

PREFACE

Drama, which has remained the paradigm for the cosmic human condition, is grounded in myth. Since the pagan beginnings of Greek theatre, drama has retained its moorings in the world of myths. Myths have become more relevant and necessary for the post-colonial writers in their quest for racial self-retrieval. The appeal of myth to the modern dramatists is also due to the deep-seated need of creative man to recover archetypal consciousness in the origins of the dramatic medium. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian dramatist and Girish Karnad, the Indian playwright are artists who use myth to endorse their visions of modern experience. Their mythopoeic imagination serves to dramatize the chaotic present and to explore the depth of its degeneration from the vantage point of the past.

This dissertation attempts a comparative study of the selected plays of Soyinka and Karnad to establish how far their mythic consciousness becomes a potent tool to comment on contemporary reality. The study also highlights how mythopoeic vision of Soyinka and Karnad embody the ethos of their respective cultures through the creation of dramatic forms evoking the mythic forces and actual performances of their indigenous culture.

The present study, although parallel in nature, employs the tool of thematological analysis, one of the key-concepts of Comparative Literature, in attempting a comparative study of the treatment of myth in

Soyinka and Karnad. The introductory chapter entitled, "Double Heritage" provides a critical biographical sketch of Soyinka and Karnad to trace their philosophy of life and ideologies which reveal many underlying similarities. These dramatists have benefited from their twin heritage, that of their native countries and the west. Their plays show them as writers deeply rooted in their soil and innovative enough to experiment by going back to the indigenous theatrical techniques and above all with themes innate to their respective cultures.

The second chapter "The Mystique of Myth" is an overview of various definitions, theories and functions of myth besides providing a comprehensive account of the treatment of myth in general in Soyinka and Karnad. An attempt is also made to bring out the special relationship between myth and literature. Though the exponents of the mythic method are many, T.S.Eliot, James Joyce and Aurobindo in addition to Soyinka and Karnad and their works are briefly but critically analysed to show how myths helped in finding parallels between the past and the present.

The symbiotic relationship between myths and literary themes is the focus of the next four chapters. They are thematic studies of the selected plays of Soyinka and Karnad, interspersed with commentary on the dramatic techniques employed in so far as it relates to an explication of myth and reality. The third chapter "Sacrifice and Bliss" assesses the role of myth in bolstering up the theme of sacrifice leading to regeneration. The plays *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Bacchae of Euripides* and *The Strong Breed* of Soyinka dramatize the need for sacrifice and periodic

cleansing for constant renewal of the spirit both at the individual and communal level. Karnad in his plays, *Yayati*, *The Fire and the Rain* and *Bali: The Sacrifice* presents the theme of sacrifice and rejuvenation. This universal theme succeeds in its impact as the writers manage to find parallels between the present world of their characters and their mythical counterparts of the Yoruba, Greek, Hindu and Jain myths.

Quest for completion, another perennial theme, is critically analysed in the next chapter entitled "The Mad Dance of Incompleteness". This chapter evaluates the attempt made by Soyinka and Karnad in presenting man's eternal quest for perfection through the re-enactment of myth of Ogun and Siva in *The Road* and *Flowers*. These plays also explore the adventures of the metaphysical self of their protagonists. The other plays analysed here include Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*, and *The Swamp Dwellers* and Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Naga-mandala* which are undergirded by an elaborate sub-structure of myth, ritual and symbolism.

Myth and history often complement each other and the fifth chapter "Retrieval of the Past" studies the selected plays of Soyinka and Karnad which depict specific phases in history and the tales of heroes who almost become legends. These plays prove the writers to be contemporary, deeply rooted in their region's respective politics and culture. Traditional mythic motifs, personages and paradigms are critically analysed to substantiate how myth and history become narrative sources in the reappraisal of the past. Retrieval of the past is essential as a truly humane modern state can emerge only from a collective recognition of historical

inheritance. Soyinka in his plays *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest* advocates a change for the better standing well within the mythic context. Both positive and negative retrieval of past is done by Karnad in his plays *Tuglag*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* in which history supersedes myth.

The sixth chapter "Reconstructing the Woman's Self" assesses the female characters of Soyinka and Karnad. The comparative study reveals the totality of vision of the writers which helps to bring out the discrepancies between the idealized myth and the reality of the woman's true self. Karnad's characters are found to be daring, complex, and challenging patriarchal tradition. Though women characters of Soyinka have come under critical attack for being mere tools who serve only to promote the heroes' interests, the present study finds the major women characters emerging as flexible, realistic portrayals and also capable of changing the order of things for the better.

The final chapter is a summing up of the various findings regarding the use of myth in the depiction of various themes so relevant to contemporary reality in the selected plays of Soyinka and Karnad. The comparative study establishes how the mythopoeic vision becomes the underlying grid that connects Soyinka and Karnad in their attempt to interpret the complexities of human life. The dramatists also succeed so admirably in exploring the meaning of national identities as an integral part of a universal vision, as to validate the comparative study.