The Archetypal Arch: The Plays of Girish Karnad

Girish Raghunath Karnad, a man of versatile genius, was born at Matheran near Mumbai on 19 May 1938. He is a contemporary playwright, actor, film producer and director. “Karnad is India’s leading playwright and one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts.”¹ He received the Jananpith Award for Kannad, which is considered the highest literary honour of India. Karnad has been composing a variety of plays for about four decades, based on different themes as history and mythology to deal with contemporary issues. He is also a part of Indian television and cinema being an actor, producer, director and screenwriter, along with earning a number of awards. Indian government also conferred on him great awards as Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan. From 1960 to 1963, Karnad has been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and from 1970 to 1972, a Bhabha fellow. His great command over English does also add to his success as a skilful playwright.

Though Konkani is Karnad’s mother tongue, he writes in Kannad which is his second language as his father stayed in North Karnataka being a health officer. Initially, he wished to write plays in English but he was more fascinated by Kannad. During his childhood period at Sisri, he was exposed to drama. His father used to take him to company natak performances. The young Karnad used to go to watch Yakshagana performances with the servants as his parents used to consider such plays quite inferior to their taste. In this way, the technical aspects of both types of dramas have

contributed a lot in the making of Karnad’s plays. From the very beginning, Karnad had wished to be a poet but, surprisingly, he turned out to be a great dramatist.

Karnad has manifested himself in the world of acting in different roles in a number of movies and television programmes. He has also worked as the Director of the Central Institute of Film and Television Technology in Poona. After three years of his service to this institute, he entered Hindi film industry and has been working since then with the famous directors like Shyam Benegal and Kabir Khan, etc. He not only acted in but also directed and produced a number of TV serials.

Despite being originally a Kannad writer, Karnad translated most of his plays into English to reach a large group of readers. Like other prominent playwrights as Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar, Karnad contributed in the revival of theatre’s trend by upholding the prosperous Indian cultural heritage in the form of using historical, traditional, legendary and mythical stories in his plays. “Indian myths in the hands of Girish Karnad prove to be vital, meaningful, and inspirational.” With the projection of Indian values and its cultural richness, Karnad has tried to fight the force of colonialism. With the presentation of Indian cultural fabric, Karnad has related the themes of his plays to the contemporary context. Karnad is in habit of discovering and presenting less known myths by understanding their significance and relating them to the context of his plays. Thus, without tampering with the authenticity of the original tales, Karnad provides his plays with the romantic charm.

Karnad has a better understanding of human psyche. He is considered to be a great actor and playwright out of this knowledge of human nature. He minutely understands the paradoxical characteristics of human nature and observes innumerable ironies happening in human life. The protagonists of his plays project the paradoxical features emerging in human nature and life. Myths, history and folklores are used as the basis for the selected themes of Karnad’s plays but they all are related to contemporary scene. While reading his plays, one feels history and puranas repeating themselves. Karnad has contributed a lot in introducing and projecting the folk tradition into his drama and, in this way, provided a wider scope to the Indian stage. When one considers his entire dramatic output, one gets aware of the loftiness of his dramatic imagination and creative perception. This is the reason why Karnad is taken to be one of the most prominent and successful playwrights of the contemporary Indian English dramatic field. In the views of Kirtinath Kurtkoti: “His work has the tone and expression of great drama. He has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic expression.”

Karnad is also a progressive dramatist as the early Kannad playwrights before Karnad used to take playwriting just as a literary exercise keeping no connection with the living stage. Though a few playwrights as Kailasam and Adya Rangacharya tried their level best to get rid of this trend yet they could not bring anything fruitful result out of it. They could not create even a substitute for it. It was just with the new dramatic movement which could bring Kannad’s drama to a better place. In the words of Kirtinath Kurtkoti: “With this new theatre going around them, new playwrights like Girish Karnad

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have been able to bring to drama a first hand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique.\textsuperscript{4}

\textit{Yayati}, \textit{Tughlaq}, \textit{Hayavadana} and \textit{Tale-danada} are Karnad’s such plays which brought him a great recognition. Karnad does not take the whole of the myth but just a part of it, which he finds useful to his plays, and the rest he completes with his imaginary power, making the plots of his plays clear to the readers and the viewers. As in the play \textit{Yayati}, the whole myth has not been presented but just a part of that, and in the play \textit{Tughlaq}, one finds various imaginary characters existing nowhere in the history as Aziz, Aazam, and many historical characters such as Najib, Barani and step-mother in a new context.

Karnad’s excellent knowledge of English language renders him into an outstanding writer, translating most of his plays into English. He chooses quite carefully the appropriate words, phrases and proverbs of English. His suggestive language perfectly deals with the characters and situations. His language is comprehensible, easy and smooth. This quality of his paves an easy way to the Indian audience to enjoy the English plays. Though based on Indian mythological and historical themes, his plays basically represent the very state of modern man, falling in various crises and tangled in intense conflict. The foundation of Karnad as a distinguished dramatist was laid with the publication of \textit{Yayati} in 1961, and that of \textit{Tughlaq} in 1964. Later on his other plays were published as \textit{Hayavadana} (1971), \textit{Angumalige} (1977), \textit{Hittina Hunja} (1980), \textit{Naga-Mandala} (1988), \textit{Tale-Danda} (1990) and \textit{Agni Mattu Male} (1995). Though all the plays

\textsuperscript{4} Karnad, Girish. \textit{Hayavadana}. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1975. v. Print
of Karnad were written in Kannad, they were later translated into major Indian languages as English, Hindi etc.

Karnad's first play, *Yayati*, written in 1961, brought him a great fame with the winning of the Mysore State Award in the year 1962. This play has derived its content from an episode of *The Mahabharata*. “Girish Karnad extracts the material for his plot from history and mythology mostly but interprets the past in the context of contemporary relevance, a system which he evolved from his very first play, *Yayati* which examines a myth from *The Mahabharata* in modern context.”\(^5\) The story of *Yayati* is like this that Yayati who is an ancestor of Pandavas is cursed by incensed Shukracharya, his father-in-law of premature old age because of his being infidel to his wife. Shukracharya still relents and lessens the intensity of this curse by putting a condition if someone willingly offers to Yayati his young age and accepts his old age, then Yayati could redeem this curse. In the end of the story, Yayati’s son, Pooru, is seen doing so. Pooru’s acceptance of Yayati’s old age is the vital moment causing a great dilemma for most of the characters of the play as Yayati, Pooru, Chitralekha, etc. and this crisis is examined in the play.

Girish Karnad is an efficient dramatist who observes man getting tangled in his problems, and fallen in such a situation where he searches for his identity. Being in such a crisis, he gets lonely, discontented and rootless making all his efforts in search of his identity in the society; and once he fails, he becomes frustrated and desperate. The play, *Yayati*, also presents various characters as Yayati, Devayani, Sharmista,

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Pooru and Chitralekha being trapped in such a situation which causes a great crisis to all of them. Yayati’s intense grief emerging out of his premature old age, Pooru as a responsible son offering the exchange of his youth to his father, and the newly married Chitralekha’s suicide present the predicaments of these characters, constantly searching for their identity, and ultimately suffering from identity crisis. In the end, they are fallen in such situations from where they consider themselves as lonely, rootless, estranged, helpless and stranger to their society. Karnad’s play *Yayati* examines the complexity existing in the relation of parents and children, parents’ over expectation from their children and their responsibility towards them, particularly in Indian familial background. At the time of his preparing to go to England, Karnad was caught in a great emotional turmoil and it was just the time, he started writing this play. It so happened on one day, Karnad came across the story of the king Yayati while reading the *Mahabharata*. It appealed to him a lot and made him write this play. This play is an expression of Karnad’s personal rift between his family’s demands and that of his own desire for freedom, as:

The play was an unexpected outcome of the intense emotional turmoil Karnad experienced while preparing for his trip to England for further studies. He was the first boy from his traditional family to go abroad for higher studies. The uncertainty of his future course of action and the struggle ahead made him aware of his responsibility. To escape from his stressful situation he began writing a play retelling myth from the Mahabharata. The play that reflects his
mental condition at that time is a self-conscious existential drama on the theme of responsibility.  

The play *Yayati* presents Pooru’s father Yayati as the personification of the parents of the present day society who expect a lot from their children without keeping enough concern for their interest. In an interview Karnad himself said that the story of Yayati had appealed to him a lot, especially the exchange of ages between the old father and the young son, and just this exchange is the vital part of the play which Karnad finds to be quite powerful and quite modern.

It being a social creature, man cannot ignore his responsibilities. Pooru’s father Yayati, who is cursed by his father-in-law Shukracharya, gets old but he is held responsible for his past deeds. In his youth, Yayati had been drenched in the sensual pleasures to such an extent wherefrom he finds it difficult to come back. The loss of his youth makes him realize rootless, powerless and outsider to his society. Karnad has also made some deviations from the original story to serve his dramatic end as: “In *Yayati* Karnad takes liberty with the original myth and invents some new relationships to make it acceptable to modern sensibility… Karnad Invents two characters – Puru’s wife Chitralekha and confidant Swarnalata.”

In the beginning of the play, we get aware of an ongoing conflict between Devayani, the queen of Yayati and Sharmishtha, a *rakhi*, and maid of Devayani. Sharmishtha does not accord proper respect to Devayani being aware of the fact that king Yayati married her just because of her father Shukracharya, who had the power to

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7 Ibid., 176
bless the king with immortality. Giving vent to her anger in an argument with Devayani, Sharmishtha discloses this fact.

The point of crisis emerges in the life of Yayati at his refusal to part with Sharmishtha. Being enraged by Sharmishtha’s arguments, Devayani does not want her to stay in the palace and asks her to leave but king Yayati, who had been attracted towards Sharmishtha, does not agree with this. Yayati announces before Devayani that he wants Sharmishtha to be his queen. Devayani gets shocked and horrified listening to this. At this Yayati tries to pacify her by saying:

Yes, but you don’t need to worry, devi. Your position will not be touched. You will remain the senior Queen. You will share my throne. You will be at my side in all public celebrations. That goes without saying. She can never be a threat to your position, you know that, because of her race.\(^8\)

This shows Yayati’s blind pursuit to sensual pleasures; and despite being aware of the fact that Devayani would not tolerate it, and it may bring disastrous results to him, he could not part with Sharmistha. Through this act of Yayati, Karnad does also seem to project the element of male-domination in which the male imposes his decisions on the female without taking care of her feelings.

At the time when Yayati comes to know the fact that his father-in-law, Shukracharya, being enraged by Yayati’s infidelity to his wife, has cursed him with old age, Yayati does not accept the responsibility of his action. He blames Sharmishtha, his

second wife, for all this as he says: “Old age! Decrepitude! By nightfall! And then? Then what? Sharmishtha. You she-devil! You are the cause of all this. You are responsible. You trapped me with your wiles.” Now the same element of male-domination is found reflected in the above reply of Yayati to Sharmistha in which he does not accept his fault and the consequences of that but holds Sharmistha, a female, responsible for it. It shows the fact that whenever anything wrong happens to a male, even out of his own actions, in a male-dominated society, he finds a woman to be an easy target to blame her to that happening and thus, victimizes her.

