CHAPTER 3

GIRISH KARNAD: Disillusioning Illusions

"We live by gilding lies with truth. I've made the story of our lives... into a lie. To cover all that up, I took shelter behind a truth that was nothing but fantasy."

(Rajadhyaksha in Atmakatha)
— Mahesh Elkunchwar

I write slowly, painfully. It’s not writing plays that’s painful. It’s writing itself that I find painful. Therefore I should have liked to have had more time for writing. But I have not been able to make a living from playwriting, and so I’ve had to take up other things that I enjoy less…. (Theatre India 85)

Girish Karnad, the eminent playwright, acknowledges to Aparna Dharwadker, in these words, his skill of writing. Karnad belongs to that generation of writers who were the first to come of age in post-independent India. At that time, the country was facing tensions between the cultural and colonial past, Western thoughts and its own traditions. This was the historical context that gave rise to Karnad’s plays and those of his contemporaries. His plays hold a mirror unto life and show a relevance of the past to the present, the subject matter resonating in modern experience and relating itself to present day situations. In an interview with Mid-Day, Karnad says: “Contemporary plays don’t necessarily require a contemporary subject.”

According to Karnad, good ideas do not visit a writer regularly, so one cannot just sit down and write a script instantly. Much more goes into the process, and at the end the play may turn out to be quite different from what was expected. There may be various interpretations or angles that the writer may not have even thought of before. In an interview with Indian Express Karnad says: “Writing a play is like having a child. You want them to be obedient, but that does not always happen. Instead there are many surprises.” By the time he was in his early teens Natak Companies, which he had grown up seeing, had stopped functioning and Yakshagana seemed silly to him. He saw theatre again only when he went to Bombay for his post-graduation. The very first play he saw was Stindberg’s Miss Julie directed by Ebrahim Alkazi. Though the play was not a success it impressed him because of the way the inner working of the human psyche was displayed in public and by the use of lights that faded in and out of the stage. This technique was absolutely new and innovative for him. It all seemed magical to him, and without his being aware of it, that evening
decided his fate - to be a Playwright. Since then, theatre has been his first love and still remains his passion. He believes that the function of the artist is to create the world for a story to happen, and then, if possible, to interpret it. All his plays display a rare obsession with history, myths, legends and folk-tales. The reason behind such an obsession is his exposure to two kinds of theatre – one the traditional *Yakshagana*, and the other the modern *Natak Company* plays. The two forms became so familiar to him that they took on a strange form by intermingling with each other. He is one of those writers who had encountered the traditions of myth, history, legends and folk-tales from early childhood, and taken them in so much that they shaped his adult life. He states in a matter of fact way: "I can’t concoct plots. And I’m not interested. To be trite, truth is stranger than fiction. History, myth and legend interest and excite me, and I like to share that excitement with others." Folk-tales attract him the most as any rigidities or dimensions do not bind them. They can be changed according to contemporary needs and times. According to A.K. Ramanujan: “A folktale is a poetic text that carries some of its cultural contexts within it; it is also a travelling metaphor that finds a new meaning with each new telling” (xi). Karnad was much influenced by Ramanujan and many of his plays are based on folk-tales heard from him. They are archetypal and it becomes easy for Karnad to experiment with them for his creative ideas. They also allow him to subvert the traditional or classical beliefs since folk-tales can make fun of any strata of society. Hence, everything is taken in good humour. Karnad agrees with Ramanujan’s view that:

Folklore pervades childhoods, families, and communities as the symbolic language... of people and culture. Even in a large, modern city like Madras, Bombay, or Calcutta, even in Western-style nuclear families with their well-planned 2.2 children, folk-lore... is only a suburb away, a cousin or a grand-mother away. (xiii)

The folk theatre is capable of questioning any kind of values. It is multi-dimensional as it consists of a variety of techniques and stagecraft. Karnad explains this:

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their heads. The various conventions – the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human
and non-human worlds — permit the simultaneous presentation
of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the
central problem. (*Three Plays* 14)

Such a vast range lends this theatre an epic dimension, and the same is true of
Karnad’s plays. The plays themselves speak of their ‘epicness’. Marxist dramatist
Bertolt Brecht propounded the theory of epic theatre, which provides larger
dimensions to various techniques in drama. Despite a play being small, it seems to
have a large panorama due to this theory. In epic theatre, there is utility of many
aspects. There are elements that are not found in real life or any other drama, but only
in the epic. Karnad’s plays also derive from the same theory, not in form but in
gesture where he talks about a large canvas of life. In an epic theatre the writer is
more concerned with the intellectual aspect rather than the emotional one. The
reaction of the readers or audience is such that it leaves them in possession of their
critical faculties so that they may learn something conducive to social realism. This
helps them to achieve another goal for a play (as in Karnad’s words) — to succeed in
‘persuading’ and not merely ‘stating’; Karnad’s plays ‘persuade’ the readers or
audience.

The themes of Karnad’s plays, being a larger part of an epic theatre, are given
wider dimensions, where there is easy accessibility of audience to the characters.
They carry various interpretations, so the more one reads his plays, the more layers of
meanings get unfolded. His themes carry a universal approach related to all types of
human behaviour and emotions, needs and desires, good and evil, just like the plays
of Shakespeare. All of them evoke some kind of feeling in the readers or audience,
and they start relating to the characters in those situations. This may work as
‘catharsis’, which Aristotle propounded as an important part of any tragedy. These
themes are relevant even in the present-day, modern times. Thus, Karnad successfully
proves to be an excellent interpreter of ‘modern man’s sensibility’ in many ways.
Other than the use of traditional themes, another aspect that proves him to be a
‘staunch Indian playwright’ is the fact that originally all the plays are written in
Kannada, his mother tongue. Kannada is the language of his childhood and of the
formative period when he was growing up. Since then, it has become a source of
creativity for him and he makes it clear that he can imagine a primary identity for
himself only in Kannada, and denies his ability to think and write in any other
language. Kamad was initially surprised when he discovered that he was writing in a language spoken by only a few million people in South India. He tells Dharwadker:

... a language is something you need to develop over a whole lifetime. After having written in Kannada for about 25-30 years, I feel I know how to write in Kannada now.... I don’t have time to go into a new adventure, looking at and mastering an entire new subject because to be able to speak is not enough. You have to go into the language, you have to go into its possibilities. (Theatre India 85-86)

His original Kannada plays use language as an important tool with various registers, dialects and linguistic differences in the plays. As Dharwadker explains: “They are used to create distinctions of class in Tughlaq, of self and gender in Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala and of caste in Tale-Dande” (Theatre India 86). But, apart from English, his plays have been translated into other languages also. Most of his plays are translated (into English) by him. This helps in easy availability to the non-Kannada readers. Karnad is the only contemporary playwright who has himself translated his plays in English. This practice of his is quite exemplary, not because of the number of plays translated, but because of the importance of translation to theatre activity. His translations have helped in the performance of his plays at the international levels. Karnad has also translated Badal Sircar’s Evam Indrajit. Hence, of his use of traditional subjects and Kannada language, there is no doubt, as he tells to The Sunday Observer: “I’m trying to create a tradition of my own.” It is a tradition, which would last for a very long time in the history of Indo-English Drama.

