APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW WITH GIRISH KARNAD JULY 26, 1996

BY VINAYA KUMARI

1. V.K. (Gave brief introduction to the chapter and explained to him the difficulty in obtaining secondary sources for his plays).

   Sir, could you give me suggestions regarding notes on your plays.

   G.K. Have you seen the introduction that I have written to my latest publication *Girish Karnad - The Three Plays*? There is a special introduction in which, taking about *Nagamandala*, I have made reference to the oral tales of women as narrated by women.

2. V.K. Yes, I read that and it reminded me of the writing of some of the feminists like Helen Cixous and other. And I wondered if you are aware of contemporary feminist theories when you wrote these plays.

   G.K. Yes, I was aware of a few. I was interested in following what I felt, because these are oral tales told by Indian women.

3. V.K. Many people think of feminism as something that is and should be confined to the West. But I am reading your plays from a feminist perspective with very interesting results.
G.K. If you read the introduction to the folk tales by A.K. Ramanujam published by Penguin, the point that he makes in many of these stories is that most of these oral tales are narrated by women, to young children. They were usually told in the kitchen where there were other women but usually no male adults were present when the stories are narrated. May be there are boys of age group 3-10 or some older girls. Many of the stories that are narrated by women what in Kannada are called Grand Mother's Tales, may reflect women's point of view. He had analysed with lot of examples what these stories exemplify. For instance, he has pointed out that in all these stories, the woman is more dominant. She is more capable. The man is less capable. The woman is cleverer. In many of these tales which are centred around women, it begins with marriage. She loses her husband and the whole story is about how she finds her husband again. If you look at it, it is the story of Shakuntala. It is the story of Ramayana (Sita) from sita's point of view.

4. V.K. You will agree with me that in India we have two cultures - the dominant culture that is uncompromisingly patriarchal and the other the folk culture which has matriarchal leaning. I thing it is this culture that speaks through the language of women. Again I was reminded of Helene Cixous' idea that women are left out of what Lacan calls the symbolic order with its patriotic language and that they should discover their own
language. I felt that the congregation of flames in *Nagamandala* is doing precisely this finding a language of women and attempting consciousness-raising. Would you agree with me on this?

**G.K.** When I write a play I don't analyse it too much. I like the power of the story and I transmit the power of the story.

5. **V.K.** But don't you agree that these flames can be perceived as representing women and their conversation?

**G.K.** Of course the conversation is feminine. Men would like to talk differently. They would not talk about the home.

6. **V.K.** It is a language derived from the body. The body is important in women's language, isn't it?

**G.K.** When I read a story I try not to analyse it. I just look at the story and try to find out why it strikes me. Especially in writing about *Nagamandala* Dr. Ramanujam has said about story telling itself among women. He mentions that in the Indian tradition there are three kinds of 'Dhana' (wealth) which you don't keep to yourself. One is food, one is the story and one is the daughter. You don't keep the daughter with you. You just marry her off. Food should be either eaten or given away and not wasted. If you know a story you tell it, you don't keep it. All three are sort of related. Hence the story is about women.
7. V.K. These stories always project women's point of view. And they are usually presented orally by grandmothers. In *Nagamandala* you have presented a story wearing a sari escaping from an old women's mouth and walking out of an old man's house. Surely it is not far-fetched to link this to the idea of women's liberation? Does it not symbolize women coming out of the shackles of patriarchal authority represented by the man?

G.K. Yes, you can read it that way. All these can be based on feminist concept but I have not consciously tried to work out any resemblance to these concepts because the whole process of writing play will get destroy.

8. V.K. I must say that one gets the very strong impression that you had feminist ideas in mind when writing your plays.

G.K. Yes of course! I have read Simone de Beauvoir's *Subject To Semiotics* which expresses feminist point of view and many other feminist works. I have read them to know what they stand for. To be aware. But, I don't try to interpret a play through fashionable theories. Fashionable theories come and go. They become unfashionable twenty years later. Already Freud is out of fashion.

9. V.K. Feminist ideas are also undergoing revision and modification. Just now feminism is beginning to merge as a force on the socio-cultural scene of India.
G.K. Maybe! But I am content and concerned with 'Feminism' to the extent that it is expressed in the story. As I said about the oral tales.