This new identity in the form of decrepitude is not acceptable to Yayati so he loses his control on himself and finds it difficult to deal with the situation. Yayati behaves like a mad man as he searches for something here and there on the bed and starts remembering his past life like this:

I am trying to recapture my youth. Moments when I handed out pain, moments when I slaughtered enemies, razed hostile cities to the ground, made my queens writhe in pain and demanded that they laugh and make love to me in gratitude. Why do I think of those moments now, Sharmishtha? Why do moments of tears and torture and blood seem priceless?^10

Yayati does not trust even his son, therefore, being suspicious towards him, he blames him to be happy at his miserable condition. Thus, Yayati becomes stranger even to his personal relationships. He gets jubilant on Pooru’s information that his curse


^10 Ibid., 43
can be redeemed on one condition and that is if some young person gets ready to accept his old age. Yayati does not realize the seriousness of the condition and accuses Sharmishtha and Pooru of being sad in his happiness:

That is good news. That is good news indeed. So I don’t lose my youth, thank god. What a relief! So you see, Sharmishtha. You were asking me to accept the curse as though that was the end of everything. You wanted me to turn my back on life but even a dotard like Shukracharya can see reason.

(Looks at them and sees no sign of joy in them.)

Why do you look so gloomy? Aren’t you happy that I have escaped a fate worse than death? Don’t you feel any happiness, any joy at my escape from the blight? Why are you silent? Am I doing something wrong?\textsuperscript{11}

In order to maintain his identity by regaining his youth, Yayati sends a message among his people that whosoever gets ready to exchange his young age with his old age for a few years, will be given a great treasure. Through this action of Yayati the playwright tries to expose man’s overwhelming desire for indulgence which makes him blind to see the reality. Ultimately, the tragedy of Yayati comes out when Pooru informs him that no one is ready to accept his old age despite the temptation of a great treasure. Yayati gets shocked and is unable to believe this as he had imagined that all his subjects will happily come forward to accept his old age. At this Sharmishtha tries to

\textsuperscript{11} Karnad, Girish. \textit{Yayati}. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2008. 45-46. Print
bring Yayati to his senses and make him realize the stark reality of life. No one would wish to lose one’s identity which gives one an authentic existence in the society. The curse disappoints Yayati and he believes that now no one, not even his son would help him to come out of his predicament. In such a condition, Sharmishtha once again asks Yayati to accept what has fallen on him and Yayati similarly, gets violent and refuses to accept decrepitude fallen in his lot. Not only Sharmishtha but Pooru also tries to make Yayati understand the reality and accept the responsibility for his deeds. Pooru requests Yayati to accept the curse in the form of old age and go to the forest. Yayati in return requests Pooru like this:

Don’t. Don’t please go on as though you cannot understand. It is the crushing suddenness of it – not being given a chance. Don’t you see the arbitrariness of it all? To be hurled into an unchangeable future – without warning, without a chance to redeem one’s pledges to life? You can stumble down a road without lights, Pooru. But to go on where there is no hope. That’s unthinkable.12

Ultimately finding no solution to the problem Pooru comes forward to accept the curse. At this, Sharmishtha, realizing the seriousness of the situation, tries to make Pooru withdraw his decision at least for the sake of his newly wedded wife, Chitralekha but all her efforts go in vein and Pooru remains adamant on his decision.

The biggest sufferer of Pooru’s decision is his newly wedded wife Chitralekha who finds her young husband being converted into an old one at the first night of her marriage. For this decision, Pooru asks Chitralekha for forgiveness as he had not consulted her before taking the decision of accepting the curse, but Chitralekha feels that he does not need to do anything like this as she was not aware of the horror of the situation. When Pooru asks Chitralekha to render him her support to undertake this responsibility, Chitralekha happily extends her support. But Pooru also tries to make her realize that it is not a normal oldness but something more than that as he says: “This is no ordinary old age, devi. This is decrepitude. The sum total of Father’s transgressions. The burden of the whole dynasty, perhaps. I couldn’t take it on without your help.”

On Pooru’s expressing all this, Chitralekha again speaks out in the same way that it is a thing of honour for her to do something for her husband and, in this way, she readily agrees to support him. The moment Chitralekha sees the horrible face of the old Pooru she gets frightened and asks him to stay away from her like this: “Please don’t come near me. Go out. Please, please. Don’t touch me …” Now Chitralekha finds herself in a predicament and curses herself for turning her husband out at such a fearful sight.

Out of this exchange of ages the identity of Pooru is completely lost as on one hand he is Pooru, Chitralekha’s husband and on the other hand with the adoption of Yayati’s old age he becomes Chitralekha’s father-in-law. In this way it is quite difficult for Chitralekha to find out Pooru’s identity so she holds Yayati responsible for spoiling the

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14 Ibid., 58
life of his son to achieve his dangerous ambition to stay young. This expresses the inner
grief of a newly married young woman craving for her marital satisfaction but Yayati
seems to be quite indifferent towards her sufferings and feels no regret for his action as
he tries to console Chitralekha in this way:

This is no time for recriminations. My heart goes out to you. But you
are an educated woman, versed in the arts, trained in warfares.
You could have displayed more self-control. Now act in a manner
worthy of an Anga princess and Bharata queen. Act so that
generations to come may sing your glory and Pooru’s.¹⁵

This statement of Yayati presents the picture of a patriarchal world in which the
male is possessing a higher position, power and right to speak; whereas the female
belongs to a lower position, having no power and voice. Women are supposed to
repress their feelings and desires and follow the orders of men even against their wish.
Yayati asks Chitralekha to have some elevated thoughts and behaviour suiting to the
daughter-in-law of the Bharata family. He asks her to make a sacrifice in the form of
accepting the decrepitude of Pooru and says that this sacrifice of her will be taken as an
obligation on the Bharata family. When Yayati finds Chitralekha disobeying him, he gets
rigorous and exercises his authority on her not only as her father-in-law but also as a
king and orders her to allow Pooru to come into her bedroom. As he says to
Chitralekha:

I hope you realize where you are. This is the palace of the Bharata’s. I can order you – not as your Father-in-law, but as your ruler – to take him in and you will have to obey. But I am not doing that. I request you – not to act in a manner that will bring ignominy on us all.\textsuperscript{16}

Chitralekha is not at all ready to agree with him and says that if Pooru enters her bedroom, she will not stay in the palace. Yayati scolds Chitralekha to think of leaving the palace and says: “Do you remember the vow you took not so long ago – with the gods as your witness, in the presence of the holy fire? That you would walk in the path marked by his footprints: whether home or into the wilderness …”\textsuperscript{17}. At this, Chitralekha ironically remarks: “Or into the funeral pyre?”\textsuperscript{18} It enrages Yayati and he rebukes her badly to wish death for her husband. Chitralekha then blames Yayati for putting Pooru in this critical condition: “I did not push him to the edge of the pyre, sir. You did. You hold forth on my wifely duties. What about your duty to your son? Did you think twice before foisting your troubles on a pliant son?”\textsuperscript{19} Chitralekha accuses Yayati for pushing his son towards death. It reflects an attempt of Chitralekha to challenge the dominant patriarchal system. Thus: “In the character of Chitralekha, we find the glimpse of ‘new woman’ of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Like new woman who is also in the search of her identity as

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
woman and always conscious of her position. She does not like the life of self-denial but protests against the odds of life.”

Yayati tries to convince Chitralekha by idealizing her sacrifice. He preaches her not to pay attention on such petty considerations and suggests her to be a great woman making such a sacrifice. Yayati’s all these arguments could not convince Chitralekha and she kept stuck to her views. Chitralekha is found caught in an identity crisis as now it is not clear whether she is the wife of Pooru or Yayati. She makes all her efforts to come out of this confusion and to find out the authentic identity of her husband and of her ownself. From within, she is always burning with a flame of fury and protest. Ultimately being fed up with the ongoing conflict, she tries to come out of this unpleasant situation and puts a proposal without any hesitation or shame before Yayati to take the place of her husband in her life so that she could give birth to the child of the family: “I did not know Price Pooru when I married him. I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He doesn’t possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But you do.”

Yayati gets shocked when Chitralekha offers herself to him. He scolds her for bearing such low thoughts. In the end, having no solution to this unending problem, she finds her life to be useless having no meaning, reason and sense of it. Then to relieve herself from depression, anxiety and melancholy, she decides to commit suicide by taking poison and, thus, ends her life.

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Sharmishtha blames Yayati to bring Chitralekha’s life to an end, as she says: “You destroyed her life. I pleaded with you but you were drunk with your future ... So here is the foundation of your glorious future, Your Majesty. A woman dead, another gone mad, and a third in danger of her life.”

Though earlier Yayati exchanges his old age with Pooru’s young age, afterwards he feels a sense of disillusionment. Yayati puts his argument that he is doing this in favour of his subjects as they need him as a king but the reality is something beyond this as he does all this for his personal interest. The ultimate horror of the whole situation emerges before Yayati in the form of Chitralekha’s suicide. Chitralekha, pooru’s young wife, when finds no way to come out of this situation, poisons herself to death to get relieved of all the troubles. Contemporaneity of the play is reflected through this Yayati-Chitralekha dialogue which projects the vital issue of concern in the form of patriarchy or male-domination in Indian society.

In the very end of the play, Yayati comes to his senses only through Chitralekha’s suicide when he owns up responsibility for his actions and sends for Pooru to tell him: “Take back your youth, Pooru. Rule well. Let me go back and face my destiny in the wilds.” Then he decides to go to the forest accompanying Sharmishtha.

Thus, Karnad’s *Yayati* is substantially different from the original story. In his play he has made some deviations from the original one. He brings some changes to serve his dramatic purpose. As in the original story of Yayati, there is no character like Chitralekha, while it is just Chitralekha’s presence with which Karnad tries to explore

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23 Ibid., 69
and criticize the evil of patriarchy existing in the very depth of Indian society. As: “Take away Chitralekha from Yayati and it falls flat.”

All the characters in the play have a symbolic meaning as they represent a particular type and are an embodiment of a particular element. Yayati symbolizes the discontented contemporary young man; and also a patriarchal figure exercising his authority on each and every one around him. Pooru is an embodiment of an obedient son who does not hesitate to accept his father’s suffering in the form of a dire curse of decrepitude. Chitralekha represents the modern woman who dares to fight for her rights and tries to give a setback to the male-dominated patriarchal social system. Sharmistha is seen to be an embodiment of a true lover who does not change with the changing fate of her love and supports him in his adverse circumstances, despite being rebuked by him.

Karnad has beautifully interpreted this ancient myth in modern context. “The playwright has given this traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today.” Like king Yayati of the Mahabharata, the common man of the present society is groping materialistic pleasures in darkness. This is the reason why reading the play Yayati one realizes that there is an Yayati in all the modern people who keeps on craving for worldly pleasures. Everybody has eyes but just a few have the vision. Keeping the internal eyes closed, one always stays busy in fulfilling one’s worldly desires, without realizing the fact that fulfillment does not finish or diminish desire. One does not realize that happiness is the goal of all other goals yet he tries to seek

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25 Ibid., 176
happiness in a round about way. One has worldly desires and material goals in the form of possessing a house, an automobile and other luxurious items. One wants a kind of security with the feeling of belonging. Some people wish to be affluent, the other desire to seek fame. However, when one is asked as why does he desire to possess all such things, he says that he wants to be happy, that is why he wants all this.

