieties and resentments, long suppressed suspicions, jealousies, frustrations and aggression.

The plot of the play revolves around the pending marriage of Vidula Nadkarni, the small town Dharwad girl to Ashwin Panje, the suitable expat Saraswat boy from the US. Ashwin, who has gone through the modern ways of life, “girl friends, affairs, mistresses, one-night stands . . .
glamour, success, social connections,” has concluded that the Western culture is empty of values and he is eager to transfer the Indian spiritual traditions to the west (80). Hence, to him marriage to an Indian girl, who carries the essence of Hindu spirituality, is more a mission: a mission to “save the West” (824). Vidula, on the other hand, is not a “traditional” Hindu girl. She is portrayed as a modern mixed-up, unhappy girl who leads a secret life. In spite of her appearance as a simple, timid, innocent girl, Vidula is a part of the Cyber world that enjoys amoral chats with a bodiless voice in a Cyber Café. Hence, the marriage between them reveals the inappropriateness of Indian arranged marriages. While Ashwin seeks for a spiritual companion in his mission, Vidula sees her husband as a surrogate to her “disembodied” foreign lover.

As a more traditional sect, the Saraswat Brahmins give high value to marriage and family life. Hence, marriage forms a central issue in the play where the parents are keen on Vidula’s marriage with Ashwin. Rohit’s proposal from a relative’s family, Tapasya is given to intensify the issue of marriage. Tapasya’s father’s begging and bribing Rohit for the wedding is a contrast to Rohit’s love affair with a Christian girl Isabel. Hema, Vidula’s elder sister, is portrayed as a wife of an expat, who is unsatisfied; moreover, she is still upset at the way her parents conducted her marriage years ago. The play also reflects on the married life of their parents. Hence, the
narrative of the play leads us to the premise of a Hindu marriage which continues to be regarded as a sacred institution. Most modern Indians see marriage as a way of self-fulfilment in an otherwise unstable, global world. In his regard, Amrit Srinivasan observes in the foreword to the play:

The constellation of sexual, conjugal, caste, class, and age-related behaviours and attitudes of selfishness and sacrifice, chastity and commerce, obedience and authority, all integral to modern Hindu marriage, forms Wedding Album’s central narrative thread. (viii-ix)

The narrative also reflects the modern man’s mixed up, amoral, craven, unhappy selves.

The Indian arranged marriages, which are often portrayed as a very colourful, even fruitful institution is, in some respect, a kind of gamble. The gambling nature of marriages is revealed in the case of both the marriages in the play: Ashwin and Vidula, and Rohit and Tapasya. Vidula’s marriage to a total stranger who belongs to another world is purely aimed at getting her a higher standard of living. The family’s anxieties and patient waiting for Ashwin’s consent to the marriage towards the very last day reveals the extent to which they are desperate for the alliance. The gambling nature of the wedding is aptly conveyed in the father’s words: “Let’s face it. Marriage is a gamble” (27).
The gambling nature of Indian wedding is also evident in the Sirur’s repeated attempts to arrange their daughter Tapasya’s alliance to Rohit. Initially they try to tempt Rohit with offers for accepting the alliance. Mohan describes the fortunes of Gopal, the girl’s father, to tantalize Rohit:

God has been bountiful to Brother-in-law. They lack nothing.

Only two children and the son lives in the states. He is doing very well, thank God. So everything sister and brother-in-law have in this world will go to Tapasya. (35)

The desperation of the father is conveyed through Gopal’s begging to Rohit to marry his daughter. He pleads: “To you, Rohit, it may seem a small matter . . . Don’t hurt her, please, don’t wound her. We have brought her up like a flower. Don’t insult her. Don’t please. I’ll fall to your feet. . .” (39). Rohit’s agreement for the alliance, in spite of having a long intimate affair with Isabel, reveals his interest in the monitory gains out of the wedding. His act establishes his father’s words: “Marriage is a gamble. No escaping from fact – marriage is a gamble,” which he reiterates towards the end of the play (89).

