

Chapter I - DOUBLE HERITAGE

I cannot claim a transparency of communication even from the sculpture, music and poetry of my people, the Yoruba, but the aesthetic matrix is the fount of my own creative inspiration: it influences my critical responses to other cultures and validates selective eclecticism as the right of every productive being, scientist and artist.

– Wole Soyinka

So, while one confesses that one went consciously to some of the folk-theatre,–Yakshagana and others, one cannot deny that Brecht as well as Badal Sarkar were haunting one

– Girish Karnad

Chapter - I

DOUBLE HERITAGE

Myths have been the perennial source of inspiration for all great literature. Writers of the past and the present have directed their imagination to the never failing world of myths which encode man's timeless search for self-renewal and rejuvenation of his world. Especially in the twentieth-century, there has been an unprecedented interest in myth. The reason may be found in modern man's deep awareness of his spiritual impoverishment. The so-called scientific and technological marvels have only accentuated man's spiritual angst. To bring back the lost values of moral and spiritual ethics to existence through a rich and imaginative form of life, writers often resort to the use of myths. The reservoir of myths supplies not only the themes but it also becomes a technique, a new way of perceiving and responding to reality.

In this age of enlightenment, myths have come to be acknowledged as the charter of moral wisdom. A study of myths used by modern writers reveals many striking parallels. There are many resemblances and coincidences obscured but not hidden under the differences of colouring thrown by the diversity of custom, culture and rationality. The similarities

in the use of myths serve to reflect the undeniable truth that myths are the statement of basic truths by which men have lived, since the origin of mankind.

The Nigerian dramatist Wole Soyinka and the Indian dramatist Girish Karnad are two contemporary writers par excellence who are preoccupied with myths. They use myth to interpret contemporary reality. Soyinka and Karnad go beyond the definite social and political situation to a fundamental concern for the quality of human existence. Both of them rely on myths and rituals as creative instruments to convey new meaning. The purpose of this comparative study is to analyse how Soyinka and Karnad succeed in inter-relating myth with present reality to probe into the mysteries and complexities of life.

Comparative Literature as a discipline is a fairly recent one that came into vogue in the twentieth-century. Though the comparative spirit is innate in every human being, the study of Comparative Literature as a subject of scholarly investigation is only a century old. Comparative Literature is a systematic study of two or more national literatures through a scientific and scholarly application of the techniques of comparison. It is the combination of international perspective, scientific approach and aesthetic pleasure. According to H.H. Remak:

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts,... philosophy,

history and the social sciences... the sciences, religion etc.,
on the other (1).

To René Wellek, Comparative literature is a study of all literatures from an international perspective with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creations and experience. Wellek believes that "Literature is one, as art and humanity are one" (42). Hence a comparative study of two different literatures will throw light on the vital truth that beyond geographical, religious and linguistic barriers men think, feel and act alike.

The key concepts in Comparative Literature study are influence and analogy. The concept of influence presupposes a direct casual link between the emitter and the receiver. Parallel study or analogical study does not necessarily imply any direct relationship. It involves two writers or two different literatures widely separated by time and place which when systematically viewed becomes a study of two cultures.

Parallel study could be defined as similarities in idea, structure and style between works which have no other connections. Literary analogies may be related to parallel social, political developments in different countries. Another type of analogical study is the study of a chosen theme all over the world and also comparable manifestations in form or content in different authors and literatures with no direct relationship to each other. Juxtaposing comparable works is of great interest and value in the criticism of each of them. The similarity can be traced to two factors- common human experience and the attempts of the writers to turn the raw materials

of life into the perfection of art. The human minds show a tendency to react to certain fundamental problems in an identical manner. When this mood is reflected in literary works, there may naturally occur parallelisms in the visions, images and the themes of the two writers. Parallel study is of great value as pointed out by J.T.Shaw who says: "the value of the study of parallels, as with other literary phenomena is in the light they cast on the qualities and merits of the individual works, they may also be of interest in indicating similarities and differences in national literary tradition" (91).