Karnad attributes the influences on his playwriting to some Western playwrights too. Not only did the heard myths and folk-tales influence him, but also the works of playwrights like Anouilh (particularly his Antigone and Eurydice which introduced him to the art of relating myths to contemporary relevance), Camus, Sartre, O’Neill and the Greeks. Though he refutes the idea of using myths for sex symbols like O’Neill, a relevant influence of this kind of utility can be found in his work. He refutes any direct influence of Ibsen, Shaw or Brecht on his writing, but there are certain similar reflections in his drama (maybe done unknowingly). Karnad’s role models from India are neither Kalidasa nor Tagore whom he considers too remote and perfect. He rejects the classical Sanskrit influence because he feels that in Sanskrit drama few of the basic values remain open to questioning. He explains:
But no modern playwright has claimed, or shown in his work, any allegiance to Sanskrit sensibility. Sanskrit drama assumed a specific social setting, a steady, well-ordered universe in which everyone from the gods to the meanest mortals as in his or her allotted slot. (Three Plays 11)

Instead, he seems to respond better to his contemporaries like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar or Mohan Rakesh, although they do not directly influence him. The Western theatre does not impress Karnad as much as the Indian does because he finds nothing sustaining in it. When he journeyed to the West with high expectations, he found that the Absurdists seemed to be repeating themselves and the drawing-room plays, which interpreted people within narrow psychological limits, were boring. He feels that Western society being too individualistic, its theatre also revolves around mere individuals. On the other hand, in India, people define themselves in relational terms to the other members of the family, caste, class and society. They are defined by the roles they have to play. To explain this, Karnad quotes Sudhir Kakkar’s words, “they see themselves in relational terms in their social context, and they naturally extend the same references to theatre as well” (Three Plays 9). But this limited Indian realism to analysis of social problems, restricting its further progress. In India (unlike the Western nations) despite the large urban population, there was never a bourgeois society with faith in individualism as the ultimate value. As discussed earlier, Karnad likes to be recognized foremost as a playwright. Something excites him only in the form of a drama, and that is what makes him a playwright in the complete sense. While writing, he imagines the whole situation, sees the stage and the attentive audience’s presence and hears them laugh. Being an actor from the beginning, he has been habituated to such imagination and this reflects his involvement with other media, of being a successful actor, director, screenwriter and movie administrator. He has maintained a superb distance and balance between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture. The ‘other’ media of film and television has helped him with playwriting by helping him to generate new ideas for plays, unlike his contemporaries who faced a writer’s block after writing a few plays or started repeating themselves. And this ‘help’ is seen in Karnad’s excellent stagecraft, techniques and stage directions (in parenthesis in the plays) which are useful for performance. About all these experiences and roles, Karnad sums up in The Hindu: “One thing more: one learns from experience, whatever the field.”
Having discussed Karnad's views on his plays and playwriting and certain other general aspects, an attempt is being made to discuss each of Karnad's plays, especially in reference to the recurring themes, devices and techniques. Karnad's playwriting begins with *Yayati* (1961), the very first play of his written at the age of twenty-one. This play is yet to be translated into English. Kirtinath Kurtkoti appreciates it as "a play with a new outlook." Puru, the central character of this play is the first anti-hero in Kannada drama. In his personal interpretation of Puru, Karnad discovers his own state of mind. He had secured a Rhodes scholarship to go abroad for further studies. In those days, going abroad was a rare occurrence. Besides this, Karnad came from a large joint family and was the first to ever go abroad. His parents were happy but also anxious, lest he decide to settle down there. They wanted him to return to India and marry a girl from his own community. He did not like their interference in his affairs and wanted to go abroad and struggle on his own. The glamour of Eliot and Ezra Pound's birthplace affected him, so he felt that he should settle down in that land and write in English. He thought that he was the master of his own destiny. At that time the feeling of opposition was such in his mind that he felt his family wanted their own gains out of his future. In such a situation, he wrote *Yayati*, with the familiar old myth that he had read before. This kind of feeling might have been aroused in him due to personal strain. He tells Kurtkoti about his anger and emotions: "I resented and this resentment must have coloured some of Puru’s statements" (*Contemporary Indian Theatre* 79). He was surprised to find himself writing a play, and that too in Kannada, for he wanted to be a poet. A greater surprise was the theme of the play, which was from ancient Indian mythology, and from which he believed himself alienated. While writing the play, he discovered it only as an escape from the situation of alienation. He was amazed at how precisely the myth reflected his anxieties, and the final discovery was, as he says: "the myth had nailed me to my past" (*Contemporary Indian Theatre* 3).

The story of King Yayati occurs in the epic *Mahabharata*. The original myth shows Puru as the son of Sharmishtha; Yayati has five sons and Puru is the youngest; after the elder four refuse to take on their father's old age, the youngest agrees to it. Karnad changes the myth to make it relevant to contemporary times. His Yayati is cursed to lose youth early and have old age for moral transgression. He pleads with his subjects and son to lend him their youth in exchange for old age. The son accepts the old age and becomes older than his father, hoping to gain knowledge and wisdom.
But it does not happen and that is where Karnad’s story takes a turn. The senselessness of a punishment taken by Puru for no fault of his, dawns upon him very late. The father, too, has to face consequences of escaping ‘responsibilities’ for his own actions. This is the main theme of the play. As Karnad states: “Our mythology is replete with parental figures demanding sacrifices from their children – as in my own *Yayati*” (*Three Plays* 10). On watching *Yayati*’s performance, Tendulkar, in his review, said that in the beginning he was worried that in our country, mythological characters were presented in the same manner. But, instead, Karnad made them live characters and presented them as ‘thinking’ people of the society who would be pining and fighting like any common human being. U.R. Ananthmurthy, in an article in Economic Times, calls *Yayati* “a self-consciously existentialist drama” based on the theme of responsibility and exchange of ages between father and son. Karnad has taken only the outlines of the *Puranic* myth and has endowed it with a depth and complexity all his own. It is a rich play, in spite of its limitations in construction. The eminent Marathi novelist V.S. Khandekar has also used the myth of Yayati in his novel *Yayati*, published in 1959. This book depicts Yayati as a representative of modern, common man who, in spite of having happiness in life, remains restless and unsatisfied, and runs after materialistic pleasures of the modern life. But Karnad’s *Yayati* is a metaphor for existentialism, as he puts it:

> I was excited by the story of Yayati, this exchange of ages between the father and the son, which seemed to me terribly powerful and terribly modern. At the same time, I was reading a lot of Existentialists like Sartre and Camus. This consistent harping on responsibility which the Existentialists indulge in suddenly seemed to link up with the story of Yayati. (*Three Plays* 14)

Although the characters are mythical and are supposed to be legendary and famous people, here they are ripped off of that mask, and are shown to have flaws like any common man. As Aristotle states in his theory of tragedy it is this one flaw, the ‘hamartia’ that is capable of bringing a downfall in a man’s life.

