CHAPTER V
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TREATMENT OF MYTH

Any traditional tale is likely to present a combination of reality and fantasy. Drama, one among the literary genres, pleases all men with an infinite variety of taste. It is considered to be a common entertainment for people of different tastes. Its power is that it lives in the borderline between fantasy and reality. G.S.Kirk opines, “Myth seems to possess essential properties like their fantasy, their freedom to develop and their complex structure” (25). One of the reasons for the invention of tales and myths is that they act as a vehicle for relieving boredom. They are sought by people all over the world and at all times, not only in modern western culture. This is often masked as something that seems more worthy.

Myth is imaginative and it is defined as that which has no real existence in French language. Kirk considers myth as a “sacred or religious story” (26). Northrop Frye asserts, “Myth is primarily a certain type of story... The things that happen in myth are the things that happen only in stories: they are in a self-contained literary world” (163-64). It is an anonymous story rooted in primitive beliefs. Myths are the tales that have been passed on from one generation to another and they have become traditional. For Plato, the first known user of the term, mythology meant
no more that the telling of stories but in actuality they have some serious underlying purpose beyond that of telling a story. It attempts to interpret, create divinity and religion. They deal with love, war, tyranny, courage, fate and with the relation of man to those divine powers which are sometimes felt irrational, sometimes to be cruel and sometimes to be just. (8)

Indra Nath Chouduri affirms that "... myths are one of the segments which serve to determine the Indianness in our literature"(22). The inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends that pattern and define our culture offers immense scope for the dramatist. The myth is neither tragic nor comic; it is only a perfect vehicle of embodying reality. It is a mode for expressing reality and it is logical and concrete. They represent the collective unconscious of a society. As Naik says, "... if the playwright in English has neglected myth, he has likewise failed to make full creative use of his extremely complex historical heritage." (190).

The inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends that pattern and define our culture offers immense scope for the Indian dramatists as Harry Levin's says, "Myth, at all events, is raw material, which can be the stuff of literature" (229-230). Our early playwrights writing in English like Sri Aurobindo and Kailasam selected their themes from the myths and
legends of Indian Literature. Though Karnad’s themes appear to build castles in the air, he took refuge in the myths and legends and made them the vehicle of a new vision. His childhood exposure to street plays in Karnataka villages and his familiarity with western dramas staged in Bombay have induced him to retell the secular legends of India to suit the modern context. A vigorous vitality that combs the past for apt myths to analyze the present has been the hallmark of Girish Karnad, the pre-eminent Indian playwright in the Kannada language. Karnad’s creative genius lies in taking up fragments of historical-legendary experience and fusing them into a forceful statement. By using the ‘grammar of literary archetype’, Karnad links the past and the present, the archetypal and the real. Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past, giving new meanings and insights reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an internal part of cultural consciousness of the land, with different meanings and it reflects the contemporary issues. Karnad believes in the Jungian collective racial consciousness and so turns to the past habitually for the source materials. As Clyde Kluckhohn says, the borrowed myths are “reinterpreted to fit pre-existing cultural emphasis” (58). All his plays are literary excavations of the Indian collective past - the racial, mythical, legendary and the historical and they have a strong contemporary relevance.
By using these myths he tried to reveal the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Markaranad R. Paranjape has said that “Literature and Myth merely dramatize, heighten and highlight what is theoretically possible in nature and science” (89). According to Sinha, “Girish Karnad’s art can be described as a vision of reality” (123). So, Karnad delves deep into the traditional myths to spell modern man’s anguish and dilemmas that are created in his mind. Karnad does not take the myths in their entirety, he takes only fragments that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination to make his plots interesting. His interest was not in recreating old myths and legends but in representing them to suit his artistic purpose. Karnad himself has revealed that

Theatre can simultaneously be entertainment, political commentary and artistic statement and can be composed in traditional, realistic and post modern forms. . . . Like masks worn by actors that allow them to express otherwise hushed truths, Indian theatre enables immediate, manipulative representations of reality. (331)