10. V.K. You wouldn't want to comment on your work in relation to feminist ideology at all?
G.K. I don't want to relate it to western terms.

11. V.K. As a student of Women's Studies, my reading of literature is very much influenced by feminist theories of the West. I find them a valid tool for the assessment if Indian literature and culture.

G.K. You may have the right to do that because you are a woman one. Secondly you are a critic. You have adopted that approach. I don't have the right because I am a man and when I try to take a western situation and apply it to Indian woman's personality, it spoils the whole application. Therefore I react to the story. People say that in Kannada literature women have never been treated the way I have treated them. It is for the first time that there is no condemnation of women's desire or extra-marital affairs.

12. V.K. The heroine of both your play Nagamandala and Hyavadana have extramarital relationships and neither guilt nor shame is even remotely suggested. And this in an Indian milieu. Or are you implying that India needs a revision of our sexual codes that have for ages expressed and even denied female sexuality? There is a bold assertion of liberated female desire in Hayavadana, "Why should love stick..."
G.K. Not only the women in these two plays but there is the third type of women in my new play call *The Fire And The Rain*. This women as an affair with her father-in-law and gets him killed openly. All the women critics are just aghast at this treatment of woman. There is no contemporary work in which such a revolutionary idea is depicted. It is a strange idea to have an affair with the father-in-law and then get him murdered.

13. V.K. Your play certainly revolve round your heroines. And they are extraordinary heroines too. What about your male characters? Are you putting across a criticism of society through them?

G.K. Yes. Appanna of *Nagamandala* has no name because Appanna means any man. Here I see Appanna as a typical Indian husband. He has a mistress but he cannot tolerate Rani’s infidelity. To him the wife is just property. He locks her up iltreats her and orders her to look after the house. Actually the two main character in this play are women —— Rani and Kurudavva.

14. V.K. What about Kurudavva and Kail? To me they represent benevolent mother figures. Your Kali has human qualities. Is she to be seen as trying to say if women are given decision making power, long denied to them, they will choose what is best for them?
G.K. Yes. Padmini is a human being. Therefore it is natural that she desires to get the best of both the worlds. It is not because she is a woman, but because she is human.

15. V.K. In *Nagamandala*, Naga becomes padmini’s lover at night. Is the snake a projection of female sexuality? Is the hidden side of padmini’s personality her repressed sexuality?

G.K. Yes. You can perceive the snake in that way. I have no dispute about it. I am actually following the folk tradition. What happens is that in these oral tales Ramanujam shows that snake come as friends of women. Men always kill snakes and women befriend them. It may be connected to the Freudian psychology. In these tales, women are in trouble very often and they are locked up in a cage. They usually open a stone door on the floor of the cage and these will be two or three snakes them. They appeal to the snake for the help. Besides this, most of the women in these oral tales or divided into two categories. The first one is the married woman who loses her husband and the whole story deals with how she finds her husband. The second category is the unmarried woman. She gets married somewhere the middle of the story. The story deals with the amorous adventures of the heroine. Before the marriage, she has incestual relationship with her father or brother. After marriage it with her father-in-law or a priest. All these, expose the hypocrisies of patriarchy Indian society.
16. **V.K.** Do you think that empowering women is the answer to this kind of hypocrisies.

**G.K.** Society may be hypocritic. But hypocrisy is there. I don’t think the problem lies with the society. The whole thing is how human beings adjust to it. Veena Das another critics of mine says about *Nagamandala* that it is not experience of the girl in the joint family alone but it is experience of every girl. That is what men are. They come as lovers at night and as masters during the day. There is no connection.

17. **V.K.** I find the symbolism of the naga fascinating. In Indian folk art the snake is associated with female sexuality. Stores of "Sarpa Sundries" or snake beauties reinforce this. In the Tantric system the serpent is the site of spiritual energy. This spiritual energy supposed to be lying concentrated in the human spine in the from of a serpent rises to the head as the person gains Nirvana or spiritual perfection. I was wondering if this is implicit it in the Naga resting coiled in Rani's hair after her being declared a goddess.