Similarly, Karnad’s second play, *Tughlaq* (1964), deals with characters from history. In modern times, history has come to be depicted in a way that it can become relevant to contemporary issues, as Rita Kothari explains: “History unfolds itself through a linear, progressive time” (153), and it always proves ‘the pastness of the
past' to use Eliot's oft-quoted words. Hence, Kamad successfully justifies the relevance of Tughlaq's history in contemporary times. This play was originally written in Kannada, drawing its source from history and has been much acclaimed for its unique treatment of history and historical characters. Karnad felt that an historical play had to have a Muslim subject, as he explains:

... the Hindus have almost no tradition of history: the Hindu mind, with its belief in the cycle of births and deaths, has found little reason to chronicle or glamorise any particular historical period.... It was the Muslims who first introduced history as a positive concept in Indian thought, and the only genuinely Indian methodology available to us for analysing history was that developed by the Muslim historians in India. (Three Plays 7)

Karnad also referred to the history books written by Muslim historians to find out about Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, the main character of this play. Tughlaq is, even today, known as the 'mad' king, a very complex person and difficult to understand. But Karnad breaks this belief to show many layers lying beyond what history shows the Sultan as. Karnad has tried to make the play and character 'ahistorical'. His attraction for legends, history, folk-tales, myths etc. led him to delve into the history of this fourteenth century king, who was completely misunderstood by his subjects. He started writing this play in a 'dry' situation. After Yayati, he could not think of what to write about. He tells Dev that while going through a critical book on drama by Kurkoti, he came upon a statement that said: "In Kannada, historical plays have come in the form of costume plays. There has not been an attempt to do a meaningful study of history. They have not been given any treatment from humanistic viewpoint"(Rang-Prasang 75). Karnad, while at Oxford, was inspired instantly to write such a play. In search of a subject, he started reading Indian history. While doing so, he came upon the history of Tughlaq, believed to be a 'mad' king. He read historians like Zia-ud-Din Barani, and found a lot of substance in the character of Tughlaq and his actions. It excited him a lot and he wrote the play Tughlaq. He has tried to use the stagecraft of the Parsi model in this play, which is the use of 'deep' and 'shallow' scenes. The 'shallow' scenes depict the scenes on the street reserved for the 'lower class' characters; 'deep' scenes show royal palaces, parks and other decorated sets for 'higher class' characters.
Tughlaq points to the changing function of history in colonial and post-colonial contexts. The responsibility of an historical play is two-fold – of history and drama. Mostly, historical plays are loyal to history and forget drama. But Karnad succeeds in combining both powerfully. As Dharwadker points out:

Tughlaq is a play about history: about how it is written, transmitted and accepted as valid knowledge about the past, and how a ‘historical play’ relates to ‘history’ proper... turns to history to de-idealize the past and uncover its lessons for the post-colonial period. (Theatre India 87)

Post-modernism denies the authenticity of history to capture the past as it really happened. Karnad does not deny this, but at the same time tries to unravel certain hidden points in this play. Thus, to a large extent, the play becomes ‘ahistorical’ in its treatment of history as well as the main character. The play also reflects the slow disillusionment that Karnad’s generation felt with the new politics of independent India. History in Tughlaq is seen through two main facets – contemporary relevance and mythical overtones. Tughlaq has remained a surprising personage for his contemporaries and successors alike. As the dramatist explains:

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 shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt that 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. (Three Plays 143)

A close observation brings out a clear parallel between the reign of Tughlaq and the Nehruvian era. Both, Tughlaq and Nehru failed to establish their ideals due to their far-sightedness, which could not be understood by their contemporaries. Tughlaq’s policy of ‘secularism’ and Nehru’s reputation as the ‘protector of Minorities’; the former’s policies such as shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad because Daulatabad was a Hindu city, the latter’s opposition to a two-nation theory, minorities
in his cabinet, social ideologies, were all failures. Both could foresee that the economic progress of the country was in science and technology, and to achieve that they had to move fast. Tughlaq introduced copper coins that destroyed the economic infrastructure of his kingdom, while Nehru was utterly driven towards industrialization. Tughlaq’s shift of the capital took five years, and yet failed; Nehru’s Five-Year Plans also did not succeed. Above all these, their people failed to understand them and their ideals. U. R. Ananthmurthy believes that this play quickly appeals to an Indian audience as: “it is a play of the sixties, and reflects the political mood of disillusionment that followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country” (Three Plays 143). The play has a significant relevance even in present times.

Tughlaq brings out the duality that is present in human beings. The Sultan is just and tyrannous, pitiful and fearful, democratic and autocratic; he is a seer, an idealist, a poet, yet he is also a murderer, a dictator, and a hypocrite. Not only within him, but the people around him are also the dramatized aspects of his personality. Sheikh Imam-ud-Din resembles him in physical features, Shihab-ud-Din in his fall from idealism to deft intrigue, Aziz as his not-so-idealistic self. All the characters reflect the very obvious contrasts present in the character of Tughlaq, which is to realize his duality. U. R. Ananthmurthy observes that Tughlaq’s great dream of realizing his Utopia can be either out of egoism or idealism. This dream of Utopia is seen from the very opening of the play. Tughlaq’s character is full of opposites and conflicts within the self. Critics have compared Tughlaq to Camus’ Caligula, depicting an alienated ‘Outsider’ figure. M. K. Naik says: “Caligula is an exposition of the inadequacies of human power in a typically existential frame-work of reference; Tughlaq is the tragedy of the limits of human power in a predominantly psychological context” (132). Tughlaq’s idealism and realism intermingle with each other, and this lends an additional dimension of mystery in the duality of Tughlaq’s personality. Hence, when one facet of his dual personality is exposed, a feeling remains – that all has not been said; a sense of incompleteness governs the play. In fact, he becomes a historical figure mainly because of the duality in his character, and here lies Karnad’s creativity of re-creating the ‘already said’ to a new connotation. Tughlaq’s character is seeped in ‘opposites’ in all aspects – the ideal and the real, the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue. He knows his real, inner self and does remain so inspite of self-knowledge and utter desire for divine grace. Dr K. S. Ramamurthy comments on the ‘divided’ self of Tughlaq:
He is at once an idealist and crafty politician, a humanist and a tyrant, a man who has murdered sleep and yet not a Macbeth haunted by supernatural solicitations, a man who thinks and broods too much and yet not a Hamlet incapable of action or guilty of delay. (17)