Gifted playwrights have discovered source materials from myths and legends and have employed them creatively. Realism in drama was a totally new concept and it was alien to theatrical conventions. Myths and legends
serve as a surrogate for Karnad’s plays. When Karnad was asked the reason for his handling of myths and legends, he replied that his sole purpose was to narrate the particular story effectively and so, “the borrowed tales are given a turn of the screw, as it were, which works wonders with his plays” (Chakravartee 36). All his plays right from *Yayati* to *Tale-Danda* have a story line with which his audience is more or less familiar. Karnad’s handling of the sources of his plot in the plays makes it abundantly clear that his interpretation of the ancient Indian history not only differs substantially from his originals but also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with a new meaning which has an urgent relevance to present day thinking about man and his world. For his first play *Yayati*, which was a major success on the stage, he borrowed the myth partially from Mahabharata and other Puranas. In the Mahabharata, Yayati was one of the six sons of King Nahusha. Devayani, whose love for Kacha remained unrequited, marries Yayati to spite Sharmishta for whom she nurses a childhood jealousy. Sharmishta is deeply in love with Yayati and subjects herself to a lot of mental and physical torture for love. A son is born to her out of her clandestine liaison with Yayati. Consequently, Devayani brings a curse of old age upon him. Yayati, blinded by his insatiable thirst for sensual pleasure, dreads old age. Puru, Sharmishta’s son offers to exchange his youth for the age of his father. Enlightened at the end, Yayati gives up
the throne and retires to forest to lead a life of renunciation with Devayani and Sharmistha.

Girish Karnad has given this traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today. The symbolic theme of Yayati’s attachment to life and its pleasures and also his final renunciation are retained. In the Mahabharata Yayati recognizes the nature of desire itself and realizes that fulfillment does not diminish or end the sexual desires. In Karnad’s play, however, Yayati recognizes the horror of his own life and assumes moral responsibility after a series of symbolic encounters with reality. Thus the playwright takes liberty with the original myths and invents some new relationship to make it acceptable to modern sensibilities.

Karnad seems to have used this myth with a view to exposing the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts, and also to show man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. His Yayati, on the one hand, rejects passionate attachment to sensual pleasures to which the King is a slave and on the other hand, pleads for a life of responsibilities and self-sacrifice as represented by the King’s son Puru in the play. Chiträlekha’s proposal to Yayati, who has become young by exchange of ages, to accept her may be a test to Yayati’s sensuality on the one hand and on the other hand it may be Chiträlekha’s own selfishness. Thus Karnad’s Yayati
successfully conveys his message of disapproval of improper sensuality as well as performance of duty and acceptance of responsibility. Karnad’s handling of the sources in the plot makes it abundantly clear that his interpretation of the ancient Indian story not only differs substantially from the originals but also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with a new meaning, which is quite relevant to present day thinking about man and his universe. Ramasamy compliments Karnad as follows:

Talking of myths and legends, the one modern English playwright who has used them with imagination and creativity resulting in stage-worthy plays is Girish Karnad. The technique of bringing together myth and legend to folk narrative style is the way in which he succeeds where many others have not. (278)

A theatre is a place where the spectators are transformed into a magic world, and so there is an extensive use of songs, dance and mask in his plays for spectacular effect. When Shukracharya curses Yayati of old age, he accuses Sharmistha and looses hope over his sons. It is a fantasy that Puru comes back and informs that Yayati’s curse can be redeemed if some young person exchanged his old age and the decrepitude it brings. In reality nobody will opt to accept the burden of old age but, quite unbelievably, his son Puru willingly comes forward to exchange his youth.
After the exchange, Puru starts feeling weak and is about to fall when Sharmistha holds him. Ultimately Yayati succeeds in transforming his old age and his sins to Puru. When Sharmistha tells Chitralekha the news that Puru has accepted his father's old age, though she gets absolutely stunned, courageously she declares that she is lucky to be honored. When Puru wants her to support him for the responsibility he has undertaken she gladly extends a helping hand. It is a fantasy that so far she is not able to realize the reality but only after seeing his face she understands the misfortune which has befallen her. She gets scared and tells him not to touch her or even come near her. Finally she requests Puru to reconsider his decision but to no avail. Kamad through this imaginative plot makes his audience feel free from boredom and monotony. Though women are held compactly by the patriarchal society, she does not accept her husband's sacrifice of his youth in the name of filial loyalty. All this could never happen in reality. Karnad breathes into the mythical story a new consciousness, which is contemporary and highly imaginative.