The present study although parallel in nature, employs the tool of thematological analysis, one of the major concepts of Comparative Literature while attempting a study of the treatment of myth and reality in Soyinka and Karnad. Thematic study helps a comparatist to examine and to understand the spirit of different cultures and also the creative urge behind the individual endeavour. To comment on the relation between the work and writer, Weisstein quotes Ernest Robert Curtis who observes:

The theme is unique in everything which concerns the individual's unique attitude towards the world. A poet's thematic range is a catalogue of his typical relation to specific situations into which life casts him. The theme is in the subjective realm. It is a psychological constant. It is innate to the poet (126).

The analogical study of the plays of Soyinka and Karnad reveals a striking similarity in their preoccupation with myths. Their plays highlight how both the African and Indian world-view are governed by an

animist, holistic way of perception and representation anchored in myth and ritual. Hence the parallel study of these two writers may not only help in deepening the understanding of their works but also throw light on the salient features of the African and Indian cultures and help in providing fresh insight into both the commonality and the difference in these two cultures with ancient traditions. The comparative elucidation may also in the process help to strengthen the bond of human mutual understanding.

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka, the colossus of African letters is the Nigerian writer whose works embody the ideals of both the aesthetic and social accountability of art. No other African writer has succeeded like Soyinka in creating works that capture so sensitively the vicissitudes of African existence. The complexity and grandeur of the works of this Nobel Laureate could be traced back to the African worldview. In spite of his cosmopolitanism, Soyinka is deeply indebted to his Yoruba roots. Nadine Gordimer observes that Soyinka comes closer to the duty of “interpreter to collective consciousness” by encompassing myths in the popular mode of people acting out their own contemporary lives (38).

Hence Soyinka became the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. His ability to articulate the most complex ideas and emotions in a language of unsurpassed force and elegance and the mastery of varied genres make him one of the finest among contemporary writers. The Swedish Academy was right to applaud Soyinka for his commitment as a dramatist and writer of poetry to problems of general and deep significance of men, modern and ancient (*Nobel* 11).

Soyinka's literary achievement is so rich mainly due to the twin heritage-that of the Yoruba culture and Western education. Soyinka took his doctorate from the University of Leeds and it was there that Soyinka met Wilson Knight. It was almost a meeting of like minds. Knight helped Soyinka in providing the means of analysing the Yoruba myths to make them applicable to his own needs.

Soyinka's literary output is staggering in its versatility, vitality and breadth of vision. It displays an astonishing mastery of varied literary forms from drama, poetry, fiction, autobiography to criticism and social commentary and cinematic arts inspired by an abiding concern with human injustice. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza points out:

Soyinka's work weaves myth and realism, poetic sensibility and prosaic speech, idealism and satire, into epic tapestries of the human condition and moral order, probing and unravelling, with deep passion often leavened by ironic humour, the deformities and banalities of evil and oppression, (87).

The most coveted award of the Nobel Prize for Literature accorded to Soyinka in 1986 is chiefly for his accomplishment as a dramatist. Drama is the form that is closest to his heart and his creative genius found its best expression in the dramatic mode. Soyinka himself is reported to have said "there is no question at all that I think, the Nobel Prize is for my drama" (*Nobel* 12). As a literary artist, most of his significant plays reveal an unrelenting preoccupation with myth and its re-enactments through ritual.

Critics often employ phrases like “mythic imagination” and “mythopoeic aesthetics” when they describe the art of Wole Soyinka. Stanley Macebuh says, “Soyinka is first and foremost a mythopoeist: his imagination is in a quite fundamental sense, a mythic imagination” (116).

