CHAPTER TWO

A Comparative Analysis of Hindu Advatic belief and the Yoruban belief of the ‘Fourth Stage’

2. Introduction

This Chapter will explore the connection between the philosophical beliefs of Yoruba culture and the Hindu Advatic belief. This connection is made at a metaphysical level by a cross understanding of the Hindu concept of Advait and Turiya and the Soyinkan concept of the ‘Fourth Stage’. Hindu philosophical thought offers a very beautiful understanding of life at a metaphysical level, wherein the human being gets established in a state of omniscient and omnipotent consciousness which is the ‘Atman’ or all knowing, and rises above human pettiness and material desires. To come to this stage of ‘thoughtlessness’ and ‘materiallessness’, one needs to practice meditation regularly. The ‘Turiya’ state is above the mind, body and intellect. It is in ‘Turiya’ that one gets established in the Atman. It is possible to argue that Wole Soyinka’s concept of the Fourth Stage is similar to Turiya. To overcome our weaknesses we need to study ourselves, and this can be done through self introspection techniques. To evolve above our negative tendencies, or what Soyinka calls ‘soul-deadening habits,’ we have to reach the Turiya state which is our essential and ‘Real’ stage, i.e., the state of total awareness. For societies to evolve, individuals have to evolve. The evolutionary stages of Turiya and the Fourth stage are steps in a positive direction. Section One of this Chapter will explain the concept of Atman and Turiya. The next section explains Soyinka’s concept of Fourth stage and compares it to ‘Turiya’. Section Three discusses Soyinka’s The Road (1973), by applying the concept of the Fourth stage. It then introduces the
work of Girish Karnad and then analyzes his play *The Fire and the Rain* (1998), applying Wole Soyinka’s philosophy of the ‘Fourth Stage’.

Playwrights like Wole Soyinka and Girish Karnad call for a metaphysical understanding of human nature. And to make this possible, one needs to understand the metaphysical terms like Turiya and Atman and then link it to Soyinka’s transitional realm or the Fourth stage. To make man reach the divine in him or his ‘chi’, Soyinka takes recourse to Yoruba drama, which is representational. In other words the actor and audience take part in it. It is also visionary. The human will is all potent and above physical suffering. It is this will, which gives humans, the ability to rise above the physical aspect of human nature. It is again this will, which gives us the ability to fulfill our visions and help society progress. Yoruba drama attempts to implement the traditional function of Yoruba myth by actualizing the ritual transition of a metaphysical gulf. The metaphysical gulf is portrayed on stage by means of the symbolic journey of the Yoruba god, Ogun.

2.1 Atman and Turiya

According to Hindu Advatic philosophy, spiritual evolution is a conscious effort by an individual to transcend the limited, visible, mind-body and intellect trio, and reach the limitless stage, the infinite invisible spiritual stage of an individual i.e. the Atman. According to A. Parthasarathy in *The Symbolism of Hindu Gods and Rituals* (1994), Atman is the living principle in man which transforms his inert matter (the body, mind and intellect) into a living being. The Atman according to Hindu philosophy is ever pure and changeless.

As Swami Sivananda expresses;
I am the Atman, the embodiment of eternal Self-knowledge, the changeless, whose nature is pure Consciousness, just as the nature of fire is heat, depending upon which the gross mind and the senses perform their respective functions. (1995:9)

According to Sivananda, the Atman is One which shines by its own light. Atman is the one which illuminates various intellects, just as the sun reflects its light in the various containers of water. One has to transcend the limitations of the waking, dream and deep sleep states to reach the fourth stage called Turiya. It is in Turiya that one gets established in the Atman. This is man’s original and real state, the core of his personality, his essential and infinite being. It is in this state, that he struggles to free himself of his material desires, and transcend them to reach the ultimate reality of life. According to an example from Mandukya Upanishad, Light needs no service of another to illuminate it; light itself is illumination. Similarly, in order to know the Atman, no other knowledge is necessary accept the awareness of its existence, as it is not a physical thing, which can be seen, but it is a state that one can reach by total understanding of the Self, by complete awareness and knowledge. Therefore Turiya is the stage which establishes one in the Atman. It is all knowing and all seeing.

The final step towards complete annihilation is the death of the ego and the awakening of the divine consciousness. The ‘I’, which is actually words, thoughts, body and desires dies and total awareness takes over. This awareness is consciousness of the divinity in each one of us and the humbling knowledge that all beings are essentially same. We are all at different levels of spiritual evolution. And to come to this state one has to enter the realm of transition which is the Turiya of the Hindu Advait and the Fourth Stage of the Yorubian world-view. It is possible to interpret that The Turiya and the Fourth stage are similar in this aspect. The realization of the
self, helps one become the ‘mouthpiece of the god’, your ‘Ishta’ and then finally become one with Him. According to Swami Chinmayananda, “The Atman and Parmatma are unified. Turiya is a state wherein the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ merge themselves into a homogenous mass of Pure Knowledge which is Itself the Knowledge-Absolute. (2006: 80). Turiya is the fourth phase or stage of consciousness which is also explained in terms of the words ‘dream’ and ‘sleep’. These words are used in their spiritual significance; meaning mis-apprehension and non-apprehension of reality respectively. Swami Chinmayananda further adds that waking state (jagrat), i.e. being awake is specially not mentioned, since the waking-state is included and incorporated in the term dream, since both the waking and dream states are characterized by the mis-apprehension or misunderstanding of reality. Whether one mistakes a rope to be a snake or a stick there is a mis-apprehension of Reality. Therefore Turiya is beyond the mis-apprehension. Turiya is a state of total clarity where there are no ambiguities, no misunderstandings. Again sleep is used here to mean non-apprehension. The non-apprehension or the not understanding of Truth is the cause for the mis-apprehension of the pluralistic phenomenal world both in the waking and in the dream states. Thus the non-apprehension is the cause and the mis-apprehension of both the dream and the waking states are the effects.

It is also mentioned that Turiya is a state of Eternal and continuous ‘knowing’. Turiya is pure knowledge and as such its very essential nature is knowing. Atman or Turiya is ‘knowing’. The state of Turiya is the state of timelessness.