**G.K.** I don’t give it a Tantric sense. Hair in India, is associated with marriage, marital bliss. A widow is shaved. Draupadi is dragged by Dushasana by her hair. Cutting the hair is considered in auspicious. I thought the irony of the hair is that ultimately Naga went and hid in the hair.
18. **V.K.** But I do think that your use of the Naga lends itself to the Tantric interpretation.

**G.K.** You can read it the way you want to.

19. **V.K.** In *Hayavadana*, Padmini commits sati. Is this intended to be significant? Would this not be seen as reactionary? In fact a cancellation of all your progressive ideas of women's empowerment?

**G.K.** Here, the irony is that she commits Sati, for two husbands! (laughs loudly) Usually Sati is committed for a single husband.

20. **V.K.** If it is ironic, could it also be seen as subversive? Does Padmini's sati then become a means for her to emerge as a newly blossomed tree, symbol of a newly liberated woman perhaps?

**G.K.** Yes. You can take it in that sense. Once a write a play I leave it a reader to interpret it the way he/she wants.

21. **V.K.** Even in *Hayavadana* you have given prominence to the idea of female desire. One would think that your main concern is recognition of the importance of female sexuality. Do you intend to convey the message that women's desire shall no longer be ignored or patriarchally controlled?

**G.K.** Implications are always there. As Yardcork says, about *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'Bottom gets into' donkey's head. Why should it be bottom? Why not top? He says it is not as
innocent as people think. Then Yardcork makes this reference that in Elizabeth Time, donkeys and horses were known for their huge phalluses!

22. V.K. *Hayavadana*, which means a man with a horse’s head, finally attains wholeness by becoming a horse, not a man. It amounts to the triumph of animal nature doesn’t it?

G.K. Yes animal nature triumphs. You can read it the way you like.

23. V.K. What inspire you to develop the much neglected field?

G.K. I only wrote plays.

24. V.K. What do you think of the future of the theatre in India?

G.K. Well, literally I don’t know. Sometimes it get depressed. Sometimes it is very active. At the moment the theatre scene is very bad. Except in Bombay there is no theatre. Theatre has a unique appeal, namely the human appeal. You see people performing on the stage. So I feel the theatre will come back. Even if it doesn’t now, it will come back. That is why that Hope makes me write otherwise in play writing there is no money. I make my money by acting in films. In Bombay there is a lot of theatre at present. But then I write not because there is a theatre or because my play has to be staged, but because I have to write. I have made my money through films. There is no need to write for a living. But I have to write. I enjoy writing. It is a passion.
25. **V.K.** You are a well known writer not only in the Kannada stage or the Indian stage but also in the World Theatre, for one of your plays was staged last year in Russia. I am right?

**G.K.** Yes. In Russia, they are staging *Hayavadana* this year in December.

26. **V.K.** Can you tell me some thing about the staging of your plays?

**G.K.** Vijaya Mehta is a Marathi artist. She has staged *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*. They have received very good reviews.

27. **V.K.** Do you have the video cassettes of these plays or at least the reviews?

**G.K.** I will find out. Now some one is staging my plays. A woman called Amaralatha. She is doing *Nagamandala*. Next month she is going to stage the play.

28. **V.K.** Where is it going to be staged?

**G.K.** At the moment it is planned for Delhi. I will let you know.

29. **V.K.** Are you training young dramatists?

**G.K.** No. I am not training. What has happened is that there is repertoire run by the Karnataka Club in Mysore. They have done my other plays - *Talendanda* and *Thuglaq*. Have you read my unpublished play "The Fire and The Main"?
30. **V.K.** No.

**G.K.** I will send you a copy of it. *Talendanda* is available in Orient Publication. In the introduction to these plays, I have written why I write plays. Talking about *Talendanda*, 'Tale' means head and 'danda' means punishment. The play is about the eleventh century Kannada saint poet Basawanna. He tries to clear caste problems and also involves in the emancipation of women. In the eleventh century, there was a revolution in Karnataka. Ultimately that movement was silenced and destroyed.

31. **V.K.** Do you belong to an overtly patriarchal family?