In this way, when Yayati recognizes the reality of life and his moral responsibility, he realizes the fact that happiness for a reason is a fake happiness and a form of misery; because the reason for happiness can ever be taken away, and at that time, the man will be left with nothing. Therefore, being happy for no reason actually is the real happiness. Thus, having taken from the ancient Indian puranic source and based on the theme of responsibility, this play of Karnad points out the problem of identity crisis, discontentment of the contemporary man, despite having everything required with him, and the very notion of patriarchy, existing at the very root of Indian society.

Karnad’s historical play, *Tughlaq* written in 1964, is based on the life of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India presenting him as a complex personality. Karnad explores the paradoxical characteristics of this idealistic Sultan of Delhi as his ruling period is taken to be one of the greatest failures of Indian history. Contrary to other chronicle plays, *Tughlaq* presents a highly imaginative reconstruction of some of the most remarkable events of the life of this king. King Tughlaq’s state of being entrapped in great psychological depth depicts his complex personality and, thus, becomes the most fascinating and appealing part of the play. The play mainly presents the psychological state of Tughlaq in the form of his determination and anguish. He has
highly utopian dreams which seem to be quite imaginary and impracticable. He makes all his efforts to get his ideals realized of producing an egalitarian society based on secularism and Hindu-Muslim unity.

Originally written in Kannad, the play, *Tughlaq*, was later translated into English by Karnad himself comprising all the merits of original writings providing it an appropriate place in Indian English drama. It mainly claims to be one of the most successful attempts made in India to produce a genuine history play in English. It is not just a historical play with the study of historical events but, sometimes, more than that. The play measures the character of Tughlaq in its width and depth. Tughlaq is a character with such higher ideas and understanding of life which make even his failures seem glorious. Tughlaq is presented as a universal character being free from the limits of time and space. He seems to be an emperor or a leader belonging to any time or all times. He is an idealist with a tragic flaw.

Though *Tughlaq* is considered to be a historical play with historical characters and events yet it is something more than that; as it does not present the historical facts and events in a sequence from the recorded history, but it presents some of the most significant events of the life of the king in a highly imaginative way, not only relating to his period but also relating to a later period in India’s history. Through Sultan Tughlaq, Karnad wants to make people aware of the contemporary reality. He tries to convey the message that, many times, in history just the faces change not the forces. While reading Karnad’s *Tughlaq*, a parallelism is marked between the reign of this Sultan belonging to fourteenth century India and the rule of a prime minister belonging to twentieth century
democratic India. Thus, a striking similarity is marked between the twenty years ruling period of Muhammad Tughlaq and that of Jawaharlal Nehru. Karnad himself says about this:

What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq’s history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi…. And one of the greatest failures also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the short comings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction. The twenty year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel.²⁶

A similarity of idealism culminating into disillusionment is evident in both the cases. How a highly capable and powerful man goes to pieces, getting frustrated within a span of twenty years, is the theme of the play. The madness of Tughlaq working behind all his absurd actions, as that of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, mining of copper coins, compulsion of prayer and later the abandoning of prayer, seems similar to the kind of madness reigning supreme even at the present time in all our national politics, administrative measures and governmental decisions. Comparatively looking at them, one recognizes the relevance between the predicament of Tughlaq and

the predicament of every ideal ruler in all ages. It proves that all human societies and the human nature itself have a mysterious power which inclines to produce adverse reactions to good attempts. The fact is that the man who possesses the ambition to rule over others wishes and tries to acquire power. This power is derived from social, political, economic and intellectual spheres. Thus, Tughlaq is a play presenting historical reality taking the strength from political power. Though the play Tughlaq is based on the story of the personal tragedy of a highly powerful man going to pieces, it is not just a historical drama; as Karnad adds some imaginative situations and incidents to the facts of history to dramatize it, for the sake of contemporaneous interest.

This play of Karnad is based on Sultan Tughlaq belonging to fourteenth century India, the time when the Muslim invaders entered India, fought against the Hindus, defeated them and set their own rule in most parts of Hindustan to spread Islam. For Tughlaq, like such Muslim invaders, the crucial problem was to rule India, a country with Hindu majority. The natives in the form of Hindu subjects bore a grave desire to avenge such Muslim rulers, and such rulers sorted out means and methods to persuade the Hindu subjects to allow them to rule. This is the reason why they started playing politics from the very starting to get them established in a foreign country. In such a crafty political atmosphere, just the worldly wise and cunning could succeed whereas the holy, visionary and the idealist failed ending up in tragedy.

The chief protagonist of the play Tughlaq is an idealist ruler who wished to build a new future for India and bring out utopia by establishing Hindu-Muslim unity and secularism. Different aspects of Muhammad’s personality are reflected, scene after
scene, with his crisis running along. The religious policy of Sultan is discussed in the beginning of the play between the young man and the old man. According to the old man, Tughlaq was leading the country downwards as he was not working in accordance to the tenets of the Islam. Giving equal importance to the Hindus, the old man thought, Sultan was insulting Islam. Contrary to this, according to the young man, Sultan was working properly and the country was in the safe hands. He was taking enough care of his subjects as a true representative of Islam. A rule was made by Sultan that the Muslims should pray five times a day and the Koran was allowed to be read in streets with the equal respect given to every religion.

The first scene of the play, in which the old man discusses the political situation of the country, highlights the discomfort of Tughlaq’s subject in his rule in which he has declared equal justice to everyone. Despite his higher ideals, people do not feel happy in his reign, as his ideals are far above the comprehension of his subjects; and he is always misunderstood by them. The Hindu subjects give their views regarding the different behavior of the officers like this:

Now, now, don’t look at me when you say that. We didn’t want an exemption! Look, when a Sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, ‘Pay up, you Hindu dog’, I’m happy. I know I am safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, ‘I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being’ – well, that makes me nervous.27

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This speech reflects that the Hindus are doubtful about Sultan’s motives; despite his declaration of equality in the country. Tughlaq was ruling in such an age which was full of religious fanaticism and hostility between Hindus and Muslims. On one hand, where Muslims considered his religious tolerance quite foolish, Hindus, on the other hand, found it cunning suspecting Sultan’s motives. Tughlaq has an earnest desire to do a lot for his country and countrymen. For its progress, he sets some ideals. As an ideal king, he wishes a new world to be created for his countrymen; for which he seeks their support and addresses his subjects:

My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the Kazi and seen for yourself how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life.²⁸

Tughlaq wishes to create a pleasant and healthy atmosphere of his kingdom. He wants to rule over the hearts of his subjects. He desires to establish his empire with his subjects winning their confidence. To do this, he communicates every minute detail of his actions to his subjects so that he might not be misunderstood by them. He wishes to be proved as a good king of Delhi who could be remembered in the future. To get this end achieved, he seeks the co-operation of his countrymen in the following words:

I am taking a new step in which I hope I shall have your support and cooperation. Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad.

The crowd reacts in bewilderment. MUHAMMAD smiles.

Your surprise is natural, but I beg you to realize that this is no mad whim of a tyrant. My ministers and I took this decision after careful thought and discussion. My empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindu and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom.29

Hence; Tughlaq was a king following the policy of Hindu-Muslim unity, brotherhood and religious tolerance. For the first time, any ruler had thought of bringing Hindus and Muslims together to have a peaceful reign over this vast country but the dirty politics shattered away all his holy ideals. Later on, getting frustrated from such opposition, his mild ideal actions were ruthlessly converted into harsh practices. He vehemently exercised his idea of brotherhood causing great annoyance and irritation to the Moulvis and Mullahs of the state. They were radically against the Hindus and called them infidels. They did not approve of Tughlaq’s concept of Hindu-Muslim unity and equality and wished the Sultan to kick Hindus. Filled with the same view an old Muslim

says: “Beware of the Hindu who embraces you. Before you know what, he’ll turn Islam into another caste and call the prophet an incarnation of his god....”\(^{30}\) The reaction of the guard of the court, where the decision was taken in favour of a Hindu against the king, by the Kazi towards the Brahmin, is remarkable: “Perhaps your highness will want an escort to see you safely home! Complaining against the Sultan! Bloody infidel! Get going, I’m already late.”\(^{31}\) Despite all the efforts of Sultan, there is seen lack of amity between Hindus and Muslims. They are opposed to each other. The Hindus smell something foul in Sultan’s treating them as human beings, and exempting them from the Jiziya tax: “Look, when a Sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, ‘Pay up, you Hindu dog’, I’m happy. I know I’m safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, ‘I know you are Hindu, but you are also a human being’ – well, that makes me nervous.”\(^{32}\)

During Muhammad’s reign, everybody was equal in the eyes of law, and there was no difference between Hindus and Muslims. This equality is observed through a Brahmin filing a case against Sultan. It was a kind of rare act, in which a common Brahmin is seen standing against the Sultan, therefore, a huge crowd gathered to hear Kazi’s pronouncement but this concept of equality is ridiculed by the Muslims in the play. As the Brahmin, Vishnu Prasad, who has filed a suit against the Sultan, that his land has been illegally seized by the state’s officer, and that he should get right compensation for the loss of his land, is actually a Muslim dhobi named Aziz. The Kazi considers Brahmin’s claim just and his majesty guilty of illegal appropriation of land. Therefore, the Kazi declares that in return to his loss, Vishnu Prasad should be given


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 2
five hundred silver dinars from the state treasury, and a post in the civil service under
the Emperor as compensation. Such a decision is passed by the Kazi to materialize
Sultan’s dream of Hindu-Muslim unity and equality. For the Muslims, this action is taken
to be foolish, while the Hindus smell a trap in this. Apparently, it was before everyone
that the justice was done to a Hindu, but in reality, it was a Muslim only who received it.
By favouring Hindus to win their support, Tughlaq tries to exercise the policy of divide
and rule. Tughlaq’s ability of statesmanship is displayed through his act like this.

Muhammad takes another step to establish Hindu-Muslim unity. He decides to
transfer his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. The argument, he puts in favour of this
decision, is that Delhi is quite near to the border so it has the threat of the invaders. The
real reason behind this shift was that a revolt was brewing in Delhi so the Sultan wanted
to weaken the strength and power of the nobles, and to serve his purpose, he takes this
decision. The most important reason behind this shift of capital was that Daulatabad
was a Hindu city; and as the capital, it would symbolize the bond of amity between
Hindus and Muslims, which Tughlaq wanted to strengthen in his kingdom. As an
idealist, Tughlaq wished to build an empire which would envy the world but all his
desires were collapsed as he faced a severe resistance and opposition by his religious
priests and the Amirs of his Empire.