In Mandukya Upanisad with Karika (2006) as retold by Swami Chinmayananda; man is now under his own self-delusion, living in a state of sleep. Further, “When we have transcended both the cause, ignorance of our own nature, and the effects, the pluralistic world of perceptions, we shall
experience the Reality in the Fourth phase of consciousness, the Turiya” (2006:81).

Turiya is the state of absolute knowledge, where there is no ignorance. The blissful moments of selfhood are moments of dynamic knowing, a stage of perfect illumination. It is a state of continuous, pervading, endless, eternal, perfect knowledge.

Swami Chinmayananda further explains that man is existing today in the non-apprehension of the real nature of himself as the all pervading consciousness. He states:

This state of affairs has been his lot from the time of creation which is from the time when the first unit of Time came to be conceived. Thus, Creation is without beginning (Anadi). From the time of creation down to the present moment, we have been living in a state of sleep, i.e. non-apprehension of Reality. When the ego, awakens fully to the Truth - the Reality of its own nature, it shall wake up to the Reality or Truth which is non-dual, birthless, sleepless and dreamless. The qualification ‘dreamless’ carries with it the significance that in Truth there is no mis-apprehension. When we have awakened from the dream, the dream-world of delusions ends; so too when we have awakened to the reality, all our concept, limitations, morality etc. drop away from us, the ego dies away once for all, never more to rise up again.(2006: 82)

2.2 Soyinka’s Concept of Fourth Stage and its similarity to Turiya.

It is in this ‘Fourth’ stage that the world of ancestors, existing in the past, ‘the world of the unborn’, existing in the future; and the world of the
living, existing in the present times of the Yoruba world view, bring in the
timelessness of eternity. This belief of the Yoruba in the day to day existence
of these aspects of time has been recognized since long. When we put the
same thing in fleshed-out cognitions, present life contains within it
manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are vitally
within the concept of completeness of life. Here one can give the example of
the Yoruba Masquerade of *the egungun*. In the *egungun* the spirit of the
ancestor enters the wearer of the Mask of that ancestor. Thus the past and
present come together. It is in this fourth realm, the three tenses cease and
man enters the area of pure consciousness.

Wole Soyinka explains in *Myth Literature And The African
World* (1990), to bring about a revolution man has to go to the Fourth stage
or Turiya and find answers for the problems he wants to solve. He has to
transcend the material levels of the mind, body and intellect and also the
waking, dream and deep sleep stages to reach this state. Similarly Wole
Soyinka’s fourth space is “the dark continuum of transition where occurs the
inter–transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality. It houses the ultimate
expression of cosmic will” (1990: 26). The fourth stage leads man to his
limitless Atman and ultimately to godhead.

Wole Soyinka epitomizes his Fourth stage through the God Ogun, the
god of artisans, crafters and all creative things. “Ogun stands for a
transcendental humane but rigidly restorative justice. Transcending, even
today, the distorted myths of his terrorist reputation, traditional poetry
records him as ‘protector of orphans,’ ‘roof over the homeless’, ‘terrible first
creative energy’, the first challenger and conqueror of transition. Soyinka
calls Ogun the first actor, the terrible guardian of the sacred oath” (1990:
26). Soyinka further states, that Ogun is the revolutionary deity of the
Yoruba pantheon. Ogun embodies the spirit of challenge, ‘the Promethean instinct in man,’ which is constantly goading man towards self-realization.

Soyinka explains,

Yoruba tragedy plunges straight in the ‘chthonic realm’, the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming. Into this universal womb once plunged and emerged Ogun the first actor, disintegrating within the abyss. His spiritual re-assemblage does not require a ‘copying of actuality’ in the ritual re-enactment of his devotees, any more than Obatala does in plastic representation in the art of Obatala. (1990:142-143).

Ogun, like Lord Shiva represents the creative-destructive principle in humans. Ogun and Obatala, the Yoruba Gods, are comparable to Shiva and Parvati, the Hindu Gods. Obatala is the form and structure, moulder of human existence and Ogun is the spirit of human existence. Likewise Shiva, is the “yogi”, the one in meditation, indifferent to worldly affairs while Parvati is Shakti, the active principle of Shiva. The Shakti evokes Shiva in each one of us because Shiva is the purest self, which emerges after destroying our ego, the worldly, material manifestation of the self. Every human being with the effort of its will can overcome the negative aspects of his personality and evolve into superior human beings. The transition of the self from the material to the spiritual being calls for a leap into the metaphysical realm of being.

Soyinka’s passionate discussion on Ogun continues, “the actors in Ogun Mysteries are the communicant chorus, containing within their collective being the essence of that transitional abyss. But only as essence, held, contained and mystically expressed. Within the mystic summons of the
chasm the protagonist actor (and every god-suffused choric individual) resists, like Ogun before him, the final step towards complete annihilation” (1990:142-143). The complete annihilation of the ego, is the awakening of the higher self. When the limited physical aspect is transcended, one gets established in the consciousness, which leads one to the Divine. Soyinka explains this step from the limited to the eternal thus, “From this alone steps forward the eternal actor of the tragic rites, first as the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering visions symbolic of the transitional gulf, interpreting the dread power within whose essence he is immersed as agent of the choric will.” (1990: 142-143).

Wole Soyinka talks of the “collective consciousness”, of a community, which through the mythical tale of their deity, here Ogun, witness his progress, or rather his spiritual journey. He describes how the god with his Herculean will is able to overcome material temptations, and evolve into the god that he is. His journey, inwards towards his essence, becomes the tale of a god to be worshipped and emulated.

This metaphysical gulf is the ‘immeasurable gulf of transition’ or the Fourth stage, which the Upanisad refers to as Turiya. Another way of looking at the Yoruba Gods, Obatala and Ogun, from the Indian point of view, is to relate them to Shiva and Shakti of the Indian pantheon (differently than the view given above). Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, the destroyer, the creator and preserver correspondingly are principally involved in these activities. It is when Shakti, the female principle is evoked that the limited aspects of these three deities are turned into the divine life-force. The inertness of the Holy trinity is activated.