Karnad’s third play *Hayavadana* (1970) was published six years after *Tughlaq*’s publication. Though he is a prolific writer, he does not attempt anything till an idea has properly taken shape in his mind. The idea for *Hayavadana* started forming in his mind in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanth about the meaning of mask in Indian theatre and the theatre’s relationship with music. The play borrows its story from Thomas Mann’s play *The Transposed Heads*, which in turn borrows its idea from *Vetal Panchavishati* and *Kathasaritsagar*. The play deals with the theme of ‘completeness’, an eternal quest of human beings, and questions the very subtle problem of human existence as to which is superior – the head or the body. In *Kathasaritsagar*, the answer is the head as it represents the human being; the one of Mann’s is different. Mann argues that the human body is a fit instrument to carry out human desires. It helps the human being to progress in the world, and hence the physical body should adjust to the head. He ridicules the philosophy of the head being superior because the human body helps to fulfilling human destiny. But Karnad moves away from both these concepts. His play begins where the above two end and poses a question about, as in the words of Kurtkoti: “human identity in a world of tangled relationships” (*Three Plays* 69). His effort is to put forth a harmony between the head and the body. He also raises the query of ‘completeness’ in human life. The story also gave Karnad a scope for the use of mask and music. The traditional Indian theatre sees mask only as the face ‘writ large’. It also gave him an opportunity to revive the folk theatre that had by and large got restricted to the rural areas. He found that the principles that govern the (dramatic) aesthetics of classical and folk drama are the same. The *Bhagavata* of the folk play is just like the *Sutradhar* of the classical play, as Karnad tells Kurtkoti in an interview: “Now I am convinced that there is no difference between the theatre conventions of classical drama and those of folk drama” (*Contemporary Indian Theatre* 82). The play begins with *Nandi*, the benedictory verse, and ends with *Bharatvakya*, as stated in Sanskrit theories of drama and *Bharatnatyashastra*. It pays homage to Lord Ganesh, the remover of all obstacles. The *Bhagavata*, like the *Sutradhar*, sings the prayer and introduces the
characters and action of the play. One might even wonder about the part of Hayavadana, which not only seems fictional, but also magical and mythical. An Indian mind may not relate to a horse-headed man speaking and thinking, except in mythology; the same is true for the Western mind, even though there have been mythical Centaurs in their literature. Hayavadana is the creation of Karnad (the source behind the conception of Hayavadana is unknown in Indian mythology and is not revealed in the play), striking a similarity to the Houyhnhms of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Karnad has created and developed this whole ‘idea’ in a uniquely superb fashion, thus proving his genius.

Karnad’s next play *Naga-Mandala* (1988) – A Play with a Cobra – was written after a long gap of eighteen years. It is based on two oral tales that he had heard from A.K.Ramanujan. Karnad informs us that these tales are told by women in the kitchen while feeding the children. The other people present there are also women, hence making a parallel system of communication among the women in the family. This play is a folk play with many devices of theatricality interwoven within the theme. Karnad conveys traditional as well as contemporary aspects of life in this play. Though the play has been developed on traditional lines, it also has relevance to modern-day life. Despite the play being short, it seems to have a large panorama comprising of larger dimensions of characters and techniques. There are elements that are not found in real life or normal drama, but only in an epic. In this sense, *Naga-Mandala* too, is an epic in some ways. It deals with themes that are socio-political and have gender-bias that strike us instantly. The play also gives a picture of a woman’s position in a joint family and society. It tells of how politics is dominant and works even in these institutions. The play also deals with human relationships in this entangled world. Karnad has also tried to interweave another issue in this play – the need to pass on oral tales (specifically folk tales) to the next generation. He has created characters such as ‘Story’ and ‘flames’ who comment upon the nature of tales, as Karnad explains:

The story of the flames comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general: they have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener. Seen thus, the status of a tale becomes akin to that of a daughter, for traditionally a daughter too is not meant to be kept at home too.
long but passed on. This identity adds poignant and ironic undertones to the relationship of the teller to the tales. (Three Plays 17)

Karnad’s fifth play, Tale-Danda (1989) derives its story from the history of the 12th century. At that time a philosopher, saint-poet called Basavanna had gathered a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers who were extremely creative and had a zeal for social welfare. Together, they tried to bring about a revolution in the then-existing systems and disciplines. From the very beginning, Basavanna clearly saw the evils of the caste-system. He cast off his Brahmancal thread and went away to Kudalsangama. He studied religion and literature in both Sanskrit and Kannada. The more he learnt the more definite was his realization that knowledge was infinite. He used to say humbly: “There is none dwarfer than I”, and this introspection and self-examination helped him to study human nature. He never discriminated between the highborn and the lowborn, the rich and the poor. His bhakti shone through his lyrical poems. He condemned people’s faith in many gods as: “Just as a virtuous woman has but one lord / God is one but his names are many / And this God is seated on the thin edge called the devotees’ mind” (Translated by M.A.Menzes and S.M.Angadi). He condemned idol worship and upheld the dignity of labour. His words are, indeed, the pioneering steps in establishing a free society: “What sort of religion can it be / Without compassion? / Compassion needs must be / Towards all living things; / Compassion is the root / Of all religious faiths.” Basavanna’s thoughts regarding idol-worship are fascinating: “… Seeing a snake of stone, they say: / ‘Pour milk, do!’ / Seeing a real snake, they say: / ‘Kill it!’ / If a Jangama who can eat comes, / They say: ‘Away!’ / And serve their dainties to a Linga / That cannot eat!” All this took place in 1168 A.D. in the city of Kalyan in Karnataka. All the followers of Basavanna gave up their caste and came to be known as ‘sharanas’ or the devotees of Lord Shiva. This movement gained momentum for some time and ultimately ended in bloodshed when a Brahmin girl was married to a low caste boy. Karnad’s play deals with this incident and its aftermath when the movement comes to an end. The play also deals with other issues concerned with politics, religion and the pursuit of knowledge. These issues are similar to the views in The Bhagvad Gita regarding attainment of liberation through deeds, knowledge and devotion. In chapter xii, the Bhakti Yoga, Arjun asks Lord Krishna about which devotees are the best knowers of Yoga — those who adore the
Lord or those who adore the Imperishable, formless Brahma. The Lord replies that those devotees who are endowed with supreme faith, are ever united with Him through meditation, and worship Him with mind centred on Him, are the best Yogis. However: “Ye Tvaksaramanirdesyamavyaktam Paryupasate / Sarvatrgamacintyam ca Kutasthamacalam Druvam / Samniyamyendriyagramam Sarvatra Samabuddhayaha / Te Prapnuvanti Mameva Sarvabhattahite Rataha” (Lines 3-4).