People were being rebellious against Sultan and uprisings were taking place at
different parts of the state. Sheikh Imam-ud-din, a highly revered saint was also exciting
the people of Kanpur against the king. There was the atmosphere of great turmoil and
rebellion in Awadh also. Ain-ul-Mulk, being enraged with Sultan’s decision of
transferring him from Awadh to Deccan was marching with army to teach Sultan a lesson against his action. Not only Sultan’s friend Ain-ul-Mulk but his most trusted Shihab-ud-din was also ready to stab him in the back. Shihab-ud-din along with some Amirs hatched a plan to murder the king. On the execution of the plan there is seen a river of blood flowing through the palace. Sultan faced such a great opposition of the people to his action of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad that once even when it was shifted he had to withdraw his decision and go back to Delhi. It all resulted in a great bloodshed. The holy and sacred prayer is also being polluted in the play. Sultan is considered guilty of patricide and fratricide by Sheikh Imam-ud-din. During the prayer time Sultan got his father and kinsmen killed. Sultan does not spare even prayer to serve his political purpose. Similarly, Tughlaq’s enemies as Shihab-ud-din and others apparently seem to be holy and idealist but they also hatch a plot to murder Sultan at the prayer time.

A dhobi is ironically presented in the guise of the great grandson of His Imperial Holiness Abbasid Al-Mustansir who was the Khalifa of Bagdad. The same Aziz who had appeared earlier as a Brahmin now disguises himself as the Muslim saint Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid after murdering him. Sultan invited Ghiyas-ud-din to the palace to bless and purify Daulatabad. Mohammad is sure of a large crowd to be collected to welcome the saint. An announcement is made thus:

This is a holy day for us – a day of joy! And its glory will be crowned by the fact that the Public Prayer, which has been mute in our land these five years, will be started again from next Friday.
Henceforth every Muslim will pray five times a day as enjoined by the Holy Koran and declare himself a Faithful slave of the Lord.\textsuperscript{33}

The dhobi, disguised as Abbasid, is greatly welcome by the Sultan who touches his feet thinking him as his saviour. Here is presented the greatest irony of situation and fate mixed together that Tughlaq, being the mightiest, is seen falling at the feet of an ordinary dhobi. The audience gets amused and feels pity for the powerful Tughlaq. Sultan’s dreams are collapsed and his politics fails. Sultan is weaker than a common man. The royalty has to go to his shelter to save himself. Mohammad did not like the interference of the \textit{Sayyids, Ulemas} and Sheikhs in the politics and just for this reason, he put them behind the bars in the name of justice. On Imam-ud-din’s remark that Sultan’s verbal distinctions would rip him into two, he says that he is aware of it as:

I still remember the days when I read the Greeks – Sukrat who took poison so he could give the world the drink of gods. Aflatoon who condemned poets and wrote incomparably beautiful poetry himself and I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds…And my kingdom too is what I am – torn into pieces by vision whose validity I can’t deny.\textsuperscript{34}

Tughlaq quite craftily manipulates Sheikh Imam-ud-din by his flattery. Sultan requests Sheikh who resembles him to be his envoy to implore Ain-ul-Mulk who was working against Sultan. Sheikh accepts this proposal with delight and gets ready to be

\textsuperscript{33} Karnad, Girish. \textit{Tughlaq}. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1975. 69. Print
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 21
his emissary for peace. When both the armies face each other, Sheikh, who was sitting on his royal elephant, stands up to say something, and at that very moment, the sound of the trumpet is heard from the side of the Sheikh’s army. Now starts the battle in which the Sheikh is killed who exactly looks like Sultan. Thus, a tireless and fearless fighter of Islam is overthrown by the crafty and manipulative politician.

The murder of the Sheikh enrages the courtiers against the Sultan. Both, the Hindus and the Muslims come together to fight against the tyranny and the craftiness of the King. Shihab-ud-din, the most trusted of the king, is persuaded by Ratan Singh, his adopted brother to attend the meeting of Amirs and the religious saints, intriguing against Sultan for the imprisonment of Sheikh Haidri and the murder of Sheikh Imam-ud-din. In the meeting the craftiness of Sultan is depicted as how he invited Sheikh Imam-ud-din to Delhi and stopped people to attend the meeting at the point of bayonets; and the people who wished to listen to the Sheikh were brutally behaved by the soldiers. With the presentation of all such facts, Shihab-ud-din is persuaded to kill Sultan at the time of prayer, when Sultan and his bodyguards are unarmed. Shihab, the most loyal of the king, is shaken at such a thought which is marked in his words, he utters: “Does your Islam work only at prayer? You have persuaded me to do what I had sworn never to do – you- Your Holiness. I’m sure the Lord will not mind on interrupted prayer.”35 This shows as how the Sultan misused prayer to get his father and brother killed to possess the throne and at a time, the same prayer is planned to be misused against him.

Ultimately, Shihab is convinced and they all contrive a plan to murder the king at the prayer time. Ratan Singh, who was jealous of his brother and wished his downfall, writes to the king informing him all about the conspiracy. Here an interesting thing to mark is that it is not only Sultan but some other characters also who take revenge by playing politics in a crafty way. As Sultan is forewarned, he takes care of his security, and at the prayer time, about twenty Hindu soldiers armed with spears enter and surround the Amirs to stop them to make any move. Sultan’s prayer goes without interruption. After prayer, Sultan talks to Shihab who behaves defiantly and ultimately stabs him to death in a great wrath. Being hurt by Shihab’s treachery, Sultan tells Barani with great anguish: “Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors.”  

and orders Najib in this way: “Najib, see that every man involved in this is caught and beheaded. Stuff their bodies with straw and hang them up in the palace yard. Let them hang there for a week. No, send them round my kingdom. Let everyone of my subject see them. Let everyone see what . . . (Chokes.)”

The play presents the combination of religion and politics of an idealist. It shows as how the idealism of a ruler fails and ruins the idealist himself. The high ideals of unity, equality and secularism existed in India quite ahead of the times of Tughlaq. Religious heads and saints in India still interfere in politics, a game of seesaw and influence the people. The Muslim saints propagate for the political parties. A majority of people shows its faith on them in comparison to a politician. People are influenced by their fiery speeches, swing this side or that side and, thus, vote for or against the rulers.

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37 Ibid.
Both, the politician and the saints corrupt the lives of the people, and the suffering of the people continues as it was at the time of Tughlaq. The vital truth that Karnad presents through this play is that religious saints can not help in washing away filth from society. At the time when Aziz is exposed to the Sultan being disguised as saint, he pleads with him for his life uttering such words: “When it comes to washing away filth, no saint is a match for a dhobi.”38

In place of bringing prosperity and welfare of the people, the idealist politicians create just chaos in the country. Karnad is of the view that having an ambition for power and ruling idealistically for people on the foundation of religion can not go together. The politician, basically a craft intriguer, is bound to shun religion ultimately as he can not pretend for long to live on it. No matter how hard a ruler tries to convince his subjects, that he is standing for the Koran and its tenets, but he can not avoid the revolt upsurging in the state as well as within himself. He is not able to hide his two faces and make people understand his double talk. He has definitely to pay the penalty for this as, for instance it can be referred to the fate of Pakistan’s Bhutto and Iran’s Khoumani. The question may be raised here whether Pakistan’s president Zia was free from his malice? Definitely not. The conflict between monarchy and theology is present even today and those who can not abandon theologism in their rule are bound to fail. People in power can not use religion to serve their purpose. Religion and politics should be considered to be contrary to each other. On one hand, it is based on morals and expects morality from the people. On the other hand, politics thrives on deceit, intrigue, insidiousness and craftiness. The same is the case with Tughlaq. On his abolishing the Jiziya from the

38 Karnad, Girish. Tughlaq. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1975. 82. Print
infidels, through the compulsion of prayer and transferring of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, people get confused. This makes the religious leaders to rise against the Sultan, and in turn, they are imprisoned by the craftiness and cunningness of the king. He wipes them off entirely from his path.

Tughlaq introduces copper coins in his kingdom and when Shihab-ud-din shows his doubt about its propriety, Sultan defends his act like this: “It’s a question of confidence. A question of trust! ....in China they have paper currency paper, mind you – and yet it works because people accept it. They have faith in the Emperor’s seal on the pieces of paper.”\(^ {39}\) One Amir remarks about the futility of Sultan’s actions and his madness working behind all of his exotic policies. Getting inspired by the introduction of the token currency in the thirteenth century in Iran and China, Sultan Muhammad also issued it in his kingdom on account of the shortage of silver all over the world. The shortage of silver was intensified in Tughlaq’s reign due to the establishment of new mints of copper coins, enormous expenditure on Deccan experiment and military expeditions. Ultimately, Tughlaq’s policy failed entirely. People started minting fake coins which they exchanged with silver dinars. Thus, it led to the failure of national economy. Observing such a collapse, Sultan utters: “Only one industry flourishes in my kingdom, only one and that’s of making counterfeit copper coins. Every Hindu home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me to close my eyes.”\(^ {40}\) In the end Sultan’s rose garden is heaped up with the fake copper coins. The rose garden of Sultan with the dumped coins symbolizes sultan’s dumped desires and dreams.

\(^ {40}\) Ibid.,55
Like any idealist ruler, Sultan supposed his state to be free from corruption whereas in reality, it was its exact opposite. The state officials were corrupt who used to take bribe and flatten themselves on poor's earnings. Aziz, as a civil officer, asks the crying woman with her child for bribe in order to help her. Having no money with her the poor woman could not bribe the officer and her child died. Tughlaq was an ambitious ruler. To get his dreams realized, he begs the support of his people as he says: “I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don’t understand me, ask me to explain myself and I’ll do it.... I beg you, I'll kneel before you if you wish but don’t let go my hand.”

Despite such a humble request of the mighty king, nobody considers over it and his friends and subjects turn down his call with their hostile attitude. Getting no positive response from his subjects, Tughlaq turns quite cruel and ruthless from a humble King and orders Najib:

I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft. I can see that now. They’ll only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.

Further he orders that the prayer should be abolished and if anyone is caught praying would be severely punished. With such reactions of Sultan, he was supposed to

42 Ibid.,44
be on an execution spree which turns his kingdom into an arena of death. Thus, all such instances suggest the fact that the politics of evil spreads like parasite destroying all of them who give it a chance to thrive.

Girish Karnad’s play *Hayavadana* is considered to be a unique play in the theatrical history of modern India. *Hayavadana* means horse-face. Karnad intimates here in the note to *Hayavadana* with its source: “The central episode in the play – the story of Devadatta and Kapila – is based on a tale from the Vetalapanchavimshika, but I have drawn heavily on Thomas Mann’s reworking of the tale in *The Transposed Heads*.”\(^{43}\) The theme of the play is depicted through such phrases as “search for completeness”\(^{44}\) and the “mad dance of incompleteness”\(^{45}\). As the play comprises a plot and a subplot, both of them reveal the same thought. In the words of Kirtinath Kurtkoti: “Karnad’s play poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationships.”\(^{46}\)

In the beginning of the play through *Sutradhara’s* narration, we come to know about the close friendship of the two friends named Kapila and Devadatta. They are considered to be one mind and one heart. Devadatta is a master of great intellect and Kapila possesses a muscular body. Their relation takes a new turn when Devadatta gets married to Padmini. Kapila starts getting attracted to Padmini and Padmini also reciprocates. Later in the play, a fight takes place between the two friends in which they kill themselves; and Padmini getting confused in such a situation, transposes their

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\(^{44}\) Ibid., 11
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 57
\(^{46}\) Ibid., v-vi
heads by mistake. Thus, she fixes Devadatta’s head on Kapila’s body and vise-versa, which results in the confusing identities of the two friends. Padmini also finds it difficult to make a search for a complete man.