Karnad, in *Hayavadana*, which won the Natya Sangh Best Play Award in 1971, gives expression to Indian imagination in its richest colors and profound meanings. As a significant mark of achievement Karnad makes bold innovations, fruitful experiments and new directions in the history of Indian drama. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad combines the western
techniques with Indian folk psyche, socio-cultural and political reality. The entire play is cast in the form of traditional Indian folk drama, which took several features of ancient Sanskrit drama. Karnad in *Hayavadana* strikes a significant note by exploring the dramatic potential of the ancient Indian myths, legends and folk traditions.

As Tutun Mukherjee points out, in *Hayavadana* Karnad has "made available the rich sources of both the "great" and the 'little' tradition, the classical and the folk elements of Indian Literature" (9). He has re-oriented the traditional forms by introducing contemporary themes. *Hayavadana* stands as an outstanding example for a play in which the playwright has used the folk form without diluting the contemporary appeal.

One of the striking features of *Hayavadana* is the introduction of the device of making inanimate objects animate. This device of Bhagvata helps enhance the psychological reality of the characters in the dramatic form. He has also made use of the female chorus, which is absent in the Yakshagana tradition, the source of the play. His use of the character of Bhagavata contributes to the drastic achievement of the play. He does not merely borrow the character of Bhagavata from a typical Yakshagana play but increases the scope of the role by making the Bhagavata not a mere commentator–narrator but also making him one of the characters. The dramatist has presented his characters as representatives though they have
been highly individualized and the names given to the characters are generic.

He has drawn from the rich sources of the folk theatre Yakshagana and other folk forms with great deftness for his play Hayavadana. The supernatural plays a significant role in this play. The dramatist employs the conventions of folk tales and motifs of folk theatre, that is, masks, curtains, mime, songs, the commentator–narrator, dolls, horse-man, the story within the story, an amalgamation of human and non-human (half man half animal) in order to create a magical world. Savita Goel comments, “It is a play with a realm of incomplete individuals, magnanimous Gods, of vocal dolls and mute children, a world apathetic to the longings and frustrations, ecstasies and miseries of human beings. (204 – 205)

In this play Karnad uses poetry and music in order to evoke a sense of gaiety and celebration traditionally associated with the theatre. He has employed folk-theatre strategies as a thematic and technical device in order to convey his ideas and explore different characters and situations. The main plot (the transposition of heads) is set in the mythical past, but the frame postulates a reality, which co-exists with the present audience. It is the story of two friends, who embody the two extremes: intellectual and physical perfection.
Devadatta, the Brahmin scholar and poet, and Kapila, the low caste, ingenious wrestling champion, are attractive but incomplete individuals. Karnad suggests man’s cravings for wholeness through Padmini’s dissatisfaction of her marriage with Devadatta and her longing for Kapila. The unrealistic plot allows Padmini to enjoy both Devadatta and Kapila without violating traditional sanctions. Prompted by remorse in their dealings with each other, the two friends commit sacrificial suicide in Kali’s temple. Left alone, Padmini discovers the corpses within the temple and so she decides to choose death, too: “Kapila’s gone-Devadatta’s gone-Let me go with them” (1.101). However, the Goddess Kali appears and assures Padmini that the men will come back to life if their heads are reunited with their bodies. Padmini fixes the heads, but interchanging the bodies. Goddess Kali comments that Padmini’s mistake is deliberate as she yearns for a whole man.

Karnad suggests that such wholeness, though immensely desirable, is seldom possible for human beings. Padmini’s tragedy is that she is destined to live a life of sexual dissatisfaction as Devadatta’s wife. But she tries to change her destiny only to fail miserably and finally jump into the funeral pyre of both the men she hankered after. Naik, observing the plight of Padmini, reveals the truth that this is
Woman’s vain attempt to unite Man as intellect and as flesh in order to further her creative purpose .... Integration cannot be achieved by trying to reconcile the irreconcilable but by accepting cheerfully the fundamental disharmony in human life. (196)

Thus Karnad reveals the way of the contemporary world, which hankers for the best of both the worlds through the character of Padmini in Hayavadana.