Soyinka’s aesthetics can be traced back to the influence of African experience. The roots lie in the Yoruba world of mythology. Though born into a family of devout Christians, it was the Yoruba pantheon of gods who exerted a greater influence on Soyinka. It was his grandfather Josiah who was responsible for Soyinka’s fascination with the Yoruba god Ogun. When Soyinka was old enough to choose his religion, he renounced Christianity in favour of the religion of his ancestors. Though influenced by his religion, Soyinka doesn’t want to be called a believer in any established religion. He prefers to call the religion of his ancestors the Yoruba “world-view” (*Myth* 122).

It is an acknowledged fact that the Yorubas are deeply religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing anchor of life for these people. In fact, a significant feature of the Yorubas’ mythic consciousness is rooted in beliefs of gods, and spirits which are determined by the value-systems of the traditional religion. Gert Chesis¹ comments on the Yoruba capture the essence of the Yoruba world-view: ‘The Yoruba do not merely practice their religion, they live it. It is their involvement in universal happenings, their participation in nature’s own spirituality which allows them to “tap the forces” of the gods’ (12).

Soyinka discusses the Yoruba belief in gods in his famous work *Myth, Literature and the African World*. The three main deities are Ogun, Obatala and Sango. Soyinka presents them in drama through the passage-rites of hero-gods, a projection of men's conflict with forces which challenge men's effort to harmonise with environment-physical, social and psychic. They control the aesthetic considerations of ritual enactment and also give performance many levels of experience of the mystical and the worldly. Of the three gods mentioned, Soyinka exhibits a strong fondness for Ogun. According to Soyinka, it is Ogun who correlates absolutely with the numinous temper of the fourth area of existence, that is the abyss of transition (*Myth 26*). The other three worlds of African metaphysics are the world of the ancestor, the living and the unborn. The fourth stage is the dark continuum of the transition and it is the ultimate expression of cosmic will.

Soyinka upholds the Ogun myth as the embodiment of creative and re-creative force. The African belief system reiterates the idea of rebirth as represented in the initiation rites. Among the many gods it was only Ogun who experienced the process of being torn asunder, and later reassembled himself by the exercise of his will. So in African metaphysics, Ogun is the embodiment of the social, communal will invested in the hero of its choice. Soyinka finds Ogun as the embodiment of the Promethean instinct in man who is always at the service of society. Soyinka exploits the Ogun myth and its significance as the archetype of dissolution and re-creation. The plays where the Ogun myth is used to embody the

revolutionary or the redemptive aspects of heroes are *The Strong Breed*, *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Madmen and Specialists*.

The Yoruba pantheon of gods becomes a powerful tool for Soyinka in his critique of his country and countrymen. The other two important gods of the Yorubas are Obatala and Sango. Obatala is a god of many virtues. Obatala is known for his patience, suffering and forbearance. He is also the one god who moulds the human beings into whom the supreme deity Olodumare will breathe life. What endears Soyinka to these Yoruba gods is their fallibility. Obatala once caught up in a drunken stupor created albinos and cripples. As a penance the god opted for eternal abstinence from palm-wine. Ogun's drunken error in killing his own people who worshipped him, made him stricken with remorse. Sango, who represents the principle of justice, too was prone to error which resulted in his disgrace and ultimate apotheosis. Soyinka makes use of these rites of passage of the gods in plays like *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Bacchae of Euripides* to highlight the fact that penance and retribution are not just punishment for crimes. They are the initial steps to a renewed awareness, a cosmic regulation.

Another god of the Yorubas who plays a crucial role in the plays of Soyinka is Aroni. According to the Yoruba belief, Aroni is a great admirer of courage. His favourite haunt is the forest where the courageous person will receive secret knowledge of plants with medicinal values. The man will be sent back to the world as a medicine-man by Aroni. Aroni is a

character in Soyinka's play *A Dance of the Forests* where he administers to the spiritual ills by misleading the culprits deep into the forest.