(Translation – Those, who, controlling all their senses, and even-minded towards all, and devoted to doing good to all creatures, constantly adore as their very self the unthinkable, all-pervading, imperishable, ineffable, eternal, immobile, unmanifest and immutable Brahma, they too come to Me).

Kamad’s aim is not communication of bhakti, but of exploring the social milieu of that time. This is why P. Lankesh’s Sankranti – a play dealing with a similar theme and character – is more successful in its bhakti aspect than Tale-Danda, a play dealing with a socio-political theme. Once again Kamad is successful in relating his play to the contemporary times and issues.

The next play of Kamad, The Fire and the Rain, is based on a lesser-known myth from Mahabharata. He worked on this play for thirty-seven years. What forced him to write the play was a commission in 1993 from the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, USA. The play is based on the myth of Yavakri (or Yavakrita), which occurs in chapters 135-138 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto). The ascetic Lomasha narrates it to the Pandavas who are in exile. In the original myth, the two sages Bhardwaja and Raibhya are good friends. Raibhya has two sons, Paravasu and Aravasu and Bhardwaja’s son is Yavakri. Though both are learned, Raibhya gets more recognition. Due to this, Yavakri has a grievance against the world. He undertakes rigorous penance to acquire knowledge from Indra, especially to utilize it as an instrument to humiliate Raibhya and his family. He sexually assaults Raibhya’s daughter-in-law, Vishakha, as a means of revenge. Enraged by this, Raibhya invokes two krityas – one in the form of Vishakha, and the other, a Brahma Rakshasa. The clone of Vishakha seduces Yavakri and throws away his consecrated water that made him invulnerable to danger. While Yavakri is forced to stay out of his father’s hermitage, the Brahma Rakshasa takes advantage of this opportunity and kills him with a trident. Angered by his son’s death, Bhardwaja curses Raibhya to be killed at the hands of his elder son. The curse is fulfilled one night when Paravasu returns from the fire sacrifice and
mistakes the black deer-skin his father is wearing to be a wild animal. He returns to the sacrifice and persuades his brother Aravasu to perform the penitential rites. When Aravasu comes back after the rituals, he is announced as his father’s murderer and a demon by Paravasu. The guards of the sacrifice throw him out. Aravasu goes to a jungle and prays to the Sun god. He requests the God to bring back to life Raibhya, Bhardwaja and Yavakri. He makes the Wheel of Time turn back. Paravasu forgets his evil deed, and Yavakri realizes his folly and pursues knowledge in the right manner. Karnad compresses this narrative into three acts. He lends great depth to the story, characters, plot and emotions. The whole play revolves around a seven year fire sacrifice, which becomes the basis of the metamorphosis that takes place. In olden days, as Karnad explains in his Notes on the play, a yajna was considered very sacred and of utmost importance: “The fire sacrifice was a rite of such central importance in the Vedic society and so completely dominated the mode of thinking that it became the central metaphor, used to underline any activity…” (FR 69). At times, the sacrifices lasted for years and the daily activities were cyclical. In between, there were intervals and the priests devoted their time to other activities; story telling was one such activity. During the intervals there also used to be performances of plays; the same is seen in this play too. The play naturally falls into three parts, with a lead character and central action. Karnad finds a parallel of this play in that of Aeschylus’ Oresteia. He also finds that a myth grows and changes with time and person; one cannot isolate its meaning from its shape. As K. Chandrasekhar puts it:

The function of myth is to transcend its own factual core by magnifying it, elaborating upon it, refining it and then enriching itself at each telling and retelling. Through sheer repetition, as it traverses the generations, it frees itself from time frames and spatial constraints…. Myths have a special place in the theatre…. the theatre may be described as the fount of myth, for the obvious artifice of theatre reinforces the universal quality of the truth that the myth envelops within itself. (10)

In this play, Karnad has changed the original myth to suit the purpose of the play. He shows Raibhya and Bharadwaja as brothers instead of friends, in order to explore a deeper interpersonal relation between the characters and the plot. The play deals with universal themes of love, hate, jealousy, loneliness, power etc. at the socio-political
level. The play is divided into three parts – Prologue, Acts I to III and Epilogue. The Prologue, as in Naga-Mandala, is a device, which works as a reference to the main action of the play, i.e. the sacrifice. It helps to familiarize the readers or audience with the plot and the characters, throws light upon their relations and also acts as a narrator who introduces the action of the play. Kamad uses all kinds of devices that an epic theatre and a folk theatre have not only in concept but also in techniques.

Other plays of Kamad include Anjumallige (not translated), Hittina Hunja (translated as Bali: The Sacrifice), Ma Nishada (not translated) and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan; Anjumallige and Ma Nishada are not easily available, especially in translation. Anjumallige (1977) is based on the problem of incest. According to Karnad the play was written hastily, and so it failed to appeal. The central issue of the play is one that the playwright did not find in India, but found in England. During the period when this play was written, such situations were alien to Indian society. The story is about Yama and Yami – brother and sister, who go to a distant land beyond the seven seas, where Yami has a desire to make love to her brother. In India the joint-family system helps to distance itself from such kind of relations, but it is possible in some countries abroad. Karnad explains: “... When you isolate the problem of incest from its other relationships it becomes a source of social embarrassment” (Contemporary Indian Theatre 82). The theme of this play can be relevant in present-day situations where joint-family system is disappearing fast. Hittina Hunja (1980) deals with the theme of adultery. Karnad feels that the basic situation of this play is very passionate. The King has a strong feeling of castration when he comes to know of his wife’s adultery with an elephant tamer. To overcome this feeling, there has to be a ritual – a sacrifice of a cock is to be made. The Queen being a strict Jain, the King too, out of his strong love for his wife, follows the same religion and strictly believes in non-violence. So the King decides to sacrifice the image of a cock made of dough. But just when the cock is to be sacrificed, it comes alive (symbolically) and conveys to the King that violence does not lie in the physical aspect only but its ‘idea’ itself is equally sinful. Karnad’s view is: “... The sacrifice is symbolic. But what it symbolizes is his desire to kill his rival. Probably all this became too metaphysical for the play” (Contemporary Indian Theatre 83). The play Ma Nishada was commissioned for the Mumbai Radio. It is based on Ramayana; the central idea of this epic is also sacrifice. Rama and Sita do not live happily together. Even after the ordeal, Sita is asked to go away by Rama because, as Karnad
tells Ramachandra Dev: "... the 'inner' logic of the incident is such" (Rang-Prasang 75). Kamad thought this as a wonderful idea and wrote this play based on it, but the play was not successful.