The subplot of the play, based on the story of horseman, emphasizes the main theme of incompleteness, by dealing with it on a different plane. Hayavadana symbolizes the theme through his physical appearance of horse’s head on human body. The search of horseman for completeness ends in a comic way with his conversion into a complete horse. Thus, the identity crisis is the vital part on which both, the main plot and the subplot, concentrate. It serves as a link tying both the plots into the same string, leaving the play a single unit. An attempt is made to analyze this play of Karnad entirely based on the theme of identity crisis.

The play gives various instances of incomplete personalities craving for completeness in the form of Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini, Padmini’s child and Hayavadana. After the transposition of their heads, Devadatta and Kapila were converted into fragmented creatures. Padmini is confused between them. Devadatta’s son gets abnormal losing the child’s natural qualities of laughing and wondering at things. The play mainly presents the problem of human identity existing in a world of tangled relationships, through the triangle of relation between Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. The subplot of the play, dealing with the story of Hayavadana, presents an instance of deep identity crisis.

Hayavadana’s mother was the princess of Karnataka. She was very beautiful and her father allowed her to choose her husband. A number of princes came in order to
marry her but she did not like any of them. Then came a handsome Arabian prince on his great white stallion, seeing whom the princess fainted. At this, her father thought that she had liked the prince so he decided to marry her off to him. But she said that she did not like the prince but the horse and wanted to marry the horse only: “So ultimately she was married off to the white stallion. She lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she wakes up and no horse! In its place stood a beautiful celestial Being, a *gandharva.*”

This horse was not a normal horse but a *gandharva* who was cursed by the God Kuvera to be born as a horse because of his some act of misbehaviour. Getting married to the princess, he could acquire his previous self being in human love for fifteen years. Then the *gandharva* asked her to accompany him to his heavenly abode but she refused and put a condition before him that if he once again is turned into a horse, then only she would go with him. At this *gandharva* got enraged and cursed her to turn a horse herself. So, Hayavadana’s mother became a horse and ran away happily to the forest. His father left to his heavenly home. In this way, Hayavadana was left alone by his parents on his lot.

Hayavadana, having an equine head and human body, is not like God Ganesha. Despite being the son of a *gandharva*, Hayavadana is lacking divine powers to change one’s body and shape. Though Hayavadana has the features of both a man and a horse yet he is completely neither of them. Thus, Hayavadana has no identity, for his being an incomplete self who finds it difficult to accept his fate. From within, he wishes

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to be turned a complete human being belonging to society. With the wish of being a complete human being, he searches for completeness. Having the head of a horse with the body and voice of a man, his prayer unfortunately was not listened completely by the Goddess Kali of Mount Chitrakoot who converted him into a complete horse. This conversion symbolizes the supremacy of head over body.

In the beginning of the play, when Hayavadana comes on the stage, Bhagavata thinks that he is wearing a mask of horse-face, with which he is scaring people. Therefore, he scolds him asking to take off the mask. Later, Bhagavata comes to know that it is actually a man with horse-face. He asks him its reason like this: “What brought you to this? Was it a curse of some rishi? Or was it some holy place of pilgrimage, a punyasthana, which you desecrated? Or could it be that you insulted a pativrata, dedicated to the service of her husband? Or did you . . .” On such questions Hayavadana gets angry and replies in this way: “What do you mean, Sir? Do you think just because you know the puranas you can go about showering your Sanskrit on everyone in sight?” In this way, through Hayavadana Karnad makes a sarcastic comment on the so-called scholarly people having the knowledge of puranas and other sacred texts, who think that their vast knowledge gives them a liberty to make a decisive comment on anything.

As Hayavadana, having the head of a horse and the body of human being, wants to get rid of his identity confusion, he asks Bhagavata: “All my life I’ve been trying to get rid of this head. I thought – you with all your goodness and punya if at least managed to

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49 Ibid.
pull it off…” It also works as a satire on the power of religious deeds to bring a solution to a problem. The main issue of discussion in the play is not about the conversion of Hayavadana into a complete horse or man. It is more of the questions about the reason of his being born like this. Who should be held responsible for his present predicament? On Hayavadana’s saying that it was just he, the child of their marriage who was left behind, there is found a kind of intense repulsion about his parents. Thus, with the instance of Hayavadana, Karnad brings to light the contemporary issue of the separated parents’ responsibility towards their children with whom they seem to be quite indifferent, putting them in a deplorable condition. Hayavadana’s father, being a celestial being left for heaven, and his mother, being a human being and later being converted into a mare by her husband’s curse, left happily to the forest to join the equine family. Now there is left just Hayavadana who is to struggle to get rid of his equine face and possess a complete personality. As he neither belongs to the human world nor the animal world properly, he enquires Bhagavata: “But where is my society? Where? You must help me to become a complete man, Bhagavata Sir, But how? What can I do?” This predicament of Hayavadana raises a question to parents’ escapism from their responsibility towards their children. If they do not find a conciliation between themselves, they get separated without paying attention to the future of their children.

Bhagavata is speechless and finds himself unable to convince Hayavadana satisfactorily by his answer. These questions are quite difficult to answer just because

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51 Ibid., 9
Hayavadana is neither a complete man nor a complete horse. If he had been a complete man, he would have had all this as his destiny or fate. And if he had been a complete horse, he would not have been in such a crisis, as then he must have been lacking the power of reasoning and a sense of recognition for himself. Bhagavata suggests Hayavadana to go to Banaras, a religious place, to pray to God over there to get rid of his problem. Then Hayavadana replies like this:

Babaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar, Gaya, Kedarnath – not only those but the Dargah of Khwaja Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of Our Virgin Mary – I’ve tried them all. Magicians, mendicants, maharishis, Fakirs, sainsts and sadhus – sadhus with short hair, sadhus with beard – sadhus in saffron, sadhus in the altogether – hanging, singing, rotating gyrating – on the spikes, in the air, under water, under the ground . . . I’ve covered them all. And what did I get out of all this?\(^{52}\)

Despite being involved in religious acts, no good result is achieved. Through Hayavadana, Karnad criticizes the blind belief of the people in Gods. He suggests that man himself should try to find a way out to get rid of any problem in place of being solely dependent on God to seek a solution.

Hayavadana tried his level best to get rid of his equine head. He visited every place and approached every person, whom he thought, could help him. Despite having a blameless life, he has to go everywhere covering his face. Hayavadana does not find

his problem getting solved. This time he goes to the temple of Goddess Kali at Bhagavata’s suggestion where he threatens to chop off his head. The Goddess appears before him and gives him an ambiguous boon creating another problem with the solution of one. Listening to Hayavadana’s prayer to make him complete, the Goddess turns him into a complete horse without changing his human voice into a horse’s neigh. Now he is seen in another problem and that is to get this voice removed. This problem of his can be removed by amusing Padmini’s child through his laughter. By doing this, he could get rid of his human voice and get the proper neigh of a horse. In this way, he could become a complete horse and, thus, a complete being. Along with having a change in his own voice, Hayavadana could also bring a change in the child. Earlier being considered as an abnormal child who had forgotten how to laugh, Padmini’s son was restored to normalcy by Hayavadana’s laughter. Through Hayavada’s efforts it is indicated that the totality of being can be attained through the wholeness of personality and the integration of the self.

As contrary to human beings, animals do not find any pleasure in looking at the mirror. Similarly, they do not have any interest in the recognition of their identity like the human beings. This is the reason why Hayavadana remains disturbed by the desire for recognition until he is completely converted into animal form. Even a little trace of human beings in the form of language remains a cause of trouble for him as the human beings have the desire for the wholeness of personality. Once their conversion takes place into a complete horse, it removes all their problems of identity and the desire for recognition existing in human beings. It clearly shows that animals do not suffer from the problem of identity recognition but there are just the ill-starred human beings who
undergo this kind of crisis. It is displayed through the protagonists of the main plot of the play – Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini who are seen searching for the completeness of their personality to have identity recognition.

With the very first appearance of the main protagonists of the play – Devadatta and Kapila, Karnad depicts the problem of caste distinction in a subtle way just through their behaviour to each other. It is so deep-rooted in Indian society that the lower caste people do not feel bad being maltreated by the upper class people. It is displayed through the dialogues of Kapila and Devadatta, when Devadatta, an upper caste man, talks in a scolding and insulting way to his friend Kapila, a low caste man; which makes no difference to the latter. He does not feel insulted or enraged but listens to all this happily.

DEVADATTA. [exploding]. Why don’t you go home? You are becoming a bore.

KAPILA. Don’t get annoyed.

DEVADATTA. You call yourself my friend. But you haven’t understood me at all.

KAPILA. And have you understood me? No, you haven’t. Or you wouldn’t get angry like this. Don’t you know I would do anything for you? Jump into a well – or walk into fire. Even my parents aren’t as
close to me as you are. I would leave them this minute if you asked me to.\textsuperscript{53}

Kapila’s humble response at the rude behaviour of Devadatta suggests that he is extremely devoted to his upper caste friend for whom he is ready to do anything and whom he considers more important than even his parents. Further, Devadatta again talks to him in the same way:

DEVADATTA [irritated]. Don’t start on that now. You have said this fifty times already.

KAPILA. . . And I’ll say this again. If it wasn’t for you I would have been no better than the ox in our yard. You showed me that there were such things as poetry and literature. You taught me . . .

DEVADATTA. Why don’t you go home? All I wanted was to be by myself for a day. Alone. And you had to come and start your chatter. What do you know of poetry and literature? Go back to your smithy – that’s where you belong.\textsuperscript{54}

This time Devadatta’s remark offends him and he confirms from Devadatta whether he really wants him to go; and finding the reply in affirmative, he obediently follows Devadatta’s order and starts leaving. At the same time, Devadatta says to him:

DEVADATTA. Sit Down.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 12-13
[This is of course exactly what Kapila wants. He sits down on the floor.]

And don’t speak . . .

[Devadatta gets down on the floor to sit beside Kapila, Kapila at once leaps up and gestures to Devadatta to sit on the chair. Devadatta shakes his head but Kapila insists, pulls him up by his arm. Devadatta gets up.]

You are a pest.

[Sits on the chair. Kapila sits down on the ground happily. A long pause]^{55}

Again on Devadatta’s order, he behaves accordingly and gets very happy sitting on the floor as Devadatta is a master and Kapila is a slave. Even when the former tries to sit with the later on the floor, he does not let him do that and asks him to sit on the chair, which shows the deep-rootedness of the class distinction in the very Indian mentality.