The contemporaneity of Wedding Album lies in the introduction of technology, and its new found uses in traditional situations. Karnad throws light on the new means of “arranged” marriages in India; the technology mediated match making. In this context, Srinivasan views:
Marriage and sex without love – that aspect of Indian culture that western society finds repulsive in its strangeness and customariness—becomes, via the technologies of representation (video, email, and telephone), a ‘self-arrangement.’ (xi)

As the play rightly implies, several matrimonial sites facilitate the marriage fixing in present day India. With the support of the modern technologies of representation – video, email, and telephone – they serve the purpose of arranging a marriage between individuals belonging to different parts the world.

The video shoot at the very beginning of play reveals the link between technology and marriage in the modern Indian society. Vidhula is seen introducing herself or giving a bio-data of hers before the camera:

I am Vidula. Vidula Nadkarni. I am twenty two. Twenty-two and a half, actually. I have done my BA in Geography. Passed my exams last year. I am not doing anything at the moment. Worked for a travel agency for six months . . . I am really not very good at it. (5)

Having ‘met’ through video playbacks exchanged to and fro, Vidhula Nadkarni’s marriage with Ashwin Panje of the US is an arranged one of this sort. The distance technology of the new techno-mediated
alliances in fact accelerates the anxieties of the family members, as it is packed with a sense of uncertainty.

However, Ashwin, the video groom, fits the stereotype of the American NRI. He returns to India at the behest of his parents for his top pick among modest Indian brides. His aspiration for a traditional wife for his “mission” to save the West, echoes the “civilizing mission” propounded by the colonial powers. To him, American culture is devoid of values and he sees it his mission “to save the West” with Indian spirituality (82). Traces of chauvinistic view can be seen in Ashwin. He is himself not chaste, yet he demands a traditional wife to spread the spirituality of India to West.

The play also illuminates the evil effects of technology and cyber media in the age of globalization. The new world of global culture has brought with it the highly liberated ideas of the West. The contemporary youth, facilitated with modern technologies, are lured by the aspirations to easy prosperity and notions of sexual freedom. Now, with the help of a computer and an internet connection any one can reach to unlimited possibilities of knowledge and amoral contents. More than guiding the youth to right path and knowledge, the intrusion of technologies is found to mislead the contemporary youth.
The advent of global culture and the consequent notions of sexual freedom in the youth are evident in most characters. The central character of the play, Vidula is portrayed as a liberated modern girl, wearing a mask of tradition. As a usual visitor to a Cyber Café, Vidula is seen as engaged in an amoral relationship through a sex-chat with a foreigner. There she is the “Kuchla the Jezebel,” submitting herself to a disembodied “Swami Ananga the Bodyless,” a foreign lover. Their chat reveals the other side of Vidula’s personality and it shows that she is a usual customer there. In spite of having caught red handed by the “moral” youths, Vidula shows a hysterical rage in screaming “sexual harassment” to make her tormentors run away. Vidula seems least concerned about her free nature and heads towards the arranged marriage with Ashwin. She hopes to have a surrogate swami, with flesh and blood in Ashwin.

A more poignant illustration of the notion of sexual freedom is portrayed through the teenage boy, Vivan who is the Nadkarni’s neighbour. Vivan, at the young age of thirteen openly expresses his passion for Hema, who is old enough to be his mother. His carefree nature and the pornographic letters to Hema show the horrifying picture of the upcoming generation. Vivan says to Hema bluntly:

Go ahead. I'll also tell her I love you. The moment I saw you the other day, I fell desperately in love. I want to die kissing
you. I want to die with my hand inside your blouse . . . Hit me. The touch of your hand fills me with ecstasy. I’m crazy about you. (45)

The play also shows the short-lived nature of his infatuation for Hema. His focus shifts to his friend Ambuja once she comes to her grandparent’s home. So he tells Radhabhai to convey the message that he will not be borrowing any more books from Hema, signalling the end of his desire for her.