**G.K.** No. In fact in our family, we have total liberty and equality. My sisters and I had equal freedom.

32. **V.K.** Can you tell me more about yourself? You were born at Matheron.........

**G.K.** Yes, I was born at Matheron. Well, I can give you an interview. Do you read the American journal called *(New Theatre Quarterly?)* Check at the USIS. There is a detailed interview about me by Aparna Dhawarkar. There you will get my background. The family in which I grew up and so on.
33. V.K. What are your major influences?

G.K. People at home. In our family fortunately there was not much restriction. We were more or less free to do what we liked. A very broad minded progressive set up.

34. V.K. Do you have anything to say about the plays?

G.K. If I am writing a play, I feel the best thing is to leave it as it is. I would dissect 'Mid Summer Night's Dream' or some other plays written by others. You can dissect my plays because you are a critic. When I am writing, I would see that the magic of the tale would not get destroyed. If one explicates the symbolism, the play loses its charm.

35. V.K. Thank you Sir.
APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW WITH VIJAY TENDULKAR BY

VINAYA KUMARI APRIL 1995

VINAYA KUMARI
Sir, I am working on four of your plays i.e. *Silence! the Court is in session*, *The Sakharam Binder*, *Kamala and The Vultures* for my PH.D. thesis. I have read the English translations of these plays and am analysing these texts. These plays were successfully staged, but unfortunately, I could not see any of these plays being enacted on stage or on television. Are the Video cassettes of these plays available in the shops?. If so where are they available?.

VIJAY TENDULKAR
First of all, even if they are available, they will be in Marathi.

VINAYA KUMARI
I know Hindi and I can understand spoken Marathi to some extent.

VIJAY TENDULKAR
If you can follow, then two of my plays are available on audio cassettes i.e. *Safar* and *'Niyeticha Mahilalu'* They are being marketed by publishers as audio cassettes.

VINAYA KUMARI
What are the major influences which have moulded your social and political thoughts?
Vijay

First of all my major influences are my personal influences, my family, my parents, my present family, the persons I keep meeting, the situations I watch. There are times when it happens that, one is also concerned with situations that are slightly away from one self. May be through a newspaper in which you read a news item or catch phrases. I am only responding to a variety of situations around me.

Vinay

So you are responding spontaneously to a variety of situations. Does this involve the mediation of your imagination?

Vijay

There is no conscious intention behind my writing.

Vinay

What about Stage Craft? Are you conscious about it while writing?

Vijay

Obviously, unless one has an idea of Stage Craft, one won't be able to write play?

Vinay

Have you taken part in these plays?

Vijay

I was a part of an experimental troupe in Bombay and I was with them for many years.
You are known as the 'angry young man' or rather, you were known as the Angry young man' of the Indian stage during the publishing of 'The Vultures'.

You can see that I am no more a young man [Laughs!].

(Yes Of Course!) You have depicted sex and violence as an inherent part of human nature in all your plays!

Do you have any dispute on that. They are something basic to human nature. Not only me, but many have written about these things. Probably the interest of literature has been written around these things.

After reading your plays especially Sakharam Binder, I felt that you are trying to say that human relationships are all sham. People are just playing roles. Or rather you perceive human beings as belonging to two types, playing two different roles i.e. the oppressor and the victim. These, roles keep changing. There is a struggle for existence and there is the survival of the fittest. The Law of the jungle still reigns Supreme. This is what you seem to be trying to say society, the roles hardly change. The males are the oppressors and the females are usually the victims.
First of all, I won't differentiate the situation like this. That also into an artificial divide and rule situation. I just treat them as human beings. The moment you get a person to have an upper hand in any relationship he over plays it, becomes pragmatic and he even cheats.

Do you think it is right to describe the world of your plays as dark and evil ridden? Is this a realistic representation of life? Aren't there any good people in the world?

First of all I don't understand anything by merely calling it good or bad. It doesn't signify anything. At times good is bad and bad is good. What does it lead to ultimately? So I don't believe in those terms. For me, there is nothing good and nothing bad. Everything around me is human. I would like to understand it as a human element and therefore rather than being against it and for it, I would like to understand it first of all.