Devadatta has a very lean and thin body as against Kapila who is a man of muscular body. As a man of intellect, the former is interested in poetry and literature, while the latter is least interested into all this. Devadatta, a great poet and pandit, has an earnest desire for outshining the eminent poet and dramatist, Kalidasa and his famous creation, Shakuntalam. During the span of two years Devadatta had fallen in

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love with more than fifteen girls but this time falling in love with Padmini, he swears to sacrifice his arms to goddess Kali and head to Rudra, in case he gets married to Padmini. In this way, he has a fatal desire to possess Padmini by marriage. Devadatta is unable to fulfill his desire by himself due to his weak character. Kapila, his close friend, comes forward to fulfill his desire. So he approaches Padmini with Devadatta’s proposal. Even after getting married to Padmini, Devadatta finds it difficult to maintain his acquired status and position and decides to execute his vow though getting frustrated from the non-recognition of his desire by Padmini. At this time, he forgets everyone – his wife, his friend and even his earnest desire for surpassing Kalidasa. Just getting the right opportunity while passing through the forest, Devadatta gets to the Kali temple and commits suicide, uttering these words:

Bhavani, Bhairavi, Kali, Durga, Mahamaya, Mother of all Nature – I had forgotten my promise to you. Forgive me, Mother. You fulfilled the deepest craving of my life-you gave me Padmini-and I forgot my word. Forgive me, for I’m here now to carry out my promise.56

Padmini, getting married to Devadatta, settles in his house. During the same time, the friendship between the two friends, Devadatta and Kapila, goes on flourishing like before, but the married life of Devadatta and Padmini does not go well; because Padmini does not feel satisfied with Devadatta, as he is not only a tender and delicate person but also remains always occupied in his books. Though she tries to adjust with

him and accept her lot, yet the lingering presence of muscular and lively Kapila in their family pushes her to an entirely different course of life.

Padmini and Kapila were a good match as they understood each other contrary to Devadatta, who understood neither of them nor himself. He was always occupied in his scholarly discussion with both of them, which Kapila and Padmini were least interested in. Gradually, there developed a rift in the relationship of Devadatta and Padmini. Kapila is a strong match for Padmini and Devadatta, a weak one. If there had not been any obligation of caste, Padmini could have married a man of her perfect match. Later on, Devadatta also gets aware of Padmini’s inclination towards Kapila and vise-versa. Karnad, through such a complex situation, tries to expose and criticize caste distinction creating so many troubles. While taking rest in the forest, Devadatta and Padmini expressed their feelings in aside. Looking at Kapila’s tough and muscular body, who climbed the fortunate lady’s tree to pick a flower for her, Padmini said:

Padmini – (aside) He is like a celestial being reborn as a hunter ……How his body sways, his limbs curve – it’s a dance almost.

Devadatta (aside) And why should I blame her? It’s his strong body – his manly muscles. And to think I had never ever noticed them all these years. . . . I was an innocent --- an absolute baby.

Padmini (aside). No woman could resist him.
Devadatta (aside). No woman could resist him…

Devadatta recognized his friend’s many muscles quite late until he saw them from Padmini’s eyes. By then, it was too late to do anything so he was left with no option but to commit suicide at the Kali temple. Searching for Devadatta in the forest, Kapila reaches the Kali temple where Devadatta is found dead. Seeing this, Kapila gets shocked and full of grief, so he utters such words: “I can’t breathe without you Devadatta my brother, my father, my friend…” In this way, being unable to bear this tragedy, Kapila also commits suicide. A strong bond of friendship was established between Kapila and Devadatta prior to the introduction of Padmini. A kind of complementary relationship is observed between both the friends, as one having a strong head, another a strong body, and the combination of both of them makes a complete man. Padmini, a weak compliment of Devadatta, and a strong compliment of Kapila, arrives late in the scene. Padmini gets shocked finding both Kapila and Devadatta dead. Staring at their bodies, she shouts in a terrifying way: “Oh, Devadatta, what did I do that you left me alone in this state? Was that how much you loved me? And you, Kapila, who looked at me with dog’s eyes- you too.”

Finding herself in a critical condition, Padmini also decides to commit suicide by taking up the sword to chop off her head. At this, the voice of the Goddess is heard who asks Padmini to put the sword down. Padmini does so and pleads with the Goddess to bring both Kapila and Devadatta back to life. So the Goddess Kali tells Padmini to put

58 Ibid.,30
59 Ibid., 31
their heads on the dead bodies and press their necks with the sword to attach them properly to make them alive. She does accordingly and both the friends are brought back to life. But a fatal mistake of exchanging the heads is committed here by Padmini bringing more trouble for her. At this point, the plot takes an interesting turn causing a great identity crisis. The transposition of their heads, done by Padmini in her confused state of mind, gives rise to various questions related to the identity of each individual, but as Kapila and Devadatta both had desired to be unified, they thank Padmini for this transposition. Kapila takes this exchange of heads as a gift and says, “Now we are blood relations! Body relations!”60. After the celebration of blood relations and body relations, the man with Devadatta’s body asks Padmini to go with him as he is her husband. He claims that she is Devadatta’s wife and he is having Devadatta’s body so she should stay with him only. While the man with Devadatta’s head puts his argument before them that the shastras suggest head to be a sign of one’s identity. At this, the man with Kapila’s head replies like this: “Don’t tell me about your Sacred Texts. You can always twist them to suit your needs.”61 Thus, through the reply of his character, Karnad satirizes the misuse of knowledge of the sacred texts by the people who possess it. The man with Devadatta’s head does not agree to these arguments and says that in the marriage before the holy fire, one accepts one’s partner as a person not as a body. So he says that Padmini did not marry Devaddats’ body but Devadatta – the person. He adds to his argument that head is the supreme of all the human limbs and as he is having Devadatta’s head, he is Devadatta. Now the man with Kapila’s head makes a comment on Padmini like this: “I know what you want, Padmini, Devadatta’s clever head

61 Ibid., 37
and Kapila’s strong body …”\textsuperscript{62} On this remark, the man with Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s strong body gives a quite normal reaction finding nothing wrong in it as it is quite natural for a woman to get attracted to the fine figure of a man.

Out of all such arguments made by both of them, the problem of identifying Padmini’s real husband remains unsolved. At this point, Bhagavata asks the audience to help in finding out a way to solve this problem: “We have to face the problem. But it’s a deep one and the answer must be sought with the greatest caution. Haste would be disastrous. Please have some tea, ponder over this situation and come back with your own solution.”\textsuperscript{63}

Ultimately, finding no solution to the problem all the three go to a great \textit{rishi} who gives them the solution of the problem like this: “As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore, the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini.”\textsuperscript{64}

Before leaving the place with Devadatta, Padmini tries to console Kapila that it is her duty to go with him but she is going with his body. Kapila leaves to the forest and does not come back to the Dharmapura ever. Padmini and Devadatta go back to Dharmapura and get involved in rejoicing their married life but it is not the end of the crisis. Devadatta tells Padmini that a funny event had taken place that he had accepted the challenge of a wrestler from Ghandhara when the latter was asking people to fight with him. Devadatta says: “I’d always thought one had to use one’s brains while

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 39
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 40
wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body just doesn’t wait for thoughts—it acts!65

Devadatta falls a victim of identity crisis. He could not enjoy the muscular strength for a long time. Gradually, his muscular body turned soft. With the progress of things, there erupts the problem of identity crisis in the play. At this, Padmini consoles Devadatta: “I’m not going to be stupid again. Kapila’s gone out of my life – forever. I won’t let him come back again --- Devadatta changes. Kapila changes. And me.”66

Later in the play, Devadatta is found with a slender body. Kapila is also found in his previous form with a tough and muscular body. Looking at Devadatta’s body undergoing a change, Padmini gets curious and goes to the forest to know whether Kapila too is undergoing the same change. On Kapila’s asking as why she has come to him. She replies in a confident way that she wanted to see him. On such a reply of Padmini, Kapila gets angry but later he gets normal and asks her as why she had come from Devadatta. In her reply, she questions Kapila as what does he want her to say? At this point Bhagavata intervenes and reveals the whole mind of Padmini in this way:

How could I make you understand? If Devadatta had changed overnight and had gone back to his original form, I would have forgotten you completely. But that’s not how it happened. He changed day by day. Inch by inch. Hair by hair. Like the trickling sand. Like the water filling the pot. And as I saw him change—I couldn’t get rid of you. That’s what Padmini must tell Kapila. She

66 Ibid., 49
should say more, without concealing anything: ‘Kapila, if that rishi had given me to you, would I have gone back to Devadatta some day exactly like this?’ But she doesn’t say anything. She remains quiet.  

For a while, the view of Bhagavata that Padmini desires Kapila physically may be kept aside. Padmini desires Kapila because her desire is desired by him. Despite her being married to Devadatta, Kapila could not help himself staying away from her as he finds his desire also being desired by her. Thus, they perfectly complement each other and there is found a complete sense of harmony, wholeness and happiness. It is justified from the forest scene where Kapila is seen fulfilling the desire of Padmini more beyond her expectation as he fetches a bunch of the fortunate lady’s flower for which Padmini had just expressed her interest. This is the reason why Padmini comes to the forest to see Kapila without caring for her marital status. It results in the death of all the three. On one hand, where Kapila and Devadatta kill themselves in a duel on the other hand, Padmini immolates herself.

Having a logical view of the whole scene, it is suggested that the desire leads to death ending all desires. It is not Devadatta but Kapila whom Padmini really wants as she finds him being quite vital both in his body and mind but as he belonged to a lower caste, she could not marry him. Her only option is to marry Devadatta being superior in caste to Padmini. Now the question is as why she chooses Devadatta’s head and kapila’s body after the transposition of heads. Giving the answer of this question one

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makes a guess that it is not Devadatta’s mind what she chooses but his face which is exposed to the society for identity recognition. It is not a vague guess but Padmini herself says this to the man with Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body: “Everyone will take you for Devadatta by your face.”

The caste system allows her to stay with Devadatta only if she wishes to live in society. This is the reason why she has to go to the forest only to stay with Kapila. The identity crisis of the people in society is appropriately presented through the sociological interpretation of the tangle of relationships in the play. The identity crisis reaches its peak point when Kapila replies in the affirmative on Devadatta’s asking whether he loves Padmini; and Devadatta too speaks the same as:

KAPILA. I know.

(Silence)

Devadatta, couldn’t we all live together like the Pandavas and Draupadi.

DEVADATTA. What do you think?

(Silence, Padmini looks at them but doesn’t say anything)

KAPILA. (laughs) No, It can’t be done.
DEVADATTA. That’s why I brought this. (Shows the sword) What won’t end has to be cut."69

In such a complicated situation, Kapila and Devadatta find death to be the only solution to this problem. At this point, they talk about their own experience of undergoing identity crisis: “With what confidence we chopped off our heads in that temple! Now whose head – whose body – suicide and murder – nothing clear.” 70 Then killing each other in fight, they put an end to the problem, at least, for their own selves. Here, in the play, a vital question is posed that of a psychological and social problem of a woman who lives with more than one husband along with the problem of uncertain future of the children. In this way, this cultural importance of society causes the crisis of identity-incompleteness.