As mentioned by Soyinka, “The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into
the fourth area of experience the immeasurable gulf of transition” (1990: 148). To create new areas of awareness one has to bridge the chasm between god and men which Ogun did. The three stages of the Yoruba are the dead, the unborn, the living and the fourth is the transitional realm. Ogun is the revolutionary, the carver of new paths. It is in the Fourth stage that man and god are one, the limited aspects of human life and the unlimited consciousness are one. Ogun is the revolutionary spirit, the will to bring about changes and lead and individual to progress, to create something new.

The Atman and Parmatma are one. This is the Advaitic essence of the Indian Veda. Indian saints like Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Gautam Buddha and Raman Maharshi had reached this state of Paramananda. Soyinka further elucidates The Fourth stage as:

the persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, a re-definition in terms of cultural or private experience is, at the least, man’s recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories, and of all the subjective unease that is aroused by man’s creative insights, that wrench within the human psyche which we vaguely define as ‘tragedy’ is the most insistent voice that bids us return to our own sources.”(1990:140)

Soyinka’s term “our own sources” can be explained thus, that the insights one gets while sitting in ‘dhyana’ or meditation and ‘the epiphanies’ or ‘telepathies’ one experiences are part of the process by which one gets attuned to one’s divine consciousness, the Atman. Getting established in the Atman takes one above all vagueness of emotions, it brings one to the state of equanimity. Soyinka further elucidates, “there illusively, hovers the key to the human paradox, to man’s experience of being and non-being his dubiousness as essence and matter, intimations to transience and eternity and
the harrowing drives between uniqueness and oneness” (1990:140). The individual struggles to discover the divine within, which is his unique effort, his unique experience. But the beauty of this discovery is the realization that he is one with all fellow beings, as the essence of the entire humanity is same. The process seems entirely confusing, but on reaching the goal, total clarity comes. Living is confusing but getting established in godhood takes away all skepticism.

The visceral inexplicable urge to understand certain things calls for a leap to the metaphysical state. A creative soul is bound to suffer the pangs of limitation at the material level of existence. He tries to expand his vision beyond perceptions, emotions and thoughts and to do this he tries to transcend the limitations of body, mind and intellect and gain realization of his inner self. This is indicated in God Shiva, by the opening of the “Gyana Chakshu”, the third eye. This third eye literally means eye of wisdom, where the vision reaches beyond that of the two mortal eyes. Shiva has a divine vision of Reality. Shiva is the god of tapas or self-control, an introvert.

Indian spirituality achieves the Fourth stage by entering the realm of silence which can be achieved through meditation. A man of realization is one who has conquered his ego, is master of ego. Soyinka talks of the human will coupled with the divine will which makes one hold on, when everything around is disintegrating and chaotic. Wole Soyinka has withstood this test when he was in solitary confinement for twenty-one months, physically the “man died” but the will to hold, his “Chi” made him live and come out of the dungeon feeling richer inside.

In the Indian context we have the great devotees of god who were able to mingle their selves with the divine will in spite of the chaos around them, e.g. Meerabai, her submission and surrender to Krishna could not be understood by her in-laws and yet she prevailed. Meerabai’s faith in her
Krishna was undoubted, the Bhakta had transcended the mind, body and intellect trio and got established in the Reality called Krishna, so steady was Meera’s faith in Krishna that when her brother-in-law sent poison for her, she accepted it as Krishna’s ‘Prasad’ and drank it. Krishna saved her, the poison did not affect her. Meera, became one with Krishna. Her bhakti made her realize the Divine in her, in whom she finally mingled.

2.3 An analysis of Soyinka’s *The Road* (1963) and Girish Karnad’s *The Fire and the Rain* (1998) through an understanding of the ‘Fourth Stage’.

2.3.1

It is the quest for the ultimate reality of life, the ‘universal reality’ which makes the playwrights delve into the fourth stage and seek answers for their spiritual quest. The search for our original self continues and the Fourth stage is one step in discovering the “true” us. It is this state which takes society forward, because after reaching the state of silence one is able to comprehend one’s essential nature and is able to get attuned to a higher consciousness. This state of silence can also be reached by witnessing a good play. It is this state of inner churning which shows human beings the way to get rid of “soul-deadening habits” which human beings repeat birth after birth and help them evolve into better human beings. The chapter will make a unique attempt to show the usage of the Soyinkan idea of ‘Soul-deadening habits’ and rising above it. This can be done by entering the Fourth–realm of existence and analyzing one’s repeated cycle of follies. It can only be corrected by the Herculean effort of the human will.

The concept of the Fourth Stage can be applied to Wole Soyinka’s play *The Road* (1973). The road is a metaphor for life, just like life is a
journey with unexpected twists and turns, so is traveling on the road. Life is full of mysteries, similarly traveling on the road is mysterious as it takes you to new lands. This play has the enigmatic Professor as its main protagonist, who runs a store called “Aksident Store - All Part Availebul” (1973:151). The store is actually a “bolekaja” (mammy wagon), selling spare parts for all locomotives, especially trucks and lorries running on the road.

The Professor is a crazy man in search of the meaning of the Word, which could be the ultimate reality of life or it could be death. He has his alter ego in the mute Murano. Murano is a total mystery to his fellow beings like Samson, Say Tokyo Kid and Kotonu and the other touts. He is seen going out before day break, and he is seen only after dark. He serves palm wine after sunset. Palm wine is Ogun’s ‘prasad’.

Murano was saved by the Professor. Neglected in the back of a hearse. And dying. Moaned like a dog whose legs have been broken by a motor car. I took him – somewhere – looked after him he was well again. (1973:186)

Murano, the mute takes an about-turn at the last step between life and death. His peculiar state puts him at a unique position in the Professor’s eyes. Professor feels the Mute is the possessor of the Word. Murano is in the ‘Agemo phase’. In his Note for the producer, Soyinka explains the meaning of Agemo as ‘a religious cult of flesh dissolution’. Soyinka explains further that “Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence (as in the festival of Ogun in this play), as much as the part psychic, part intellectual grope of Professor towards the essence of death” (1973:149).