The Yoruba world-view is dominated by certain rites which have spiritual and archetypal connotations. The initiation rite that highlights the idea of rebirth is an important ritual in the life of an individual. It is the "rite of passage" which represents a symbolic death and rebirth. This process involves three phases that of separation, margin and re-aggregation. As Mircea Eliade points out, through this ritual, the novice is first transformed into an embryo and then is re-born (79). Through the agency of initiation the adolescent becomes a socially responsible and a culturally awakened person. The return to the womb is symbolized by the novice's seclusion in a hut. In the play *The Strong Breed* the hero Eman undergoes such an initiation which forces him to face his responsibility to his society.

Soyinka's relation and indebtedness to Yoruba communal beliefs need special mention as they become the spring board of his creative genius. A significant belief of Yoruba community is the importance of periodic cleansing. They believe that cleansing rituals and festivals will get rid of the accumulated impurities and sins. *The Strong Breed* of Soyinka is a deeply moving tragedy based on the Yoruba ritual of Oro sacrifice, usually observed on New Year's Eve. The motif of the "carrier" sacrificed for the regeneration of the entire society is found in *The Bacchae* of Euripides.

Certain other individuals too share in the task of safeguarding the communal well-being. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, it is Elesin Oba who should willingly sacrifice himself for the smooth continuance of the

world. Likewise, the King too was looked upon as a saviour, a promoter and defender of communal health (David 19). Any weakness or blemish in the King meant disaster to the land. This Yoruba belief is illustrated in Soyinka's satire *Kongi's Harvest* and *A Dance of the Forests*. The well being of the king and the land are interdependent for the Yoruba s.

Rejuvenation is achieved not only through individuals but also through festivals. Like the New Year, many other festivals are essential practices for the Yoruba's for cleansing and purgation. Both nature and society are renewed through festivals like the New Yam festival in *Kongi's Harvest*. The main action of Soyinka's play *A Dance of the Forests* takes place with the festival of the 'Gathering of the Tribes' as the ritual setting.

Many of Soyinka's heroes are healers and spiritual saviours. They act like the Shaman or the Medicine men. Eman, the hero of *The Strong Breed*, is a healer who has set up a modest clinic. The blind beggar in *The Swamp Dwellers*, the two old women Iya Mate and Iya Agba carry this gift of healing into other realm of the spirit. Healing is one of the important attributes of Ogun. Ogun emerges as the deity with functions like that of a quester, path-finder, primordial smith, healer and also the god of poetry and songs.

The Yoruba are mostly agriculturalists and as such they worship the land as mother goddess. To them the earth is the domain of goddess Onile. In rites conducted to honour Onile, she is often referred to as "Iya" or Mother. In the play *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka has assigned

important roles to Iya Agba and Iya Mate as "Earth Mothers" who are finally forced to destroy the specialist Bero.

The dual influence of both Yoruba and Christian religions nurtured the mythopoeic imagination of Soyinka. Even though Soyinka renounced Christianity in favour of the religion of his forefathers, his works illustrate the Christian influence. It is only natural because Soyinka's parents were devout Christians. His mother was nicknamed "wild Christian". Biblical tales and Christian symbolism nurtured the young Soyinka. But later on Soyinka turned away from Christianity. When he was at the Government College Ibaden, Soyinka won a prize for his article "Ideals of an Atheist". One reason for renouncing Christianity was that Soyinka could not find in it any solution for African ills. Soyinka was also offended by the way the Christian missionaries were demeaning African religion as superstition.

Many works of Soyinka contain parodies of Christian rituals and satirical comments on Christian beliefs. Yet Christianity is visible in the recurring themes, motifs and symbols of his works. Soyinka defends this symbolism by pointing out the difficulty of escaping from the endemic effect of great religions and asserts his right as an artist to draw analogous symbols from the available faith or mythology.