After the death of both Kapila and Devadatta in fighting, Padmini is left to face the crisis. She says: “If I’d said, ‘Yes, I’ll live with you both’, perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I couldn’t say it... I know it in my blood you couldn’t have lived together.”71 Thus, Padmini being torn between Kapila and Devadatta is also found divided in her own views. The next one to be exposed to the crisis is Padmini’s child. Padmini tells Bhagawata that she wants her child till the age of five years to be given to the hunters living in the forest telling them that it is Kapila’s son. Later the child should be taken to the Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapura telling him that it is Devadatta’s son. The predicament of the child is evident as it turns to be an orphan, initially being

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70 Ibid., 61
71 Ibid., 62
accepted by the forest people, later being rejected by them taken to be a child of the city. He is an incomplete and dumb child lacking the child’s natural activities of laughing and wondering at things. There is seen a kind of alienation in Padmini’s child as he refuses to talk to anyone but is completely attached to his dolls resisting anyone even to touch them.

This shows how the child of Devadatta and Padmini falls a prey at the hands of the unhappy relationship of his parents. The death of their parents affects him adversely turning him into a morose just as Hayavadana suffers being abandoned by his parents who did not take care of their child and left him alone to suffer. It is marked here that the child is completely absorbed in a world of make-believe which he does not wish to come out of. Suddenly, the sight of a laughing horse breaks this barrier and the child’s innate sense of delight and wonder is struck restoring the child to normalcy after which he drops his dolls. In this way, the child is taken to be a complete member of the family and the society.

Thus, Hayavadana can be taken as a play of desires especially the desire for recognition. The mind is found asserting its power over the body resulting in the radical change of the physical features. Every character is seen regaining its identity like Kapila and Devadatta who once again appear in the Kali temple in the second act of the play. They are seen being not at all different from the pair sacrificing their heads in the first act of the play. The play, thus, suggests that the identity is ultimately met. Hayavadana, longing to change into a complete human being, contrary to his wish, attains animal completeness and becomes a full fledged horse like his mother. This conversion of
Hayavadana presents another instance of head’s supremacy over body. His mother becomes a horse being cursed by her husband. Therefore, both of them, Hayavadana and his mother, are put to lead an animal life in which there is no problem of recognition. Lord Ganesha, though imperfect and incomplete, is paradoxically the master of perfection and the destroyer of incompleteness remaining at the divine level. While at the human level, Kapila, Devadatta and Padmini are found being trapped in the triangle of desire for recognition. Padmini’s desire, being fulfilled through the transposition of heads, leads to the tragic end of all the three. Goddess Kali, though being a divine power, bears the grief of desire for recognition because she has a human characteristic in the form of human language. In all the characters of the play, the crisis of human identity or the desire for recognition is helpful in understanding the complex motives of them moving along the stream of desires till they reach on the verge of death.

In conclusion, it can be said that Karnad in this play with the theme of incompleteness, raises and criticizes several issues and facts in the contemporary context. The unhappy relationship of parents causing unfavorable consequences to their innocent children is dominantly raised in the play through the predicament of Hayavadana and Padmini’s child. Karnad is quite critical of this modern trend in which the parents think just for themselves having no concern for their children. He also criticizes people’s dependence on religious units as gods, temples, pilgrimage, etc. for the solution of their problems; and in the play through Hayavadana, he projects the futility of such dependence. He is also critical of the caste distinction and its unfortunate results which he projects through the marriage of Padmini and Devadatta. Padmini was
a good match for Kapila and not for Devadatta but due to Kapila’s belonging to a lower caste, they did not have any chance to get married together. It could not suppress Padmini’s feelings for Kapila ultimately resulting in fatal consequences. He also makes a satirical comment on people being considered highly intellectual with the knowledge of sacred texts which they manipulate for their own benefits. Thus, through an ancient story, Karnad has explored several issues of contemporary relevance.

Karnad’s another play Tale-Danda delineates the evil effects of social, cultural and psychological deformity. The play presents different aspects of crisis along with the exposure of the age-long problems of caste, class and religion with a didactic purpose. The play tries to draw the attention of the people to the shortcomings of society along with offering solutions to them as:

Tale-Danda deals with the socio-political problems which are the base of the society and its structure. The Chaturverna system, caste-class discrimination, oppression and exploitation of Dalit people without giving them opportunity and freedom to flourish, the cartel of the high caste people and their vicious attitudes towards poor, low castes are discussed in the play.  

Through his play Tale-Danda, Karnad exposes the ugly face of the Hindu society with the depiction of a communal struggle, which took place during the twelfth century in the city of Kalyan in north Karnataka during the reign of the king Bijjala, the sudra by caste. His court comprised great scholars and poets. Basavanna, King’s treasury

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officer, was also a great poet-philosopher. The man named Basavanna came to the city of Kalyan and became the treasurer of king Bijjala ten years ago. He promoted the revolutionary movement called ‘sharana’ against several Brahmanical superstitions, dogmas and rituals and tried to establish a casteless society based on egalitarianism. Thus, Basavanna is considered to be the great ‘sharana’ saint who tries to fight social inequality and caste system, ‘sharanas’, as the moralist and the true devotees of lord Shiva, believed in the motto of ‘work is worship’. They are contemptuous to profit. All these hard working people, being indifferent to caste, do everything together. The main purpose of the ‘sharanas’ was to bring equality rejecting the caste discrimination. Ultimately, this noble movement collapsed in disaster with the marriage of a Brahmin girl and a cobbler boy leading to a great confrontation between the ‘sharanas’ and the orthodox Brahmins. Despite, deriving the plot of the play from a period of long history, its theme does have a contemporary relevance. As one can observe in the ‘Preface’ to the Collected Plays, volume two, that Karnad wrote Tale-Danda in 1989:

… ‘when the “Mandir” and “Mandal” movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered’.  

Though Karnad’s basic inspiration behind writing this play has been the ‘Mandir’ and the ‘Mandal’ movement, the theme of the play is neither of them. The mandir movement refers to the Hindu-Muslim confrontation; while the mandal movement alludes to the implementation of the report of mandal commission by Indian government, relating to other backward castes, causing a great turmoil among the upper-caste Hindus. *Tale-Danda* is a Kannad word which means death by beheading as ‘tale’ refers to ‘head’ and ‘danda’ to ‘punishment’. This title of the play suggests the inhuman punishment given to the ‘sharanas’ who tried to break the boundaries of the caste distinction.

The poignant issue of caste consciousness is marked in the depiction of the whole process of Bijjala’s achieving the status of a *Kshatriya*. King Bijjala also belonged to the lower caste as he was a barber. His forefathers tried a lot and made every possible attempt to get rid of their depraved position. They wished to have the caste of *Kshatriyas* branded on their forehead; for which purpose, they bribed several generations of Brahmins with millions of cows and married into the royal families. Despite all such efforts and passing of so many generations, Bijjala is still considered to be a barber by caste and this internal anguish of his is presented in this utterance:

… you ask the most innocent child in my Empire: what is Bijjala, son of Kalchuriya Permadi, by caste? And the instant reply will be: a barber! One’s caste is like the skin on one’s body. You can peel it
off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again a barber – shepherd – a scavenger! 74

Thus, the real tragedy of caste consciousness is displayed through King Bijjala’s inability to receive the level of belonging to the Kshatria caste. The constant realization of his lower caste keeps him disturbed and agonized all the time. When a king, who is all mighty and powerful, undergoes such a terrible crisis of caste agony, one can realize the deplorable metal conflict of the ordinary lower caste people. Bijjala admires the ‘sharanas’ uttering such words:

In all my sixty two years, the only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly birth lurking deep in their eyes are the sharanas : Basavanna and his men. They treat me as – as what? – (Almost with a sense of wonder.) as a human being. Basavanna wants to eradicate the caste structure, wipe it off the face of the earth. Annihilate the varna system. What a vision. And what prodigious courage! 75

Bijjala also praises the ‘sharanas’ for their great contribution to make his kingdom flourish with their hard work. As he says:

Every sharana seeks only to earn the days’ keep, makes no extra demands, treats profits with contempt. So who benefits? From every corner of the country, trade and commerce have come

75 Ibid.
pouring into Kalyan, and now the city is bursting at its seams with money and activity. Even those who despise the *sharanas* for their beliefs need them for their economic enterprise…

Bijjala has great affection for Bsavanna and ‘sharanas’, while his son does not like him and his community. Sovideva suspects Basavanna to misuse the money from the royal treasury in the promotion of his new faith, therefore, Sovideva opens the treasury to check the accounts. He does so to prove that Basavanna, the chief treasury officer, was meddling with state funds and diverting it for the propagation of his new religion, ‘sharana’. When Basavanna returns, he shows to Sovideva that all the treasury accounts are in order. On King Bijjala’s arrival, Basavanna hands him over the treasury keys and resigns the post of the treasury officer, despite Bijjala’s reluctance to accept it. Bijjala scolds his son for his this action which offends Sovideva a lot and he decides to avenge this on Bijjala and Basavanna.

Caste and religion have been used as the main theme of the play, *Tale-Danda*. The play presents intolerable frustration and tensions emerging for the untouchables of the Indian society. They are trapped in the unending crisis passing from generation to generation. The very opening scene of the play presents this caste distinction existing in the Indian society. On his return from the treasury, Jagadeva is accompanied by his lower caste friend Mallibomma. Getting to his friend’s home, Malli stands outside the gate and does not enter the threshold for his being a man of lower caste. On Jagadeva’s insisting him on coming inside the home, Mallibomma replies in his way:

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“Don’t be silly. I should not have even stepped into this Brahmin street, and you want me to come into your house.”

This suggests the deep-rootedness of the caste barrier and social stratification. The visit of a friend to his friend’s house is impossible because of the difference of caste between them. This depicts the anguish and frustration existing in the mind and heart of a man of lower caste. The attitude of the upper caste people is displayed through Bhagirathi, a friend of Jagadeva’s mother, who looks down upon Mallibomma standing at the door, this way: “This is a Brahmin house hold. Do you mind standing a little aside so the women of the house can move about freely?”

Jagadeva, an upper caste Brahmin, abandons all the evil forces of caste distinction for his being a ‘sharana’ and does not hesitate to take the lower caste as equal to him. This is the reason why he wishes his lower caste cobbler friend, Mallibomma, to come to his house. Despite all such things, he reverts to caste system at the funeral ceremony of his father, performing all the actions according to the Brahmanical tradition. This instance suggests that no matter how much one wishes to get rid of this social evil of Varnaashrama dharma, one can not come out of its tyrannical clutches: “Exploitation and oppression have become a ‘natural’ norm in our society as it has absorbed and observed individualism and competition. Consequently every body takes inequality for granted.”

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78 Ibid., 9
The most crucial event of the play in the form of inter-caste marriage is presented in the fifth scene of the second act. The parents of the would be inter-caste couple are ‘sharanas’. Kalavati’s father Madhuvarsa and Sheela Vanta’s father Haralayya are respectively Brahmin and cobbler by birth. They decide to marry their daughter and son. Madhuvarsa, a devoted ‘sharana’, is unable to assume the fatal consequences of the marriage, and wishes to drink the venom and hold it blocked in his throat like God Shiva. He is quite determined for this marriage and goes to the extent of saying that: “I shall not hesitate to sacrifice my daughter’s life to forward the cause of our great movement.” In this way, Karnad seems to communicate the message that, at least, someone is required to come forward to take the initiative or the revolutionary step going contrary to the established norms of society, bringing some positive changes. Just like Madhuvarsa, Haralayya is also quite enthusiastic for this marriage which used to be considered an impossible event of that time, as he himself says that “I wasn’t even allowed to dream of upper-caste girls. Now this one falls right into my son’s lap!”