The play Hayavadana is based on a tale from ‘Vetalpanchavimshika’ (also known a Vetal Pachisi). But Karnad has relied on Thomas Mann’s re-working of the tale in The Transposed Heads. While the Sanskrit tale poses a moral problem, Mann uses the story to ridicule the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. For Mann, the human body is a fit instrument for the fulfillment of human destiny and even the transposition of heads will not liberate the protagonists from their natural psychological demands. For Karnad, the confusion of the identities reveals the ambiguous nature of the human personality.

Karnad examines the psychological and sociological problems of his characters but offers no cure. Of all the mythical and legendary figures, Goddess Kali of Mount Chitrakoot plays a decisive role in the plot of Hayavadana-- the half horse and half man. She is indifferent to the suicides
of Devadatta and Kapila but interferes in Padmini's affair when she attempts to kill herself. She helps Padmini to revive the dead men. The Goddess plays a negative role in the case of Hayavadana. She does not allow him to complete his prayer for a complete man and so transforms him into a horse but does not remove his human voice. Thus Padmini and Hayavadana are tortured by the Goddess for no specific reason of their own. Karnad's presentation of the story of Kali, Padmini and her two men may serve as good entertainment to relieve the boredom and ennui of human beings in an indifferent and hostile world; all this could exist only in a world of fantasy and myth; could never happen in reality.

Karnad's use of folk forms is neither casual nor incidental. In his Hayavadana, he has made innovative experiment to offer a new direction to modern theatre. The dramatist has proved that the traditional forms need not be treated as precious artifacts, but can be adapted to treat modern themes suitable for the urban Indian audience.

It is a play of mythical wonder and is enshrrouded in a realm of magic and supernatural, which is a frequent feature in a folk play. Goddess Kali, a supernatural element in the play, is portrayed as a terrifying figure, her mouth wide open with the tongue lolling out but possessing human attributes. She gets vexed when she is disturbed in sleep and wakes up yawning and wonders why Devadatta should sacrifice his head to Rudra
and his arms to her. The Goddess who sees and knows everything, is however, not taken in by these platitudes. She spells out clearly what the audience might have only vaguely felt along. She tells Padmini,

The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That fellow Devadatta – he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it-head to him and arms to me!

Then because you insisted on going to the Rudra temple he comes here and offers his head. Nobly too- wants to keep his word, he says-no other reason! (103)

From this sarcastic statement it is fully evident that Devadatta has made his promise to the Goddess as an excuse for hiding his real motive. The Goddess continues,

Then this Kapila died right in front of me – but ‘for his friend’... And what lies! Says he is dying for friendship. He must have known perfectly well he would be accused of killing Devadatta for you. (1.103)

The Goddess fully comprehends the motives behind the actions of the characters. By employing this strategy the playwright stresses the fact that there are no smooth and practical solutions to human problems.
Karnad also employs the ingenious folk device of Yakshagana to project the personalities of different characters. In the beginning of the play, Devadatta appears on the stage wearing a pale mask and Kapila a dark mask. Later on, to signify the transposed heads, their masks are transposed. Lord Ganesha wears an elephant-headed mask and Kali, a terrible mask. Initially Hayavadana appears wearing the mask of a man and in the end the mask of a horse.

Miming makes the audience think about the problem in a more detached manner. It makes the universal framework easier. The action of the play is mimed when the three characters proceed to Ujjain. A cart does not appear on the stage; rather "Kapila followed by Padmini and Devadatta, enter miming a cart- ride. Kapila is driving the cart" (1.95). The play is replete with miming and for all these techniques, Karnad owes a great deal to folk theatre. The main thrust of Karnad's urge was not to revive the tradition but to understand and assimilate it for creative use, namely to express the contemporary situation and its varied manifestation. Savita Goel says,

... through the use of folk theatre strategies, the contours of fresh, innovative and flexible dramatic form have gradually emerged enabling Karnad and his contemporaries to telescope different points in time and space, to bring
in many levels of reality simultaneously or to negotiate them freely in any order. The new form promises to restore the essential imaginative character of drama suitable for presenting complex human experience. (212)