The essential principles of Christianity like sacrifice, healing and regeneration influenced Soyinka so much that they become the recurring motifs of his plays. Many of Soyinka's dramatic personae are gifted healers. Likewise the theme of sacrifice and regeneration is a recurrent one in Soyinka's plays. The image of the saviour, the motif of washing and

anointing the feet are found in the play *The Swamp Dwellers* where the blind man who comes as a lone saviour is anointed. The same motif, repeats itself in *The Bacchae of Euripides* where Dionysus receives the honour. The characters like Eman in *The Strong Breed*, embrace their sacrificial role like the Christian martyr or like Christ himself.

Though the plays of Soyinka exemplify the fact that both the Yoruba religion and Christianity are the fountainheads of his unique mythopoesis, Soyinka's interest in myth goes beyond this double heritage. Colonial education had its impact on Soyinka by making him realise the striking parallel between myths of different cultures. He has also delved into the European, Brazilian and Asian myths especially Indian myths choosing the best that served his artistic purpose. Prometheus, Dionysus and Orpheus are the mythic heroes in whom Soyinka found striking parallels. As Soyinka points out in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* helped him to find parallel between the Dionysian-Apollonian brotherhood and that of the dialectic of Ogun and Obatala (141).

In Soyinka's works Ogun and Dionysus are archetypes of dissolution and regeneration. Prometheus is the hero, the archetypal hero who brings a changed world order through his sacrifice. Soyinka finds affinities between Prometheus and Ogun. Both of them risk everything, sacrifice themselves, and finally bring back gifts to mankind. Ogun is more identified with the Greek god of wine, Dionysus. The fundamental similarity between the two gods is that the myths of these gods narrate their dismemberment and reassembling. Hence Ogun and Dionysus

become symbols of sacrifice and regeneration. This is very well exemplified by Soyinka in his play *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Orpheus is the third hero from Greek myth who had influenced Soyinka. Soyinka has made extensive use of this myth in his *Season of Anomy* and in *The Man Died*.

Another important archetype that is latent in Soyinka's writing is that of the Quester in the medieval myth of the waste land which was popularized by T.S.Eliot. Though Soyinka himself has stated that he is "not very fond of Eliot", yet like Eliot, Soyinka believed in the power of ethical values which alone can save humanity from total disintegration (Wilkinson 220). The spiritual guardians of Eliot as in his plays find a parallel in Soyinka's works like *A Dance of the Forests* and *Madmen and Specialists*, as the Forest Head and the *aje*.

By his complex welding of the African mythology with the oriental and the occidental myths, Soyinka strives to proffer explanations and resolutions for social and individual problems. Though the mythopoeics of Soyinka sometimes create interpretative problems, this mode of presentation has its advantage. It not only encapsulates experience but also provides a holistic picture of reality. Another undeniable advantage is that it widens the reader's horizon of perception.

Girish Karnad is one of India's finest dramatists. He has shown the Indian stage as to what extent myths can be used to confront contemporary reality. Acclaimed nationally and internationally, Karnad is a multi-faceted personality. He is a renowned playwright, actor, film, television and

theatre director, translator, critic and ambassador of culture. Yet what Karnad loves most is theatre and his role as a dramatist. He has succeeded in showing how the indigenous theatre can reach its heights by being true to its traditions and also by responding to contemporary problems. Karnad has achieved this feat through the reworking of myths to comment on contemporary reality.

Like Soyinka, Karnad too is blessed with the advantages of a double heritage. As Karnad's childhood was spent in different parts of Maharashtra his early education was in Marathi. Konkani being the mother tongue was spoken fluently by Karnad and when the family moved to Sirsi, Karnad learnt yet another language- Kannada. The rich and diverse cultures of these languages and the opportunity to see a lot of theatre are the early influences that later stood Karnad the dramatist in good stead.

Mathematics and Statistics, the subjects of his college years, imparted a strong sense of equilibrium and balance to Karnad which is evident in all his plays. The major influence—the impact of English language was rather inevitable and the Rhodes scholarship further strengthened Karnad's love for English literature. The English plays of Shakespeare, Brecht, Osborne, Anouilh and Beckett inspired Karnad especially by impressing on him the way lights could be used to determine visual impact and to manipulate story telling. These western techniques are adapted by Karnad along with indigenous ones in his plays.