Haralayya raises some questions regarding the caste distinction and its consequent crisis in the society, as why a low caste man does not have the liberty to change his vocation. Why the caste is passed on from generation to generation on physical parentage, why the age long caste system can not be changed on the demand of the changing time. After all, why one is being punished for the crime one has not done and who is responsible for it all. Every sensible person of the society is required to

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81 Ibid., 50
consider over all such appropriate questions. Haralayya’s question requires to be answered when he asks: “My wife and I became sharana, gave up meat and alcohol and our ancient gods; Now our children ask us: ‘Why then are we still stitching the same old scraps of leather?’ What can I answer? If my son decides to change his vocation will the weavers accept him? Will the potters open their ranks.” It displays the psyche of the people filled with the deep-rooted feelings of caste distinction, affecting adversely the society at large.

Karnad does not seem to be in favour of the established structure of caste or creed. The drawbacks of any rule whether it is of science or Varnasharma require to be removed and, thus, it should be restructured into a better setup with a better strength. When the Brahmin, named Madhuvarsa, wished to marry his daughter Kalavati to Sheelavanta, the son of a cobbler, Haralaya, Basavanna, who was a great philosopher and poet, had already assumed the disastrous outcome of this inter-caste marriage. He was aware of the fact that the orthodox Brahmin would take this act as a blow on their Sanatana dharma. He is tensed to think of the moment when this news will spread and cause a great hatred to erupt. According to him, this marriage would prove to be quite fatal for the couple, as they will fall a prey to the venomous wrath of the bigoted; and in such a condition, who will be there to protect them. Considering over all such predicted results, Basavanna does not favour this inter-caste marriage. Ultimately, he has to change his decision, when the ‘sharanas’ argue, that this marriage is going to be a step in the direction of the eradication of caste distinction, the same cause, for which

Basavanna has been preaching them for years. Now, when the time has come to follow his precepts practically, Basavanna seems to withdraw his idea. In such a situation, finding no way to convince the ‘sharanas’ to withdraw the plan of this marriage, Basavanna is bound to give his consent, but puts a condition before them that, just after their marriage, the couple must leave to a distant place from the point of view of their security. Thus, the playwright uses Basavanna as his mouthpiece to present his views.

Though king Bijjala was in favour of the ‘sharanas’ yet on the point of inter-caste marriage, he falls into a dilemma and hesitates to support them predicting the fatal results of this marriage, due to the wrath of the higher class Brahmins, who would not approve of this act and might turn the wedding *pandal* into a slaughter house. This is the reason why he comes to Basavanna and asks him to stop this marriage. Finding Basavanna quite firm on his decision of favouring this inter-caste marriage, Bijjala also diverts from his mission and, contrary to it, he assures ‘sharanas’ to keep them safe from any kind of danger from the side of the orthodox Brahmins. Here the question may be raised as what the strong reason was behind Bijjala’s changed attitude. One can simply observe the only reason behind this change in the king’s attitude which is nothing but Bijjala’s sympathy for the low caste people; as he himself had suffered a lot belonging to a lower caste, and he wished this reformative event to take place which could bring a radical change in the society, suffering at the hands of caste deformity. Therefore, he did not care for his life and decided to sacrifice it for a noble cause, bringing the positive change in caste system of *Varnashrama dharma*.
Through this act of Bijjala, the playwright tries to communicate the message among the people of lower caste to take an initiative which could be helpful in eradicating such social evils. In the society there is also a section comprising the orthodox Brahmins, quite opposite to them ‘sharanas’ in the form of Damodar Bhatta, the Queen’s priest and Manchanna Kramita, King’s adviser who radically oppose any such change to take place in the established system. This is the reason why they get highly disturbed and infuriated over this marriage taking place against the *Vedic* tradition of *Varnashrama*, which does not approve of such a mingling of castes. It is well displayed in Basavanna’s remark when he says: “The orthodox will see this mingling of castes as a blow at the very roots of *varnashrama dharma*. Bigotry has not faced such a challenge in two thousand years. I need hardly describe what venom will gush out what hatred will erupt once the news spreads”\(^{83}\)

Damodar gets more anxious on the fact that the king Bijjala was also favouring this marriage and assuring ‘sharanas’ of the protection from any kind of mishap during the wedding. Damodar’s anger towards Bijjala is observed when he says:

This marriage arranged by the *sharanas* was not trifling matter. On the one hand stands the Vedic Dharma, which has branched out in strength over the centuries and now shades the whole Aryavarta. On the other, there is the *sharana* movement – a pestilence – but of a virulence not seen since the days of the Buddha. These two face each other in implacable. Hostility …. And : Your majesty had not

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intervened, the *sharanas* would have not their fate on the day of that infamous wedding. But yours majesty staunched the wrath of the people and invited disaster on his own head. Why? Why? 84

Getting infuriated from this act of Bijjla, Damodar and Kramita get revengeful. Therefore, they first abduct the king. Along with depriving the king of all his powers, the orthodox Brahmins Damodar Bhatta and Manchanna Kramita proclaim Sovideva as king and plan to persecute the ‘sharanas’. All the ‘sharanas’, involved in the inter-caste marriage, are ordered to be arrested. First of all, Haralayya and Madhuvarsa are arrested and killed. The other ‘sharanas’, terrorized by the event, flee away from their city Kalyan. Getting infuriated by such brutal event, a few ‘sharanas’ collect and get revengeful to Sovideva and plan to teach him a lesson under Jagadeva’s leadership. Searching for Sovideva, they get to the palace but do not find him there. Then they come to know about Bijjala who was in queen’s chamber. Now Jagadeva, reaching to the king stabs him and kills himself as well.

The last part of the play presents some messengers meeting Sovideva in his hideout who make him aware of the terrible end of Bijjala culminating into the disastrous happenings in the city as that of killing, looting, raping and burning etc. Sovideva gets shocked to know all about the city of Kalyan, thus, having crowned the king in such a terrible atmosphere, he turns out to be a tyrant with his fascist declaration to control the situation. Ultimately, they insist him on persecuting the ‘sharanas’, giving an instance like this: “Sir, King Mihirakula of Kashmir took case of the Buddhist menace by

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decimating sixteen hundred viharas. Our Pandya neighbor impaled eight thousand jain scoundless along the highway. So why are we being so circumspect? "  

Now, Sovideva orders his soldiers about ‘sharanas’ like this: “Pursue them. Don’t let them escape. Men, women, children – cut them all down. Set the hounds after them. Search each wood, each bush. Burn the houses that give them shelter.” Hence; the involved ‘sharanas’ are put to horrible death. The play Tale-Danda, thus, presents the evils of caste system and marriage laws which deform the Indian society. Karnad does not offer any particular solution to the problems projected through the play, but he definitely makes the readers think about the futility of Hindu-laws regarding the hypergamous marriage. Basavanna’s ‘sharana’ movement asserts the need of re-examining the Hindu laws of caste system.

Tale-Danda gives voice to dalit’s predicaments and sufferings. In ancient times, the upper caste Hindus used to look down upon even the thought of a hypergamous marriage but in the present scenario, some flexibility is marked in the rigid structure of the Hindu caste system. For instance, one can refer to Ambedkar’s wife who was a Brahmin by caste and, at present, one finds a number of such marriages taking place without causing any violence or turmoil. Gradually, with the passage of time, one can observe such caste barriers and the rigidness of the people being reduced. People have gone quite flexible in their thinking yet the people of some remote villages maintain their strong faith in the Varna system, especially those who belong to the three upper Varnas taking inter-caste marriage to be quite unacceptable.

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86 Ibid., 101
As Karnad asserts the theme of caste and religion in the play, *Tale-Danda*, he wishes some required changes to be brought in it for the betterment of the society and the country. With the passage of time, the meaning and purpose of religion have been drastically changed, thus, it needs to be redefined. Change, being the law of nature and the requirement of time, is inevitable in religion, too. As change is marked in science, a phenomenon based on proofs, in the form of new laws superseding the old ones, for instance, Einstein supersedes Newton’s gravitational laws, the required alteration in religion is also justified. Many a times, people misuse it, as in the name of God, a number of evils are done and in the name of religion, the deadliest wars have been fought, giving them the name of crusade. The play, *Tale-Danda*, favours an equal treatment to every human being.

Karnad relates *Tale-Danda* to the present day, having the strong religious fundamentalism, causing the destruction of Babri *Masjid* and risking the lives of innumerous people. Basavanna’s views are, thus, quite relevant to ‘mandir-masjid’ violence, when he says: “Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and mortar is a monument to stupidity.” Therefore, a great resemblance is marked between the past and the present events.

On the whole, it is observed that the play, *Yayati*, taken from an ancient myth, presents various issues of social concern in the form of patriarchy, identity-crisis, one’s responsibility to one’s actions and the true picture of the contemporary discontented
man through the character of Yayati. The play, *Hayavadana*, taken from ancient folklore, depicts contemporary issues of a woman longing for two men – her husband and her lover, possessing the complementary qualities in the form of intellect and physical strength respectively. In this play, like *Yayati*, the problems of identity-crisis and responsibility of parents towards their children have also been dominantly presented relating to present day context. *Tughlaq*, taken from the Indian history of the fourteenth century, presents the resembling picture of the political situation of the country just after independence. *Tale-Danda*, getting back to the eleventh century, projects the deep-rooted problem of caste-consciousness in India existing even at the present time.

The study shows that the plays of Karnad are not just the carbon copies of the ancient myths, folklores or history which he chooses to derive the themes from but he does also bring some deviation from them. As in the original story of *Yayati* from the *Mahabharata*, there is no character like Chitralekha and Swarnalata, Similarly, in Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads*, based on *Kathasaritsagara*, there is no character like Hayavadana. In his play *Tughlaq* also, Karnad inserted the imaginative characters as Aziz, Aazam and step mother. Likewise, in *Tale-Danda*, too, various such characters are found which exist nowhere in the history. He does so to serve his purpose of making his plays effective with the communication of a certain message in regard to the contemporary context.

Thus, the chapter focuses on the point that Karnad’s plays are outstanding as they cover excellently India's traditional cultural heritage, religious beliefs and customs of society through mythical, historical, legendary, and folk themes. Karnad's rewriting
and remaking of myths, folktales and history, with the addition of his unique imagination, displays the strong archetypal angle. His very plays *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana* and *Tale-Danda* hold a mirror to the very evolution of post independent Indian theatre. His plays provide one with a confidence to claim that there is a true Indian theatre presenting a true picture of Indian traditions, highly responsive to the contemporary concerns of Indian society. Since his plays are replete with certain images, symbols and metaphors from ancient Indian myths, histories, folktales and legends, they are considered as the archetypal arch in the field of contemporary Indian English Drama.