K.R. Srinivas Iyengar describes how the play is structured around the cult of Ogun, the god of the road and iron god who is the fierce protector of taxi and lorry drivers (2004:86). Nature has always awed man and the road traverses through various landscapes like the mountain, the river, the jungle,
the valley, the bridges and the rocks. Therefore the traveler on the road has
to face the power of these natural structures. Iyengar continues that the
‘Road’ is a god surely, for who else can dare so much, encompass so much,
and suffer so much. Road is a passage from somewhere to somewhere.
Similarly life too is a passage. The road is uncannily deceptive, and
humankind can be deceptive too. Iyengar continues in his essay, “the roads
seductive bends and coils can be an invitation to destruction, and human
uniforms - the driver’s, the soldier’s, the policeman’s, the priest’s, the god
Ogun’s may also hide more than they reveal. And life is full of paradoxes.
One has to die- to die almost-to give new life” (2004:98).

The Agemo phase leads to the Fourth Stage. It is here that the interest
in the physical aspect of life wanes. The Professor, Ogun like has both the
creative and destructive qualities in him. He exclaims that too many people
come to him for help. A lot of people depend on him and he cannot let them
down. But one is never clear as to what his occupation is. He forges licenses.
There is always a question mark as to whether he causes accidents on the
road by pulling out road signs. His perpetual preoccupation is with the Word.
But the Word forever eludes him. He wonders whether the word is Life or
Death or Death in Life or Life in Death! The Professor’s Quest definitely
provides a comical strain to the play. The play tries to convey the message
that higher philosophy need not always be dense. Simple revelations and
unexpected witticisms in our daily lives can help us discover delightful and
deeper truths.

The play has another interesting character, Kotonu. He is an ace driver
but has given up driving and is acting as a salesman at the Professor’s
Aksident Store. He has a sixth sense, which gives a forewarning to him
before there is an accident on the road. His super sensitiveness keeps him
away from the steering wheel.
The three characters Murano, Kotonu and the Professor are at various levels of evolution. Especially, the Professor’s journey is intriguing. As K.R. Srinivas Iyengar points out “when the net seems to be closing over him at last, and the inquiry about the abducted or missing god threatens to take an ugly turn, Professor simply says remember my warning. Be careful I said. Be careful. If my enemies trouble me I shall counter with a resurrection” (2004:97). Joe asks the Professor whether that was his last word, to which the Professor replies that it was his message.

The last scene is the mad enactment of the Resurrection. It is evening time and Murano is distributing palm wine. Suddenly he is seen to throw aside the mask with its obviously disturbing intimations of a buried past. Professor pulls him up and takes him to the store. Then, after some minutes - and all too abruptly, the ‘egungun’- the masked god, Ogun-emerges from the store. It is Murano, who comes wearing the mask. The spirit of the mask enters him and he behaves like one possessed. Everybody becomes serious. The Professor too behaves like one possessed. Say Tokyo Kid leaps at the Professor, snatches the palm wine gourd and dashes it against the wall. Say Tokyo Kid stabs the Professor. Murano wearing the mask smashes Say Tokyo Kid on a bench. Professor’s death is also the death of the mask wearer, as Murano is his alter ego, he dies with the Professor. The resurrection of the Professor is not a reality of the play, it was just a hope. The death is a reality and in it is the resurrection of the spirit which is part of the Yoruba, and Advatic belief. The Word is death, which is the ultimate reality of life. The Road, shows the abyss of transition the Fourth Stage, which the Professor is able to witness. His resurrection would be his union with his god. Whether the death of the Ogun mask wearer is their union is a question mark.
2.3.2
From Soyinka’s play we move to a study of Karnad’s background and then the application of the Fourth Stage to Karnad’s play *The Fire and Rain*. Girish Karnad mentions in the Author’s Introduction to his *Three Plays* (1994) that he belongs to a generation of playwrights who were the first to come of age after India acquired independence from the British. With his contemporary dramatists, he had to combat the literary tensions of creating an identity for the Contemporary Indian Theatre. The tensions were caused by a tussle between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and the country’s own traditions, and also between the various visions for the future, which seemed to have the potential of being fulfilled once the British left India with all their political baggage.

Girish Karnad continues in the *Three Plays* that he was born in a small town in Karnataka. Right from his childhood he was exposed to two theatre forms which depicted two irreconcilably different worlds. His father took the entire family to see plays staged by groups of professional actors called *natak companies* which visited their town throughout the year. The plays were staged on semi permanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and the lighting was done by petro max lamps. And the servants of the house, after the harvesting season, took Karnad to watch the traditional *Yakshagana* performances. The stage was a platform with a back curtain, erected in the open air and lit by torches. As Karnad turned into a teenager *natak companies* stopped functioning and Yakshagana seemed quaint and silly to Karnad. This exposure to theatre, which left a childhood impact on the writer, resurfaced in his writings later. The next exposure to theatre was at the post graduate level, in Mumbai, where he saw the play *Miss Julie*, by Strindberg. This play was directed by the young and bright
director and dramatist, Ebrahim Alkazi. As Girish Karnad comments, “by the norms I had been brought up on, the very notion of laying bare the inner recesses of the human psyche like this for public consumption seemed obscene. What impressed me was the way lights faded in and out on the stage. The realization that there were instruments called dimmers that could gently fade the lights in or out opened up a whole new world of magical possibilities. We stepped out of mythological plays lit by torches or petro max lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers. The new technology could not be divorced from the new psychology.” (1994: 2). This was how the playwright Karnad was born. He could very easily connect the antique world of myths and folklores with the contemporary world. Right from *Yayat* (2008), his first play, to *Fire and Rain* (1994), *to Bali* (2004), he has been using myths. His plays enthrall the reader and the audience equally because Karnad is an excellent narrator. His language and sensitivity touches one’s heart, one can relate to them very easily. Another two plays which employ myths and folklores are *Hayavadana* (1974) and *Nag Mandala* (1988). His plays also deal with political figures like Tughlaq and Tipu Sultan. And his magnum-opus according to this thesis, which surfaces in each chapter of this thesis, is his political play *Tale Danda* (1993). Plays with themes like plagiarism and sibling rivalry are - a monologue *Broken Images* (2005) and *Flowers* (2005). *Flowers* (2005) is a monologue about a priest, who is torn between his love for a courtesan and duty towards his wife. It depicts the double standards of priestly life.