The studies in Oxford University ironically served another purpose. The colonial education only served to strengthen Karnad's allegiance to his

Indian roots. In his conversation with Tutun Mukherjee, Karnad admits, "although my thoughts about dramaturgy had not really formed then, my stay in England convinced me that western drama had nothing much to give us" (32). Karnad deserves praise for revealing the richness and complexity of the indigenous theatre tradition and for highlighting the splendour and true grandeur of the repertory of Indian myths.

Karnad's creative genius has won him a long and formidable list of awards including the Padma Bhushan (1992) and the Janpith Award (1999) for life time contribution to literature and art. Though Karnad has excelled in many fields, it is drama which remains his forte. He confesses in the interview by Aparna Dharwadkar, "I have been fairly lucky in having a multipronged career. You know I've been an actor, a publisher, a film maker. But in none of these fields have I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting" (362).

Among the modern Indian dramatists, Karnad remains the foremost to make a very expressive use of myth in his plays. As he admits in his introduction to his *Three Plays*, "The myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally" (23). It is interesting that a modern playwright like Karnad alienated from his background and language should go back to the ancient resources of myth, folklore, and legends in writing his plays. Though Karnad's taking to myth was an act of impulse it was an inevitable one. The reason was, even as a young boy Karnad was exposed to traditional forms of theatre. There are three crucial influences which had gone into moulding the imagination

of Karnad the dramatist. In *Theatre in India* Karnad throws light on the state of Indian theatre through a narration of his own experiences. In his childhood, Karnad often witnessed the plays staged by troupes of professional actors called "Natak" companies. The plays were enacted on proscenium stage with drop curtains and were illuminated by pertromax lamps.

Karnad was exposed to two very different theatre forms that seemed to represent two vastly different worlds. As the love for the theatre was in the family, his parents encouraged Karnad to see the plays both by the Natak companies and also the popular Yakshagana performances, the important activity of the folk theatre. When he attended college in Dharwad, Karnad discovered modern theatre. The plays of Shaw, Strindberg, Anouilh, Sartre, Brecht, Camus and Alkazi left a powerful impact.

The diverse influences of the native and Western traditions resulted in Karnad's adoption of new modernistic techniques of theatre and an adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. His latest work *Broken Images* makes brilliant use of technology to flesh out the character of the heroine Manjula Nayak. She is interviewed on T.V. and gradually the T.V. becomes the interrogator forcing the splintering of her cultivated image. But Karnad always relies on myth and history for plots to provide analogues for modern times.

To confront this burden of culture, Karnad uses India's rich repertoire of myths from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharatha* and also the folk

tales. His first play *Yayati* written with impulsive enthusiasm is based on the story from the *Mahabharata*. It is an existentialist play based on the theme of responsibility. The myth of Yayati reflects Karnad's anxieties and his resentment at his elders who demanded too much from him when he was preparing to leave for England. In *Theatre in India* Karnad admits the surprise he felt at the choice of story from the ancient epic. "By the time I had finished writing the play, it was not my parents but this myth that had appeared out of nowhere to come to my aid that seemed to pose the real challenge. It had nailed me to my past" (334).

The search for a moral order or search for completeness seems to be the major theme in most of the plays of Karnad. *Yayati* deals with the philosophical problems of responsibility through the story of Yayati and Puru taken from the *Mahabharatha*. The search for completion or perfection happens in a different sphere that of politics in *Tuqlaq*. In *Naga-mandala* and *Hayavadana*, Karnad uses the folk tales to discuss the quest for completion or identity of both men and women characters. *Tale-Danda* deals with the search for a perfect social order. *The Fire and the Rain* presents the theme of regeneration through sacrifice. The myth of Yavakri taken from ~~the~~ *Mahabharatha* becomes the backdrop. In *Bali: the Sacrifice* the problem dealt with is more complex as it debates the conflicts of faith through a Jain myth. In his latest monologue *Broken Images* Karnad takes up a psychological study of the human psyche and questions whether human beings are doomed to fragmentation and incompleteness. *Flowers* is a monologue that uses an old Kannada folk tale to present the complexity

of the human mind caught up in the dilemma between desire and power, sacrifice and fulfilment.