Further, as Subhangir S. Rayakar says, “one does not know whether the choice of the form determines the choice of the story or vice-versa, but Karnad’s choice of a folk tale for his play is very apt because it lifts the above limitations of time and space.” (61)

Karnad’s Naga-Mandala is based on two oral tales from Karnataka as we know from what he says in his “Introduction” to Three Plays:

... these tales are narrated by women—normally the older women in the family—while children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family. (16)

The dramatist also attempts to instill an alienation effect by driving the material of the play from the folk tales, and also by using the ‘non-materialistic techniques’ of the traditional Indian theatre. The title of the
play is not the name of a human character, but it is that of a snake. As the name suggests, it revolves around a woman and a serpent. As this play is based on a folk tale it could be observed that the serpent plays an important role as in most such narrations all over the world. "We are forced to believe that there exists a theory that the mothers of great men in history such as Scipio, Alexander the great, and Augustus Ceasar were all impregnated by serpents" (276). It is believed that snake myths are found extensively in Brahmanism, Buddhism, Lamaistic and Japanese writing. In Naga-Mandala, the story of the cobra suggests that the play is intended to dramatize not merely the folk tales, but also to imply a deeper meaning at various levels. The folk-tale element of the Naga-Mandala and the magical power, which the cobra possesses continually, remind the spectators that they are only watching a play.

The play deals with a 'self-involved' hero, who undergoes a test put to him by his wife in order to survive. The psychological inadequacy he is trapped in causes acute lack of understanding and communication between him and his wife. It is a threat to family and society. Every man through adolescence faces this existential problem and so he must learn to overcome and this becomes more comprehensive in Karnad's plays. Naga-Mandala is not only about the male difficulty to trust and love women, it seems to be about the socialization process of both men and women, particularly in the
Indian society, where marriages is more often than not the first experience of sex and love for most people. The transition from childhood into adolescence and then into adult roles has, in India, very different stages and psychological and cultural relationships are totally different from other less tradition-bound societies. The *Naga-Mandala* probes into the female and male growth into selfhood, and their mature adjustment with the social roles appointed for them by the traditional society.

Myths and folk tales in a patriarchal society represent primarily the male unconscious fears and wishes and are patriarchal constructs and male-oriented. In these stories the women’s experiences and inner feelings are not given importance. They do not probe much light on women’s fears, anxieties and psychological problems. It is a remarkable achievement of Karnad that he adapts this male-oriented folk tale in such a manner that it becomes a representation of the experience of man and woman in the psychologically transitional phase.

In a folk tale, there is a magician or a snake that assumes the form of the Prince, enters the palace and woes the beautiful Princess, locked up in the palace. When the Prince becomes aware of this, he gets the snake/magician killed and the Princess then sets him a riddle. If he fails to answer, he has to die. This existential crisis is treated in the folk tale in different ways. In Karnad’s play, the story takes a happy turn, both Rani
and Appanna adjusting to the family and community in a socially useful manner. But this is achieved after upsetting the male egoism and exaggerated sense of power over women. The male assumption of keeping full control over the body, sexuality and virtue of women through the insinuations of family and values like chastity are mocked in the story.

Appanna's violent reaction to his wife's infidelity does not make him consider for a moment his infidelity towards her. The other villagers also ignore this lapse on his part but they emphasize the institution of marriage and the procreative function of the couple. The importance of the family and progeny are established. The husband and the wife run towards each other, with a greater sense of relationship. The girl-bride now becomes the mother to be and as such gains a social recognition. This stage of Rani's social integration brings her a new sense of respect and her own worth. This is another significant aspect of the Indian social and cultural life in its treatment of women.

In Sudhir Kakar's words, "... an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can" (57). As a mother, Rani is seen in the last part of the story to be in command of the household with some authority and decision making power. Appanna even agrees to her rather strange demand that their
son should perform an annual “pinda-daan” in the memory of the dead snake.