Most of Karnad’s plays are written in Kannada and English. His plays have been staged in English and Hindi too. Girish Karnad has been awarded the Sahitya Academy award (1992), the Padma Bhushan (1992) and the Bhartiya Gyanpeeth Award in 1999. He has written a beautiful play to sensitize people to the issue of environment conservation, *Cheluvi*. This has been filmed too.
The play *Fire and the Rain* (1998), as analyzed by Radhe Shyam Sharma, is “a play of conflicting values of good and evil, moral and immoral, ‘dharma’ and ‘adharma’ real face and mask face, it presents characters as victims of their attitudes. The play points out a relationship between gods and men on the earth from period of the ‘Mahabharata’ to the modern contemporary society. It mirrors the growing war between saints, rishis and Brahmins and low-caste people, actors, hunters” (2000: 67).

Another analysis of the play by Radhe Shyam Sharma, is that the fire-sacrifice represents self–gratification, self-examination and self–purification of Brahmins, but they become involved in jealousy, envy, power-politics and supremacy of their sectarian attitude. “Karnad has beautifully displayed the game of spiritual power as political activity prevailing in society as a contemporary reality” (2000: 244).

In this Chapter the deeply embedded issue of the Hindu Caste-System is highlighted. Play after play Girish Karnad makes the audience confront the social evil of caste. The soul deadening habit of the high caste Hindus of degrading humans of low caste has been repeated age after age. Through the ages humane writers, have compelled people to think about the negativity of this system and after some soul searching made people think of a casteless society. The spiritual journey of the Brahmins in the play *The Fire and Rain* (1998), can be read as a parallel to the Soyinkan journey of The Fourth stage.

Girish Karnad in his play *Tale Danda* (1993), speaks of the Shavite Saint of the 12th century Basavanna. The followers of Basavanna, ‘Sharnas’ were against idolatry and caste systems. They upheld the equality of sexes. The ‘Sharnas’ believed in a casteless society where human beings were recognized as human beings and not as Brahmins and Shudras. Though the practical formulation of this belief resulted in chaos and bloodshed Basavanna tried getting a Brahmin girl married to a ‘low-caste’ boy, which resulted in mayhem. His revolutionary step in that age resulted in bloodshed.
It however created an awareness of the decadence of this system. To date the caste remains a pressing social problem.

The theme of two people of different castes falling in love and meeting with resistance from society is dealt with again in Karnad’s play *The Fire and the Rain* (1998). Nittalai, a tribal girl is in love with Arvasu, who is a Brahmin. Although the play deals with other issues, casteism is highlighted. Nittalai is made to marry a tribal, and dies towards the end of the play at the hands of her husband because she is found with Arvasu. Her tragic end once again points at the evil of caste system in the Indian society. Girish Karnad makes the audience confront this issue again and again, in the hope that the impact of such an evil will make his audience rise above it. It is almost like one has to rise above the physical aspect, into the metaphysical space to get rid of this social evil of casteism. We hear stories of lovers whose love could not be sustained in their life, therefore they had to die to be united in spirits. Consciousness or the fourth stage, then is possible. It is here in Soyinka’s Fourth Stage and the Indian Advatic Stage that the souls are united, that realization dawns on humans that life is nothing but consciousness and consciousness of Atman and Parmatman are above all material relationship. To reach this idealistic or the true state of our beings that playwrights like Wole Soyinka and Girish Karnad deal with the metaphysical Fourth stage. It is from this angle that this chapter will proceed to analyze Karnad’s play *Fire and the Rain*.

Drama is intended to take the audience towards a realm of elevated emotions and higher consciousness, and the purity of ‘being’. It is supposed to purge a human being of all limitations, physical and psychological. If on witnessing good theatre the audience evolves, it helps furnish a better society. The belief is definitely to enhance the thought that all human beings are inter connected. Soyinka discusses the concept of the ‘Expanded
consciousness’ and ‘Mythic awareness’ to support this belief. One has to realize one’s potential and become limitless, and the aim of good theatre is to take audience to this infinite metaphysical state.

Soyinka elucidates in *Myth, Literature And The African World* that:

Intuitions, sudden psychic emanations could come, logically, only from such an incomparable immensity. A chthonic realm, a storehouse for creative and destructive essences, it required a challenger, a human representative to breach it periodically on behalf of the well-being of the community. The stage, the ritual arena of confrontation, came to represent the symbolic chthonic space and the presence of the challenger within it is the earliest physical expression of man’s fearful awareness of the cosmic context of his existence. (1990: 3)

Soyinka contends that in West African ritual theatre, the audience participates in the dramatic conflict and undergoes a cathartic transformation similar to that of the hero. He explains “the human world is separated from a divine unity by an abyss or gulf” (1990:26). Through a process that dissolves and re-integrates the self, the protagonist enters what Soyinka calls the abyss of transition or the fourth stage.

Girish Karnad’s play *The Fire and the Rain* (1998) can be interpreted by means of an understanding of Soyinka’s concept of the Fourth stage. In this play, Karnad refers to the myth of Yavakri as mentioned in *Mahabharata* in Chapters 135-38 of the ‘Vana Parva’.

Soyinka, through his ritual theatre, shows that both the characters and the audience move back and forth across the ontological gap towards an experience of psychic wholeness. Just like Soyinka, Karnad too skillfully integrates old mythologies into a modern context, searching for new patterns
of ritual experience. Karnad too believes that the audience should on witnessing the trials of the characters of the play, evolve with them. Drama being representational (i.e. the actor and the audience par-take in it) is not only for entertainment but for making audience realize their limitations and how to transcend them.