_The Dreams of Tipu Sultan_, written for BBC on the completion of fifty years of India’s independence, is again based on history. The play centres around Tipu and his dreams recorded in a diary where he also gives his interpretations of these dreams. In this play, everyone except Tipu is treacherous and mean. Tipu wants to establish new technologies and create friendly relations with his neighbours. He wants the Britishers to go away, but the Britishers are too clever for him. All his men support the Britishers and his two sons are kept as hostages. The dreams that Tipu sees are his desires for the welfare of his people. As Dr. Ramachandra Dev observes:

... probably Tipu felt compelled to prove his patriotism to his subjects, majority of who were Hindus.... Tipu's is a case of a Muslim leader in late eighteenth century British India who felt compelled to prove his credibility to his Hindu subjects not only to stand against the British but also against his Hindu rivals. (45)

But as in _Tughlaq_ or _Tale-Danda_, the intricacies of history do not work in this play in order to justify the actions of the characters. The play dramatizes the external details of history and fails to throw light on the inner workings of the plot. After this brief introduction to the plays of Karnad, a detailed study of the themes and devices in his plays is now attempted.

To begin the study of the plays, one needs to look into the contemporary times and situations of men and women. Today the problems of men and women, especially of liberal women, are slightly different from those in the earlier times. The question today, is about the independence of the sexual desires, of achievement and fulfilment of physical needs and of a search for perfection rather than only the need to be financially independent or creating a self-identity. Though the earlier problems have not been solved in totality, they remain at a surface level. The present day issues are concerned also with woman's sexual freedom. In a society where there has been male-domination, an absolute change is difficult to come about easily. A man is not questioned if he has sexual relations with other women outside his wedlock; he can have extra-marital affairs even with women half his age. But patriarchy does not 'approve' of a woman doing the same. She must not look at another man if she is
married, should never think of physical relationship with other men, especially out of the wedlock. Society would, then, question her chastity. The concept of chastity has been valued culturally, and not abiding by it will make a woman ‘immoral’. Even Ramayana, the highly valued epic of all times, talks about woman’s chastity as the utmost value of social norms. In order to keep women tied to such norms, patriarchy holds back their sexual freedom. Kate Millet observes that:

... Woman is still denied sexual freedom and the biological control over her body through the cult of virginity, the double standard, the prescription against abortion, and in many places because contraception is physically or psychologically unavailable to her. (54)

Patriarchal society does not think much about female sexuality. A woman is not expected to ask for fulfilment of sexual needs as it is considered a sign of carnal instinct, which may prove her immoral. She must wait for the man to take the initiative. She is neither expected to have a relationship with other men outside wedlock, nor to think of someone else, other than her husband, as equally attractive. A woman’s urge to feel complete, or to be a mother even if unmarried, is not readily and openly accepted by patriarchal society. The present times have been dealing with this subject matter for a long time. The literature of contemporary times also deals with this issue along with many other modern-day issues, and poses a question that still remains unanswered. Karnad’s plays put these kinds of problems and questions before his readers or audience. He, being a playwright of modern times, deals very well with such present-day situations. Though his plays have myths, folk tales and legends at the centre, the subject matter and its treatment are very contemporary. Karnad’s characters force one to think and find a solution to these questions. He never gives a final solution, but leaves it to his readers or audience to think for it. Karnad’s plays can be called feminist to a certain extent as they deal with many women’s issues. Karnad’s female protagonists are strong-minded persons and, as pointed out by J.D. Soni, make a ‘journey from identity to recognition’ (81). They are the female voices that speak of self-identification in every way. These women ask for their rights even regarding physical needs, and do not consider it as immoral to demand fulfilment of basic human desires. The playwright very rightly points out the position given to a woman. He also brings out her psyche, and shows that as an individual, a woman is equally desirous of having physical needs or intellectual
greatness. All of Karnad’s female protagonists belong to different strata of society, representing the different classes that women belong to. But they all have a common female sensibility and aspiration. They do not consider sex as a mere carnal instinct; it is higher than that, almost aesthetic or spiritual for them. It becomes a means of finding perfection and of being complete. The questions that Karnad’s women characters pose can be relevant to any individual, and are aimed at a society that is blind to human aspirations. In a discussion with Ananthmurthy and Prasanna, Karnad says:

A daughter-in-law finds no words before her father-in-law, so does a wife before her husband.... In our homes, womenfolk speak a lot when they serve food. They have the freedom to speak only in the kitchen and in the bedroom. The reason probably is, they give food and sex. It is only there that a man sits and receives while a woman gives. She has a freedom to speak what she feels like only there. (Indian Literature 140)

When the freedom of speech is exercised outside these two places, a woman seems to lose her womanhood.

In Yayati, it is the princess Chitrakaha, whose reaction in the last part of the play, is the shattering voice of human ego and male-domination. Through this play, Karnad shows how a woman, even in a palace, is pushed aside and her desires and opinions are never asked for or considered. Chitrakaha is a new bride, coming to her in-laws’ palace for the first time. She is married to Puru, son of Yayati. She comes to his home with many dreams. Though she does not think very high of Puru and considers him a coward, yet she marries him because he is young and belongs to a great dynasty. Chitrakaha does not find any valour or virtue worth appreciating in Puru, until she comes to know of Puru’s sacrifice for his father Yayati. Puru exchanges his youth with his old father Yayati, at which she feels happy and elevates him to the position of a man who has attained glory. She imagines him to be coming with a glowing face, and starts thinking highly of him because she feels that his sacrifice must have enlightened him and made him famous. The playwright throws light on the simple and innocent nature of a woman; though she is a princess, she has ordinary longings like any other woman. Chitrakaha starts feeling honoured to be Puru’s wife. But when she sees his distorted face and body, she is horrified to realize what has befallen her. She shouts out at Puru: “Don’t come near me... go away from here... do not
touch me" (YA 69). Chitralekha is not afraid to tell her husband to go out of her room. She is very frank in her decision; she tells Yayati that she has married Puru for his youth, for the manhood through which she will be able to bear a child for his great dynasty. Her desire for motherhood is something which will make her feel ‘complete’.