“The relationship between God and Man is one of my major concerns in my plays” states Karnad (qtd. in Ramachandran 30). Man is everywhere religious. But it is in India that the farthest limit of religious faculty has been realised. Hence India has been hailed as “the land of eternal thought” and as the most religious country in the universe (Couchoud 31). Karnad makes use of the various principles of Hinduism which is polytheistic and is among the oldest religions of the world. Three supreme gods who manifest the Absolute are Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer. Siva the Propitious and ascetic par excellence and Vishnu who is known for his incarnations as Rama and Krishna have generated innumerable myths. Karnad utilises these Hindu myths of these gods and also the myths of Lord Ganesha and Indra.

Karnad makes abundant use of the popular myths related to these gods. In *Hayavadana*, the god Ganesha is propitiated on the stage itself for successful completion. Ganesha who becomes a creative symbol in the play is one of the most popular deities solicited for success in different endeavours and for the boon of intelligence. In *Flowers*, god Siva performs a miracle for saving the good name of his devotee. Indra plays a crucial role in *The Fire and the Rain*. One of Indra's many surnames is Vritrahan which means “slayer of Vritra”. Karnad takes this aspect of the myth and links it with the theme of fratricide. And again, being the god of rain and thunder, Indra blesses the people with rains by the end of the play. Agni,

the god of "the Sacrificial Fire" too has a role in this play. He is believed to be the friend of men who waft their offerings to the gods and carries their prayers to the higher deities.

Karnad's plays most often contain ironic references to the Hindu theories of karma and rebirth in order to point out the ever widening gulf between theory and practice. Belief in karma makes Hayavadana visit a lot of temples to attain redemption. Caste system, one of the banes of Hindu society is attacked powerfully by Karnad in his plays like *Tale- Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*. The caste division too is based on the myth that initially intended division of labour. Karnad is not against religion. Though an atheist, he has nothing against theists. Basavanna of *Tale-Danda* and the priest in *Flowers* are strong believers in god. Karnad is only against religious fanaticism as it can easily turn men into enemies of life.

Like religion, the problem of identity, especially feminine identity is another major concern of Karnad. Karnad's dependence on myths and folk tales is in fact a surrogate for the exposition of the complexity of human nature. The tale from *Kathasaritsagara* is used with such telling effect in *Hayavadana*. *Naga-mandala*, a play based on folk tale presents Rani's mute suffering. Few Indian writers have presented the delicate question of a woman's sexuality, her individuality and even the sin of adultery with such understanding and honesty as Karnad has done. By using myth and folktales Karnad dramatizes the tragedy of women who are denied individuality and their helplessness and suffering caught up in the whirlpool of patriarchy.

Distrust of intellect is another recurring thematic strand in the plays of Karnad. In plays like *The Fire and the Rain*, *Yayati* and *Hayavadana*, myths are used to show that intellect given to logic and devoid of finer sentiments of the heart will dehumanise a society. When Yayati rationalises his inhuman demand for his son's youth and Chitrlekha's sacrifice of her marital bliss, Chitrlekha feels that only cowards and liars would find logic indispensable. In *The Fire and the Rain*, the men Parvasu and Yavakri who thirst for knowledge end up as failures while Nitilai who embodies instinctive goodness and nobility becomes instrumental in bringing rains to the parched land. *Hayavadana* attains completion by becoming a full-fledged horse, a being of pure instinct instead of becoming a human being.