Yavakri, propitiates Lord Indra and is granted Universal Knowledge, after severe penance. But it is knowledge received without experience so it lacks depths. Yavakri has prayed ritualistically but has not entered the metaphysical state to acquire self-knowledge, therefore his understanding of Universal knowledge is superficial. He has still not crossed the “abyss of transition” or “the fourth Stage” from where one comes out healed of ones follies and weakness. His knowledge comes to naught in the face of burning carnal desires. He finally gets burnt in the fire of desires without attaining supreme bliss. The power of his Universal knowledge could not save him from death. He does not reach the Fourth Stage which the Vedas say can only be attained by transcending the mind-body and intellect trio. This gulf of transition calls for total self-apprehension, the realization of one’s shortcomings and trying to rise above them. After understanding one’s inner being to mingle with the universal whole. This is what Soyinka’s ritual experience refers to in terms of the means for individual to become integrated into the community, and to attain a renewed mythic awareness.

In ‘The Fourth stage’, Soyinka describes the ritual experience as being parallel to that of the Yoruba God Ogun, who dared bridge the chasm between the gods and man. The chasm is the “Fourth world” or the ‘area of transition’. It is here that the participant surrenders his individuation, experiences the joy of oneness, with community and to recreate one’s self through dance and poetry (1990: 140-147).
Soyinka’s equation of ritual with the dramatic forms can be best understood in terms of their transcendental effect, which is equivalent to individual and collective experience. Like dramatic forms, ritual forms aim to expand individual and collective consciousness and to provide the community with an experience of its own identity. The Individual’s will - to surmount the pressures of living without succumbing to them - calls for a Herculean effort. The individual struggle against inner and outer chaos to reach a harmonious state, has to affect the collective consciousness of the audience and thus help them transcend their shortcomings and pressures of living.

Yavakri epitomizes all those ascetics who go away to forest for ‘tapasya’ and feel that they have achieved spiritual knowledge by self-denial and mortification of the flesh, but the moment they come back to the world they cannot resist its temptations. The rigours of Yavakri’s penance were such that Indra, the Lord of gods, appeared to him and granted him his wish of knowledge of Vedas. But Indra did persuade Yavakri to realize that there were no short cuts to knowledge. Knowledge was acquired at the guru’s feet in all humility and by following his instructions. Yavakri was too conceited to realize this and he paid for it by his life.

The moment Yavakri came back from the forest, after the penance, he cornered his father’s cousin, Raibhya’s daughter-in-law in a lonely spot and molested her.

Yavakri’s father Bharadwaja’s caution against delusions of omnipotence had no effect on him and he enrages Raibhya by his misbehaviour. Raibhya invokes the ‘kriya’ spirit. He tears a hair from his head and makes an oblation of it to the fire. From it springs a woman who looks exactly like his daughter-in-law, Vishakha. From another hair he similarly brings forth a rakshasa (demon). He sends the two to kill Yavakri.
The spirit in the form of the daughter-in-law approaches Yavakri seductively and steals the urn which contains the water that makes him invulnerable to danger. The rakshasa then chases him with a trident.

Yavakri: Where’s that shadow puppet?

(Slowly, calmly, Vishakha starts pouring the water out. He looks at her and for a moment cannot comprehend what she is doing. He suddenly screams). Oh God! What are you doing? The water—the sanctified water! My life! What are you doing? (He grabs the kamandalu from her hand. It’s empty. He starts banging it on the ground). Water, please! Just a drop, Oh gods! Only a drop … You devil. I trusted you … A drop of water.

(Suddenly a very strange wail is heard from the distance, unearthly, terrifying and evil. Vishakha is frightened) (1998: 24).

The wail is issued forth by the rakshasa created by Raibhya to destroy Yavakri. The rakshasa then chases him with a trident. Yavakri runs here and there in search of water, but does not find a drop. Finally, Yavakri tries to enter his father’s hermitage. But Andhaka, the blind shudra, who was guarding the gate, stopped his entry and at that moment the rakshasa killed Yavakri.

According to Soyinka,

Penance and retribution are not therefore aspects of punishment for crime but the first acts of a resumed awareness, an invocation of the principle of cosmic adjustments. Tragic fate is the repetitive cycle of the taboo in nature, the karmic act of hubris witting or unwitting, into which the demonic will within man constantly compels him. Powerful tragic drama follows upon the act of hubris, and myth exacts this attendant penalty
from the hero where he has actually emerged victor of a conflict. (1990:156)

One folly makes way for the other in the play. Bharadwaja is distressed at his son’s death and curses Raibhya to die at the hands of his elder son, Parvasu. Then he is shocked at his own folly of cursing a friend, so he enters fire and immolates himself. Parvasu, mistaking his father to be a wild animal because he was wearing a black deer skin, kills him. He is during that time conducting a Fire Sacrifice to propitiate Indra, the god of rains as it had not rained adequately for nearly ten years. He is not supposed to leave the ‘yajna’ premises during the entire ceremony, but he does so. Parvasu, goes back to complete the sacrifice and puts the entire blame of his father’s murder on his younger brother, Arvasu.

Arvasu is the rebel. He is not the staunch unfeeling Brahmin. He wants to change the old order of the cunning and deceitful Brahmins into a more humane and genuine lot. He loves the theatre and loves to act. He loves a tribal girl Nittilai. His loving a tribal girl is not accepted by the Brahmins and neither does Nittilai’s family accepts it. Yet their love for each other is ceaseless and permanent. The symbol of drought, aridity every where spells the lack of spiritual and compassionate understanding of life. Parvasu, Yavakri, Bharadwaja and Raibhya are so caught up in their brahminical egos that they cannot look beyond themselves. They cannot be humble to transcend the mind, body and intellect trio to reach the ‘fourth stage’. Even when they realize their follies and are repentant, there is only self-immolation. Bharadwaja immolates himself in the fire and so does Parvasu. Parvasu enters the sacrificial fire of the ‘yagna’ and immolates himself. Parvasu does seem to contemplate before dying his folly of killing his father and blaming it on his brother.
Parvasu: He saw a face by the altar. Whose face was it? The face of my dead father? Or of my brother, who is a simpleton, yet knows everything? Or was it my face? Cold fear tore through him. He stood paralysed. When he came to, he heard a voice asking ‘Who are you!’ His own voice. There was no choice now but to go on, to strike. But to think that the fear had lain coiled inside him and he wasn’t even aware (1998: 56).