Most of these plays were published in the seventies. During that time, 'The Feminist Movement' was in full swing in the West and the impact was felt all over the world. What do you think of Woman’s Liberation?
First of all that movement didn't have any impact on me.
Neither did the movement have any impact on the Indian woman at that time. Lately in Maharastra particularly, it had some impact, in certain class of people.

Did it not affect your writing at all? Were you influenced by any of the liberal views regarding women and their rights?

Women did affect me. No movement, rather in the theatre, not in the society affects me in that sense. In the other sense, everything affects me. I look at human beings as human beings, as individuals and in terms of various relationships; because, what he is to you, cannot be what he is to me at the moment. He probably cannot be. This is my independent view and it will always be. While I am trying to understand a character or situation, I have this limitation in life. This probably is my view of that person or situation. And a person of that situation must be beyond that. That consciousness leads me to a kind of distancing.

What qualities would one attribute to your ideal woman?
You have portrayed a variety of women characters in your plays.
VIJAY First of all there is nothing like an ideal woman or an
TENDULKAR ideal man. They will always have some abort- comings.

VINAYA Why are you so much disgusted with the middle class
KUMARI morality?

VIJAY Because if is all sham. I feel fascinated by someone like
TENDULKAR Sakharam Binder or someone like Champa, mainly
because they don't have this Sham element at all. They
come out as what they are.

VINAYA What about Rama of Gidkade or The Vultures? She acts
KUMARI as a docile wife, but she has an affair with her
brother-in-law and she frankly declares that she has
sexual desire and that she possesses a 'hearty womb' and
so on.

VIJAY I don't understand in terms of good and bad, moral or
TENDULKAR immoral. She has every right. As long as she doesn't
become an nuisance to anyone else, she should be allowed
that right.

VINAYA What do you think of Leela Benare?
KUMARI

VIJAY Leela benare has treaded on someone's toes
TENDULKAR unintentionally. But that doesn't mean that there should
be a gang hunt on her.
VINAYA Was this mock-trial just an excuse for the man hunt?

KUMARI Or, Did you find a genuine situation for it?

VIJAY Of Course! There is a situation. For that matter, even after writing that play, many number of situations had come! People come to me, even unknown persons come to me and tell me that what you have written is true. After, I wrote Gidhade the Vultures, (I think it was staged in the seventies), even after it was staged in the Seventies, people refused to believe that these sort of things are happening.

VINAYA But I did not find anything terribly, scandalizing about it.

KUMARI What do you think?

VIJAY As far as contamination is concerned, yes! it is a very natural situation. It has happened in my family, it has happened in my family, it has happened in my neighbour's family and has happened in your family!

VINAYA What about Manik? I have heard of husband's acting as pimps to their wives. I don't think that the Indian society has degenerated so much as that, the brothers act as pimps to their sisters. Do you think so?

VIJAY It is happening! Even the sons behave with their mothers in the same fashion!
VINAYA: So, you mean to say that we haven’t moved far from the Law of the jungle! So, we are still cave men at heart!

KUMARI: Why are you going to the cave men? Probably they were better than us. Why compare ourselves with them. Consider their innocence! Most of the time, they really didn’t know what they were doing. We know what we are doing, but still we do worse thing?

VINAYA: What do you think about Lakshmi in Sakharam Binder?

KUMARI: She is considered as a good woman by the society because she is always praying and chanting mantras. Is she a hypocrite?

VIJAY: I have not painted her as a hypocrite at all. There is a change in her character and she develops from one point to another point. Now you have to examine whether that development is logical or illogical. Whether it is convincing or not. People in changing situation have a tendency to adopt to change.

VINAYA: Is Champa’s death justified? Did you intend her to be perceived as open-hearted, and a better woman than Laxmi?

VIJAY: First of all, why justify? If some one dies in my plays that doesn’t mean that I want the character to die. There is a logic to that particular situation.
VINAYA: Why couldn't it be the other way round. I mean, Laxmi should have died. It would have been more predictable. In fact Champa is more vivacious, more striking and lovable, in spite of her weakness. She is the one with the zest for life.

VIJAY: Quantitatively, I don't differentiate between Laxmi and Champa. Both are strong. The way they are fighting with their back to the walls.

VINAYA: That is all! Thank you very much.