In the alternate end to the play suggested by the playwright, the snake does not die. It is allowed by Rani to live in her dark, long and cool tresses. The lover is always present; he lives with her, within the family. The danger to male authority as a husband and patriarch lives on constantly at close quarters but mostly within the woman’s imagination. The dutiful and loyal wife may observe the social, moral code entirely; yet within her live the memories of the perfect lover who had given her first emotional and erotic experiences. These desires may haunt her or lie dormant within. Rani can understand emphatically why Kappanna, the young man, who was bound by filial duty to his old and blind mother, runs away one night. He had been pursuing his dream of a beautiful woman. Though he resisted the alluring voice and presence of the dream girl, he was trying to be a dutiful son carrying his old mother on his back. Finally he is pulled away when the dreams become too powerful. Rani has gone through these new desires, the daydreaming and fantasizing about love and she understands their power over the social and moral duties.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad treats the problem of amoralism in contemporary life. It is a criticism of the Brahmin society on the one hand, while on the other hand, his approach is realistic and existential. He has
artistically and beautifully handled the power of myth. In the Prologue, Arvasu declares, “... this is a fiction, borrowed from myths” (Prologue 4). It is a re-enactment of a puranic myth from the Mahabharata of Indra’s destruction of his brother out of jealous fury. Arvasu’s cry, “But why, Brother, why?” (2.38), rings throughout the play frequently voicing the puzzled fury and heart-rending agony of betrayal by a worshipped brother. The play has a complex framework with a central myth assuming the form of a framework of the story of Arvasu’s betrayal by his brother Paravasu, the chief priest performing a yajna to bring rain to the drought-stricken land. The Indian mythology, according to Girish Karnad, expresses a deep concern over “the fear of brother destroying brother where the bonding of brothers within the Pandava and the Kuru clans is as close as the enmity between the cousins is ruthless and unrelenting.” (246)

It is a play, which is based on the myth of Yavakri, Indra and Vritra. The eternal conflict of good and evil continues from the period of the Mahabharata to the modern contemporary society. The myth of Yavakri is a story of ambition to achieve the universal knowledge directly from the Gods but not from the human gurus, which is unjustified and immature. Knowledge without experience is dangerous to humanity is the message passed on by Gods to Yavakri as well as to human beings on earth.
The mythical play within play is enacted in the last section of the play and depicts Indra’s attempt to destroy Viswa, his stepbrother, in order to be unrivalled in all the domains. Indra considers himself to be the legitimate son of Brahma; he cannot tolerate the existence of Viswa, the son of Brahma from an earthly woman or Vritra. It is a fight for supremacy. Viswa is played by the theatre manager; Vritra by Arvasu. Arvasu is a character in the original play and his task is to protect humanity. He is severely wronged by his elder brother Paravasu and falsely accused by him as their father’s murderer. Paravasu, the chief priest of the seven years’ fire sacrifice conducted in the King’s palace in order to propitiate God Indra, represents Indra in the play. The drama of real life runs parallel to the myth. The play underlines the need for supreme human quality, that is mercy and compassion represented by Nittilai, the beloved of Arvasu, who belongs to the Shudra class—the tribe of hunters. Nittilai as a ‘lamp into hurricane’ symbolizes the rains of human love.

The play illustrates the use of myth in a powerful way. The game of trickery and treachery adopted by Indra in order to kill Virtra in self-defence is the story of modern politicians in the realm of reality. They are much superior to Gods even in their art of treachery, deceit and cunningness. The myth of the Mahabharata is the story of modern hero of every family and the play through the myth of Yavakri, an elitist Brahmin,
tells the sad aspect of jealousy, power politics, and neglect of woman. Myth mirrors the contemporary reality of existentialist society. The context of the mythical play in *The Fire and the Rain* is relevant, morality-oriented and thought provoking. It possesses the merits of morality with shades of reality and ideology.