Parvasu is at the stage of self-questioning before he sacrifices himself in the ‘yagna’ fire.

Parvasu is also as conceited as Yavakri. He tells his wife Vishakha that he became the Chief priest for the fire sacrifice because it is a formal rite. The ritual of performing the Yagna would bring Lord Indra to him. Every rite is structured.

Parvasu: Structured. It involves no emotional acrobatics from the participants. The process itself will bring Indra to me. And if anything goes wrong, there’s nothing the gods can do about it. It has to be set right by a man. By me. That’s why when the moment comes I shall confront Indra in silence. As an equal. For that, it is essential that one shed all human weakness. Be alone. Absolutely on one’s own to face that moment. Become a diamond. Unscratchable (1998:31-32).

Parvasu considers his way of attaining Indra superior to Yavakri’s way of propitiating the God. Yavakri’s way of penance to him is begging to Gods for what you want.
Parvasu: One can practice austerities like your fool, Yavakri, to force the gods to bend to one’s will. Stand in a circle of fire. Torture oneself. So many techniques, all equally crass, to make the gods appear, And when they give in, what do you do? Extend the begging bowl! ‘Give us rains. Cattle. Sons. Wealth As though one defined human beings by their begging – I despise it (1998: 31).

Parvasu’s father Raibhya is also jealous of him because his son was appointed chief-priest of the seven-year long ‘yajna’ rather than him as he is old. Parvasu feels that Yavakri’s killing by Raibhya was to disturb him in the last stages of the Sacrifice. Parvasu tells his wife, Vishakha that his father, wanted to disturb him in the ‘yajna’, therefore he has come from the sacrificial enclosure, which he is not supposed to leave, to settle scores with him. Parvasu says,

‘Not to punish Yavakri, but to be even with me I had to attend to him before he went any farther’. (1998:33)

Parvasu’s killing his father could be his destiny but he has no remorse at the time of killing Raibhya. It is only after seeing the play enacted in front of him by Arvasu that his doubts about his deeds begin to surface. Parvasu, realizes his folly of killing his father and blaming it on his brother, Arvasu. He questions himself as his misdeed haunts him. Seeing Indra kill Vishwarupa in the play enacted in front of his eyes, he realizes the fear that was in him after killing his father.

He has to complete the Fire sacrifice against all odds. The formal rite of ‘yagna’ do not give him a glimpse of the ‘fourth stage’ but the actions of a play, in front of him somehow leads him to it. Parvasu’s fire sacrifice actually turns out to be his self-immolation. The rites he was carrying on to
bring rain in the land, ridden by drought could only be materialized by sacrificing himself. On seeing the sacrificial enclosure being defiled by the general public and things going out of control, he calmly walks into the blazing enclosure and burns himself.

Brahmins: It’s the tribals – the savages – they’re desecrating the sacrifice – Oh God! This is madness. The doomsday- they are eating and drinking the food kept for the gods. They’re leveling the sacrifice to the ground –

King: Chief Priest! Parvasu! What shall we do! Parvasu has been watching the chaos, without so much as moving a muscle. He gets up and without a word calmly walks into the blazing enclosure? (1998: 58)

The gulf of transition as Soyinka mentions, is what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf.

Parvasu’s confrontation of the fear in him was his leap to the ‘Fourth stage’, but the realization was also the self-destruction. He kept on with the rites of the sacrifice in spite of the chaos around and when he realized the chaos could not be contained he entered the blazing sacrificial enclosure. His sacrifice gave him a glimpse of the Fourth Stage which is portrayed as rain-drops towards the end of the play.

His self immolation was his self upliftment and like he had told his wife that if something goes wrong with the rites he would himself right it. He righted the wrong by burning himself, whether he was united with his God, Indra, is not clear in the play because the torrent of rain towards the end of the play could also be because of Nittilai’s sacrifice. Parvasu did not bridge the
chas but he definitely entered it, because he did realize his follies but could not become humble enough to overcome them without destroying himself.

The stage of transition or the ‘fourth stage’ is the metaphysical abyss both of god and man. Soyinka states in Myth, Literature And The African World (1990), “it is only because nothing rescues man ancestral, living or unborn from loss of self within this abyss but a titanic resolution of the will whose ritual summons, response, and expression is the strange alien sound to which we give the name of music. On the arena of the living, when man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts (the material of drama) have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf, he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon his spiritual or psychic perception” (1990:149-150).

Wole Soyinka further continues that these moments of self revelation are moments of either self abnegation or self upliftment, because it is at “such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will” (1990:149-150). Soyinka explains further, it is this experience that the modern tragic dramatist recreates through the medium of physical contemporary action, reflecting emotions of the first active battle of the will through the abyss of dissolution. Ogun is the first actor in that battle, and Yoruba tragic drama is the re-enactment of the cosmic conflict.

Soyinka further states that it is nothing but the will of the being which saves him from annihilation within the abyss. Ogun according to him is the embodiment of the Will, and the Will is the destructiveness and creativeness in acting man, “Only one who has himself undergone the experience of
disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions” (1998: 150).

Parvasu’s will compels him to complete the sacrifice but the chaos within him of his earlier disruptive deeds cannot be contained by him. He is in the abyss of transition but he cannot be shown to be completely united with his deity Indra, therefore the rain does not come immediately after his self-sacrifice, it comes later in the play. There is bound to be chaos whenever anything sacred is being conducted. The seven year long sacrifice was to call for a lot of cosmic adjustments, therefore it was inevitable that there would be forces trying to disrupt it. The Chief-Priest tries to let no chaos prevail but towards the end things are beyond his control therefore he burns himself. The chaos without and within destroys him he could not contain it and rise above it.