The tyranny of the caste system is exposed by Karnad's plays like *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*. In the latter play, the myth of Yavakri from the *Mahabharatha* is used as an indictment on the caste system. The play contrasts two different cultures, two ways of life that of the Brahmins and the tribals. When the Brahmin men like Yavakri, Raibhya and Parvasu misuse knowledge for self-improvement and for destruction, the innocent tribal girl Nitilai stands for life-giving forces of nature.

Karnad delves into the psychological consequences of violence in his play *Bali: The Sacrifice*. It is based on a thirteenth century Kannada epic, *Yashodhara Charite* and the play is an ideological one that interrogates the notion of violence and the conflict of faith. Once again Karnad amplifies an

obscure myth to debate on cultural codes, modes of representation and forms of attachment.

Karnad's abiding interest in "ithihasa", an analogous Indian term for history, is reflected in *Tale-Danda*, *Tuglaq* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. These plays emphasise a review of history, especially the first and the last plays written amidst growing fundamentalism and communal frenzy advocate integration. It is this social awareness intrinsic in Karnad's plays that makes the audience sympathise with the fight against insensitivity and cultural lethargy of the modern times.

To the question of Karnad's setting the plays in the past instead of the present Karnad replies, "distancing is pivotal if one wants to look at the present critically" (*India Today* 161). The artistic foray into the myths and history of India's past has opened newer frontier of meanings for Karnad who found in them alternative texts.

The biographical account of Soyinka and Karnad and their ideologies reveal many interesting similarities. Both the dramatists have benefited from the twin heritage that of their native countries and the west. Yet they are writers deeply rooted in their soil, writers who have boldly experimented by going back to their indigenous theatrical techniques and above all with themes innate to their respective cultures. Soyinka and Karnad have "returned to the source" searching their respective cultures' ritual archetypes and myths as a technique, as a new way of responding to reality, to illumine the present from the vantage point of the past. Dramatic form best suits these writers' themes and myth oriented creativity because

it enables them to draw on the ritualistic nature of the Nigerian and the Indian theatre traditions.

One is able to perceive identical quests, similar patterning, concurring devices which include both the western and the indigenous, and also a language which is almost poetic in the works of Soyinka and Karnad. The similarity between these writers is found also in their unique capacity of practising what they preach about social justice. Whenever there was a crisis Soyinka met the challenge actively and didn't hesitate to accept incarceration. Soyinka is a crusader exhibiting courage and also accountability. His offer to negotiate between the Biafran secessionists and Nigerian government resulted in harrowing experience of incarceration on trumped up charges. Solitary confinement for nearly twenty-seven months has left an indelible mark on his personality but his faith in individual will and action in bringing in regeneration remains unchanged.

Karnad led the demonstration to protest against the attack made by the VHP-Bajrang Dal men on the theatre group *Samudaya* which was doing an anti-communal play as part of Tipu Sultan's bicentenary celebrations. Karnad also used the opportunity as the chief guest of the Marathi Sahitya Sammelan to criticise the culture of intolerance which was interpreted widely as the much-needed castigation of groups like Shiv Sena and the RSS fundamentalists (Deshpande 21). Whenever Karnad took a stand against religious fanaticism and social injustice, he became the target of demagogic denunciation and threats of retaliation.

Parallel study implies a study of comparisons and contrasts. There are many aspects in which Soyinka and Karnad differ as dramatists. Though both writers are mythopoeic, Soyinka is more cosmopolitan and makes use of Yoruba, Christian and Greek myths. But Karnad is content to rely on Indian myths and folk-tales. There are many other valid points of difference which would be explored in the coming chapters.

The salient features of the twin heritage of Soyinka and Karnad serve to place them on the common pedestal of comparison which would be explicated in the coming chapters. The power of the mystique of myth which sustains the creative genius of Soyinka and Karnad as dramatists is discussed in the ensuing chapter.