Fire is used as a myth in *The Fire and the Rain*. Fire, that is, 'Agni', is worshipped as a deity in Indian mythology. All the rituals and rites are to be performed in the presence of this deity. In this play, it is presented for various purposes, such as for penance in the case of Yavakri, for warning Nittilai and for cremation of Raibhya. And Rain is also equally important in this play. From the beginning to the end it is Indra, that is rain, who plays the most vital role in the story of the play. Whether it is Yavakri or Paravasu or any one else like the King or the Action-Manager, all are seen trying their best to please Indra who grants the last will of Arvasu and gives rain to the world. In the plot dealing with the myth of Yavakri, Karnad has very intelligently incorporated the Indian myth of the slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra. Significantly enough at the end of the play rain occurs only when Arvasu's mask of Vritra is removed from his face. This is in conformity with the Indra myth found in the Rig Veda as well as in the Mahabharata. Summarizing this myth, Karnad in his "Notes" to the play says,
In the Rig Veda, Vritra, "... the shoulderless one (a serpent) swallows rivers and hides the waters inside him. Indra, by killing him, releases the waters and 'like lowing cows', the rivers flow out. The importance of this deed to the Vedic culture is borne out by the epithet, 'Vritrahan' or the slayer of Vritra, by which Indra is repeatedly hailed. (68)

Thus Indra is the source of all actions in The Fire and the Rain. Yavakri undertakes penance for ten years and Paravasu for seven years in order to please Indra, the God of Rains. The Epilogue very significantly presents the myth of the slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra.

Through the dramatization of the mythological episode of Arvasu's love for a tribal girl, Karnad very significantly condemns and ridicules the caste system, which has been a social stigma for ages. The mythical Paravasu represents modern man, who, because of his self-centered materialistic approach to life, seeks progress even at the cost of his own father and brother. Thus Karnad in The Fire and the Rain has made use of myth for social, religious and philosophical purposes.

To sum up, Karnad has dramatized the myth of Yayati in his play Yayati with the specific purpose of glorifying the existential philosophy of the performance of duty and acceptance of responsibilities. In Hayavadana he significantly projects the myth of Ganesha who, in spite of himself being
an embodiment of imperfection and incompleteness is worshipped as the
destroyer of incompleteness. The love story of Devadatta, Padmini and
Kapila has been effectively presented in the mythical framework to drive
home the lesson that man must find harmony in disharmony. Naga-
Mandala depicts the sex-starved, pitiable condition of Rani; she represents
young maids who, just after marriage, fall victim to the ill treatment and
atrocities of their husbands.

Tale-Danda is a dramatic representation of the undesirable
complications caused by the Hindu myth of origin of varnas. By projecting
Bijjala, a Sudra, a barber by caste, as the King of Kalyan, Karnad
challenges the myth of Varnas which declares that Brahmins have come
from the mouth of Brahma and therefore they are fit to be priests, poets,
teachers and ministers, Kshatriyas emanated from the arms were Kings and
warriors, Vysyas who came from thighs were tradesman and, therefore, fit
to be tradesmen and shudras have derived their existence from the feet of
Brahma, and therefore are supposed to do menial work. The play The Fire
and the Rain represents the myths of Yavakri, Bharadwaja, Raibhya,
Parvasu, Arvasu, Vritra and Indra. Fire, that is ‘Agni’, is known as a deity
in Indian mythology and ‘Rain’ represents Indra himself.

Thus myths constitute the major theatre idiom of Karnad -the myth
of Yayati in the play of the same name, of Indra in The Fire and the Rain
and of Ganesha in Hayavadana. Ancient legends and folk tales too have
formed the basis of some of his plays like the story of the horseman taken
from Vetal Panchavimshati and Somadeva's Brihat Kathasaritsagara and the story of Naga in Naga-Mandala. Subhanghi S. Rayakar has rightly pointed out that

Karnad takes leap from the original story and develops it further. This further development is the play of the artist's imagination and it challenges the glib solutions offered in the original stories. (48)

In fact Karnad has taken this leap in order to provide new meaning to the myths and legends and has examined them from the vantage point of the present.

Karnad himself has justified that he has gone back to the old myths, histories and oral tales not because he does not have an amazing inventive power, but because they are very much relevant even in the present context. Thus, "Karnad's use of myth and folk elements to deal with a theme which has a striking contemporary relevance is wholly authentic and salutary and has the weight of experiment successfully made in contemporary world literature" (Devindra Kohli 15). The purpose of drama is solely to depict the life of the whole universe and Girish Karnad through the element of myth has effectively portrayed the contemporary world making his portrayal universally appealing. There is no wonder that he has been hailed as one of the most appealing and successful dramatist of the contemporary Indian theatre.