Girish Karnad in the notes to the play, The Fire and the Rain, mentions that the fascinating aspects of dealing with myths are their self-reflexivity. “Myth seems complete in itself and yet when examined in detail, contains sub conscious signals which lead on to another myth which in turn acts as a conduit to a third one while illuminating the one with which one started” (1998:69). Karnad states that the tale of Arvasu and Parvasu fascinated him as an usual variant of the Indian obsession with fratricide and it seemed logical too that Yavakri should be their cousin, though the Mahabharata does not explicitly say so. Karnad further quotes, “I cannot remember when I decided to incorporate the Indra-Vritra legend in my plot, but years later, while re-reading the original version, I was astonished to find that right at the beginning of the tale of Yavakri, Lomasha mentions that the
whole story took place on the banks of a river in which Indra had bathed to cleanse himself of the sin of killing Vritra?” (1998: 69).

The Epilogue of the play deals with the Indra and the Vritra myth. This myth is joined to the rest of the play within a play. Arvasu is dumb founded by the treachery of his brother. He wants to vindicate his stand and punish his brother. This he does by participating in a play as Vritra. The play is enacted in front of his brother Parvasu and the King who has organized the ‘fire’ sacrifice’. The Manager of the play himself enacts the role of Indra.

Lord Brahma’s three sons Indra, Vishwarupa and Vritra enact the deep anxiety which the whole of Indian mythology is replete with, the fear of brother destroying brother. This fear is relevant in today’s context too.

It is through this play that Arvasu is able to prick at his brother’s conscious and make him realize his folly. Arvasu’s retribution leads to the self immolation of Parvasu. Arvasu voices his own sentiments through Vritra. He is agonized when Indra kills Vishwarupa treacherously.


Vritra : Whose voice is that? Familiar words! (Indra gives a villainous laugh!)

Vishwarupa: Brother, why this treachery?


Aravasu’s words as Vritra echo the same words which issued forth from him when Parvasu blamed him for Patricide in front of the other Brahmins.
Arvasu : But why, Brother, why? ... why? (A couple of soldiers get hold of him and drag him away as he keeps shouting.)


At that time Arvasu was thrown out of the sacrificial enclosure but today he is inside. He fights Indra as Vritra. He cannot be shown to kill Indra because that is not the actual mythical story. In the myth Indra is supposed to have killed Vritra. Vritra’s anger and fury and wish to kill Indra show that even gods can be treacherous and only love can supersede gods and deities. Vishwarupa, with his divine goodness and faith in this goodness is able to make a place in the hearts of humans. It is this favoritism in favour of Vishwarupa that makes Indra jealous of him and finally makes him kill Vishwarupa.

Girish Karnad also mentions that slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra is one of the archetypal myths of India. Vritra as mentioned in the Rig-Veda had swallowed rivers and hid the water inside him, Indra by killing him had released that water and the rivers had started flowing again. Indra is hailed as “Vritraharan”; Slayer of Vritra. But Indra is also portrayed as a jealous and frightened god, he had destroyed Vishwarupa treacherously. Indra later suffers from the guilt of killing Vishwarupa and Vritra (1998:68).

Indra is like Ogun. He has both the creative and destructive elements in him, both gods and men have to cross the Fourth stage to evolve. Indra has the will to bring about changes in society. He has the power to revert time back or forward to make his devotees happy. But Indra is never shown to make serious efforts of the will to make himself a better deity. In fact Indra is worshipped in Rig Veda but by the time of Mahabharata Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva hold more sway. Even today we do not hear of people praying to Indra. They pray to Shiva and Vishnu.
Arvasu comes across as a compassionate, sensitive and humane being. He is not wrapped up in his brahminhood. He wants to explore new ways of understanding life. He loves theatre and acting in plays. He initiates a lot of changes in the play. Arvasu makes Parvasu realize his faults. He is the Brahmin who loves Nittilai, a tribal. He is the one who brings Indra to speak in person.

Nittilai is killed by her husband. Arvasu is saddened by her death and wants to accompany her in death. Indra appears and stops him from doing this. He tells him that he is happy with him because of his performance as Vritra and the way Vritra challenged Indra in the play. He asks him to ask for a boon. Arvasu wants Nittilai to come alive. Indra warns him that, that would mean the repetition of the tragedy. Arvasu tells that he has now become wise and will stop the tragedy from repeating itself. “I can provide the missing sense to our lives” (1998; 10). Arvasu has entered the Fourth stage. He has bridged it, reached his God, and is ready to make amendments for his follies.

Lord Indra is shown to grant him his boon but the Brahma Rakshasa appears and pleads to Arvasu to ask Indra for his release. Initially Arvasu does not agree because he wants Nittilai to come back to life. Brahma Rakshasa’s release would not let that happen but when the Rakshasa pleads in the name of Nittilai, Arvasu agrees. Arvasu asks Indra for the release of Rakshasa’s soul from the cycle of life and death. Nittilai’s soul goes back. He holds her dead body, but it is raining heavily. It is Arvasu’s sacrifice of his love i.e. Nittilai, for the release of the Rakshas soul which makes Indra rain.

It is Arvasu who has all along being wronged but his compassion and goodness never leaves him. He does feel that the world is too harsh to let people like Nittilai live.
Arvasu leads to the release of the Raksha’s soul. He in doing so attains bliss. He has been able to mingle his individual soul into the divine by his effort to bring changes. The state of bliss is shown by the torrent of rain. The rain brings joy to everyone around. Arvasu is the harbinger of this joy. After seven years of draught it is finally raining.

Crowds: What’s that?-you smell that?-Yes. Yes. The smell of wet earth. Of fresh rains. It’s raining. Somewhere. Nearby. The air is blossoming with the fragrance of earth. It’s raining- It’s raining-Rain! The rain!

(……..It pours. People dance with joy. They roll in the mud. Arvasu sits clutching Nittilai’s body.)


Arvasu’s journey to the Fourth Stage is the giving up of every personal desire and coming out of it for the upliftment of society. It requires a great effort of the will to sublimate one’s desires and work for the release of others. Nittilai would be his alter ego, his finer being, her death symbolizes, the death of the difference between the two characters. They have become one towards the end of the play.

The play ends on a positive note. The Fourth Stage is the state of bliss, ‘ananda’. To reach this stage one has to sacrifice a lot, one’s ego and one’s desires. This stage can be reached by transcending every material need. The transition from the selfish to the selfless stage is the journey towards expanded consciousness. And it is the evolution of the self which sensitizes one towards the others.