Kamad’s female protagonists want to achieve ‘completion’ through motherhood. The playwright, through these women, brings to light the fact that attainment of motherhood is one of the highest needs that women want to achieve as they feel ‘complete’. (The same need is also forced upon women by patriarchal society). What is most tragic is that Puru never thinks of the plight of his young wife, nor does the king wonder if his act is morally or socially justified. Chitralekha challenges the very authority of the king and retorts: “Cowards and liars will always argue. With your arguments, you have woven a net around me” (YA 76). She makes a man’s ego all the more miserable when she puts a proposal of physical relationship before Yayati, her father-in-law. She argues that as the qualities that she had chosen in Puru are no longer present in him, Yayati should accept her: “… you still possess all those qualities… You have snatched away youth from your son. So it is logical that you accept everything related to it” (YA 76-77). Her argument is that Yayati should accept her in the same way as he had accepted everything belonging to Puru and provide the conjugal bliss that a young wife expects from her husband. Chitralekha is not ashamed to put forward such an ‘immoral’ proposal. She cannot be blamed for this ‘moral degradation’. She has to fall in her morals because of Puru and Yayati – the men who had evaded their responsibilities. There is only one way left to be free of the net that Chitralekha was trapped in – to die. Before consuming poison, she asks Yayati: “You have youth, Puru has got the sense of sacrifice. What am I to do here?” (YA 79). Karnad leaves it to the readers or audience to provide an answer to the question regarding women before men take decisions. It is Yayati who is responsible not only for Chitralekha’s death, but also for the maid Swarnalata’s madness and Sharmishtha’s degradation. Chitralekha’s suicide brings Yayati to his senses. In her character, Karnad has introduced the concept of a woman who is conscious enough to struggle and voice her opinions so as to create her identity. From Chitralekha, begins a journey of revealing woman’s desires and identities, which is also found in the other plays of Karnad.
The concept of chastity that has been dominating the Indian socio-cultural sphere has been brought out very well in the play *Naga-Mandala* where the female protagonist Rani exhibits the dilemma in the life of a woman who is tortured mentally and physically by her husband. Appanna brings Rani home only to keep her locked, while he enjoys sexual pleasures with his concubine. He neither interacts with Rani nor does he want anyone else to interact with her, thus denying her her need for communication. He asserts his power over her by isolating her from society:

Kappanna: Mother, what does it mean when a man locks his wife in?... It means he does not want anyone to talk to his wife. (NM 30)

Appanna: She won’t talk to any one. And no one need talk to her. (NM 34)

Rani is young and feels frightened when alone. She dreams of being captivated by a demon and then a whale rescuing her, symbolizing her ‘locked’ position from where no one seems to rescue her:

... So the demon locks her up in his castle. Then it rains for seven days and seven nights. It pours. The sea floods the city. The waters break down the door of the castle. Then a big whale comes to Rani and says: ‘Come, Rani, let us go.... (NM 35)

She daydreams of being with her parents and of being secure. She craves for love and care, which her husband does not give her. He comes only for his food, and then goes away, locking her in again. Karnad observes that the position of Rani:

... can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles – as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night.... The empty house that Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into. (*Three Plays* 17)

The structure of an Indian joint family is such that each individual loses his/her identity in it and has to struggle to realize it.

Rani dreams of animals and birds that help her to escape her mundane, loveless life. She dreams of eagles, stags and whales that will take her away from Appanna’s house. The animal imagery is also a symbol of her unfulfilled sexual desires. She dreams of going to a place that would be heavenly beautiful and where she would be secure and happy, a place like Moore’s ‘Utopia’ or Yeats’ ‘Byzantium’: 92
... So Rani asks him: ‘Where are you taking me?’ And the Eagle answers: ‘Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you.’ So Rani says: ‘Do they? Then please, please take me to them immediately. Here I come.’ Then Rani’s parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and caress her. At night she sleeps between them. So she is not frightened any more. ‘Don’t worry,’ they promise her. ‘We won’t let you go away again ever!’ In the morning, the stag with the golden antlers comes to the door. He calls out to Rani. She refuses to go. ‘I am not a stag,’ he explains, ‘I am a prince’... (NM 27-28)

Rani does not get the love that she should get from a husband. The stag is the man of her dreams, perhaps her husband. She fantasizes a world of bliss where she is neither alone nor insecure. This is her way of escaping the harsh reality, which does not provide her love and care. Help comes to Rani in the form of Kurudavva, a blind woman, who gives an aphrodisiac to her and asks her to feed it to Appanna. When she mixes the root in the curry it turns blood red, and Rani (as a typical Indian wife) thinks that it may kill her husband. Thus, she pours away the curry on a nearby anthill where a King Cobra resides. The aphrodisiac works; the Cobra consumes the curry and immediately falls in love with Rani. Had Rani fed it to her husband, the plot would not have developed further or become complicated. But her social conditioning prevented her from doing so. Hence, the Cobra in the disguise of Appanna comes at night and promises her that he would come to her every night. But Rani has to promise him that she would never question him about his presence or absence. She is not allowed to voice herself:

Naga: ... When I come and go at night, don’t go out of this room, don’t look out of the window – whatever the reason.
And don’t ask me why.

Rani: No, I won’t. The pig, the whale, the eagle – none of them asks why. So I won’t either. (NM 45)

Rani is happy with Naga who loves her and takes care of her. Her fears of being alone vanish and she even learns to overcome her sexual misapprehensions with Naga, who explains to her that no human being can be free from having and fulfilling
one’s physical desires; it is not something to be avoided. Naga, in a very poetic form, tells Rani of how every living creature comes together to fulfil physical desires:

Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows – even the geese! The female begins to smell like the wet earth. And stung by her smell, the King Cobra starts searching for the Queen. The tiger bellows for his mate. When the flame of the forest blossoms into a fountain of red and the earth cracks the hollow of the cottonwood, in the flow of the estuary, the dark limestone caves from the womb of the heavens to the dark netherworlds, within everything that sprouts, grows, stretches, creaks and blooms – everywhere, those who come together, cling, fall apart lazily! It is there and there and there, everywhere. (NM 45)

Thus, she sleeps with a man who is not her husband, which maybe considered a sin in the traditional patriarchal system.