Most of the characters in the plays are liberated and influenced by the western notions of sexual freedom. Ashwin is portrayed as a typical expat who has gone through many relationships: “I have drunk life in the US to the lees. Girl friends, affairs, mistresses, one-night stands. And on the public stage, glamour, success, social connections. I have been through them all” (80). His revelation of having had many relationships has no importance either to Ashwin or to Vidula.

Rohit on his part enjoys an affair with a Christian girl, Isabel. The open nature of their relationship reveals that they are intimate enough. Even after his marriage with Tapasya, Rohit tries to re-establish the affair with her, which is revealed in his conversation with Prathiba Khan. These incidents show Rohit’s notions of sexual freedom. Hema, who is married and has two children, is also portrayed as influenced by modern liberalism.
of the West. Though at the beginning she was horrified by the advances of Vivan, Hema is shown as accepting his amorous letters. Her direction to Radhabhai reveals that she anticipates his letters: “Yes, him. If he hands you a book, keep it aside for me please. Don’t give it to anyone else” (84). Her sense of chastity in marriage is seen shaken.

The postcoloniality of *Wedding Album* lies in the implicit conflict between the Eastern and Western ideas in the contemporary generation. The conflict and hybridity are evident in every character, one way or other. Vidula, the bride, is a hybrid and two faced; her complex, courageous, amoral self is concealed in her simple, timid, innocent, traditional appearance. Belonging to a traditional, middle-class Saraswat family, Vidulha is expected to be a very orthodox girl rooted in tradition. Her fiancé, Ashwin expects a “Woman as Mother – Wife – Daughter.” But she reflects that the younger generation of the country, who are frustrated by the rigid society, aspire for sexual freedom. The conflict between aspirations and social conformity is evident in Vidula’s character.

The conflict in Ashwin leads him to a kind of “spiritual crisis.” Exposed to the western ways of life, he has realized the loss of values in the American culture. In order to regain his spirituality, Ashwin returns to India to get married to a spiritually inclined girl. Rohit, Vidula’s brother, is also
subject to this conflict between the East and the West. The progressive, liberated youth in him takes him to engage in an open love affair with a Christian girl, which is very rare among Saraswat Brahmins. But for marriage, he opts for Tapasya, his distant relative. His decision is also motivated by monitory gains as well as convenience. Hema, the elder sister, though portrayed as a house-wife, entertains the same sense of sexual freedom as Vidula. She seems to be comfortable and content with the advances of Vivan, the teenage boy of the neighbourhood.

The new world of global culture has brought with it the highly liberated ideas of the West. The traditional Indian society, which is rooted in age-old customs and values, finds it difficult to accommodate the Western culture. Hence, the contemporary generation, trained in western ways, but still rooted in Indian culture, experiences a conflict. Their western liberated influences can be seen in their attitude towards chastity, a concept highly valued by Indian culture. The theme of chastity and its deflation is treated more explicitly by Karnad in *Wedding Album*. Chastity never comes as an issue between Ashwin and Vidula. Karnad’s earlier plays treat adultery subtly, but in *Wedding Album* almost all characters indulge in adultery, as if it is normal.
The structure of the play is different from the rest of his plays. Unlike in other plays, where the central story is told/narrated by choice characters or the story follows linear narration, *Wedding Album* explores a new method. Scenes one and five of the play are presented as taking place about three years after the rest of the play. The play begins with Rohit’s and Pratibha Khan’s review of Vidhula’s video tape in search of a possible subject for their new tele-serial. But Vidula’s story of a girl agreeing to marry a total stranger seems outdated to Pratibha, considering the taste of her viewers who are mainly westernized youth. She says: “The may believe it, but they won’t like it . . . The boy turn up, all ready to jump on to the altar without ever having seen her. In this day and age? (8).” She rejects Vidula’s story and prefers the maid Radhabhai’s which has “more meat” (9).

Radhabai’s story is discussed in Scene four by Vidula and Hema. The story reveals the tragic story of her daughter, Yamuna, who came to Bangalore in search of a job and remained a rich trader’s concubine. Radhabai knew this and worked in the same city. The rich man’s death resulted in throwing away Yamuna from the house. Later Radhabai discovered the missing Yamuna in a street in a mad state and she disappeared into the crowd. This tragedy is given as the reason behind Radhabai’s tantrums. The Scene five of the play gives a dramatic
conclusion to Radhabai’s story by Rohit and Pratibha Khan. Their version of her story ends with Yamuna’s failure to recognize Radhabai; she moves away from her in search of her mother melting into the rain. They provide everything to intensify the tragic effect of the story.

But her true story is revealed towards the end of the play. As Radhabai starts watching the television, she narrates her own story. It reveals her selfishness, as she herself hides from the mad Yamuna out of her fear of losing her job. Her selfishness is revealed in her words:

I was paralyzed. Why is she here? What if my mistress sees her? What’ll happen to me? I ran and hide in a corner of the terrace. I buried my head in my knees and curled up, so she wouldn’t recognize me . . . I crawled back to my kitchen. Safe. (93)

This act of Radhabai actually explains her sudden violent outburst of when she watched a serial about a mother sacrificing her life for her daughter. The guilt of abandoning her daughter made her shout to the people around her. She screamed: “Why are these bastards after me? Why won’t they leave me alone?” (52). The real ending of the happenings in the play is depicted in Scene five. It describes that Rohit is married to Tapasya who is at her home for delivery and Vidula is successfully married to Ashwin.
It is interesting to note that Karnad gives an unprecedented prominence to the women characters in his plays that are based on myths and folktales. The plays based on contemporary concerns also get a comparable importance as signified by *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*. But in history plays Karnad portrays the women characters in a rather passive way. In *Tughlaq*, the only noted female character is the step-mother whose relation with Tughlaq is underlined with incestuous tone. Her betrayal of the Sultan in killing Najib, his close associate, makes Tughlaq mad with rage and compels him to punish her with death. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* also centres on the central figure of Tipu and the female character is limited to the portrayal of Ruqayya Banu, the Sultan’s favourite Queen. The ailing queen plays a passive role in the play.

In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad draws a patriarchal structure underlying the main thread. The *sharanas*’ urge for an ideal society is contrasted with their own treatment of women in an unequal way. Jagadeva, the young *sharana* treats his wife, Savitri in a rather chauvinistic manner. He behaves in an indifferent manner and refuses to respond to her several entreaties to meet him while his mother is bed-ridden. Madhuvarasa, the bride’s father, also treats his wife in the same way. He tries to silence her and even attempts to hurt her when she raises her voice against the proposed inter-caste marriage. Karnad’s reaction to such unequal treatment for women is echoed through
the words of Gangambika, Basavanna’s wife: “Shame on you, Madhuvanna. Women and cattle, they are all the same to you, aren’t they?” (CP 2, 49). Hence, in Tale-Danda also women characters play a passive role. But Karnad here attempts to expose the unequal treatment of women in a male-centred society.

Through the retrospective narratives of the past, Karnad gives insights into the lives of modern man. He returns to the cultural past of India to deal with the political present. But an analysis reveals the parallel between the past and present in his plays. History and historic characters stands to illuminate the present events and population. Karnad’s act of re-interpreting history can be compared to Brecht’s method of historicizing. The term “historicizing” means to historicize the text or to produce the text in the light of past happenings and view the present in broad perspective. Karnad follows this pattern in his exploration of contemporary dilemmas through the narratives of history. In his plays, the past helps us to comprehend the present. He provides us with a glimpse of the past as well as its relevance to an understanding of the contemporary world.

Karnad has proved himself as the true advocate of postcolonial Indian individual. In case of thematic sources, Karnad entertains and illuminates his reader/audiences with such a multiplicity of themes. His plays, whether
based on myths/folktales or history/contemporary issues, mirror a rare insight into the conflicts and dilemmas of contemporary individuals.