Rani does not question Naga because she does not want him to go away. She needs the love and care that he showers upon her. She wants the satisfaction of achieving her physical desires, which gives her a sense of completion. Rani does not suspect incidents such as the killing of the dog or the mongoose, of the Naga coming with injuries or of seeing the reflection of a snake in the mirror. Her conscious mind reaches a stage, which in the words of Coleridge is ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. Ultimately, she becomes pregnant due to the nocturnal visits of Naga. She feels complete in achieving motherhood, but Naga is not happy, for he is worried about what will happen to Rani once Appanna finds out the truth. Rani is unable to comprehend Naga’s fears, for she feels joyous to be a mother. She tells Naga of how baffled she is by his dual behaviour and cannot understand the ‘games’ that Naga plays:

... Don’t ask questions. Do as I tell you. Don’t ask questions. Do as I tell you. No. I won’t ask questions. I shall do what you tell me. Scowls in the day. Embraces at night. The face in the morning unrelated to the touch at night. But day or night, one motto does not change: Don’t ask questions. Do as I tell you.... I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here.
But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or a sparrow. Why don’t you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like a chameleon from day to night? (NM 51)

As feared, Appanna is highly enraged when he comes to know of Rani’s pregnancy and calls her a whore. Like a typical man, he cannot bear the idea of his wife sleeping with someone else and feels socially degraded. Though he has been living with his concubine, he is never questioned by Rani or society. But when it comes to his wife, he decides to take the case to the Village Elders, and thus humiliate her. Karnad shows how men and women are treated differently by the same society and how different norms are made for them. A woman also longs for love and care and cannot stay away from her physical desires only because her ‘legally wedded’ husband denies it to her. S.R. Jalota’s observation appears relevant in this context: “It leads the audience to reflect on the efficacy of the social laws which discriminate a woman from a man and which demand a wife’s faithfulness even to her callous husband” (274). The villagers never question Appanna’s infidelity towards Rani, but they all sit in judgment to test Rani’s chastity. Overcoming the fear of the inevitable ordeal, Rani decides to take the snake-ordeal. The entire scene is reminiscent of the fire ordeal that Sita had to undergo in Ramayana, to prove the purity of her character. Bukhari, in his analysis, compares the two scenes: “... Both the incidents show that the concept of the purity of character has been associated with women since ancient days, almost from the beginning of human civilization” (67). It is always the woman who has to play the role of a torchbearer for the social and moral values. Rani’s question to the Story is also a question to society: “Why should I let you push me around?” (NM 58). Rani, very bravely, takes the snake-ordeal and triumphs in it. Immediately Rani is pronounced a goddess, and all the villagers fall at her feet: “She is not a woman. She is Divine Being! Indeed a Goddess!...” (NM 59).

Till the ordeal is not conducted, Rani is the victim, who has transgressed moral limits, she is an adulteress. All of a sudden she is transformed into a goddess. This shows that a woman is positioned at two extremes in a patriarchal society – either highly chaste or totally degraded; she is either Virgin Mary or Medusa/Eve. She is not allowed to be a common human being, having human qualities and flaws. Appanna, too, falls at Rani’s feet after the ordeal, yet he knows that he has never slept with his
wife. Karnad, without disturbing the sphere of socio-moral structure, provides three endings. Any of these endings can be a solution, but the playwright does not pinpoint it himself. The first ending is where Rani and Appanna live happily thereafter. The second is where Rani takes a promise from Appanna that their son will perform the dead Cobra’s rituals. Rani might have been aware in her sub-conscious mind about the real identity of Naga. After all, it is the Cobra who makes her attain motherhood. The third ending can be the one where Rani decides to live by fictions and half-truths. She asks the Cobra to hide in her long hair and hide there forever: “This hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, for ever” (NM 64). This ending brings woman’s identity into focus. Rani knows that she has been sleeping with another man because, as the Story explains:

No two men make love alike.... when her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realize it was someone new?... When did the split take place? Don’t you think she must have cried out in anguish to know the answer?

(NM 60)

Yet, Rani fulfils her desire and points out that life can be turned and made according to one’s own will. Whether to escape from life or not, is an individual’s decision. Rani does not escape, but faces life, just as Appanna does. Appanna is well aware of the fact that he has not slept with his wife, but he has no proof to prove his point. Rani prefers to live in her illusory world rather than face the harsh reality. Hence, both Appanna and Rani keep it a secret that their son has been born out of the physical relationship between Rani and Naga. Rani does not discuss anything because illusion is more acceptable and soothing to her than reality. Karnad tries to prove the relevance of the same situation in the context of the present days. If a woman has an extra-marital affair, is she as free as a man to have it? Will the patriarchal society always want to judge her purity? Rani’s question is an answer to these queries: “... Do desires really reach out from some world beyond right into our beds?” (NM 58). The question is not only of desires but also of existence – the existence of a woman as an individual, as a human identity.

Karnad points out the question of existence and a search for perfection in his next play *Hayavadana*. This play deals with a woman’s search for a ‘complete’ man. A patriarchal society is habituated to dominate over women and lower classes. Such a society does not give enough space to a woman to search for her ‘perfect’ man. The
playwright puts before the readers or audience the problem that occurs when a woman tries to find the complementary ideals of perfection in a man other than her husband; how does society react when a woman finds 'another' man also equally attractive, and is she allowed to drift towards him, especially when the attraction is physical. Karnad shows it through Padmini, the female protagonist of Hayavadana, and once again leaves the problem to the readers or audience to think upon and find a solution. Padmini is endowed with beauty, intelligence and wealth, as Kapila describes her: “… she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati – all rolled into one” (HV 87). While she is married to Devdatta, a poet and a Brahmin who is madly in love with her, she is also attracted to his blacksmith friend Kapila, who has a shapely and masculine physique. Padmini is complete in herself, but she is searching completion in her man too. For both the men, Padmini is merely a beautiful body, a sexual prize to be acquired. Padmini is a strong-headed and determined woman who refuses to act as an ideally devoted wife. She praises the physical body of Kapila, which Devdatta does not have, and which she finds sensuous: “… what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back-like an ocean with muscles rippling across it… He is like a Celestial Being… No woman could resist him” (HV 96). She admits frankly that just as a man falls for a beautiful woman (Devdatta had been in love fifteen times), the same way a woman can be attracted to a man with a perfect body. She does not want to leave Devdatta, but wants to create a fusion of a beautiful body and an intelligent mind, to have the best of both the worlds. Padmini’s quest is to achieve the wholeness of the elements, an eternal search of all human beings. In Mahabharata, when Draupadi asks for a husband who would be a complete being in all aspects, Lord Shiva explains to her that such a wish cannot be fulfilled because no single person can be ‘complete’ or ‘perfect’. So, she marries five men, each representing one aspect of perfection. In the same way Karnad suggests that a woman of contemporary times may also desire ‘completeness’ in her man, but this cannot be attained in one person. Hence, being attracted to other men may not always mean that she is promiscuous. Padmini’s fusion would be an ultimate perfection, which reminds of Plato’s theory of perpetual love: “… the desire for the everlasting possession of good” (xiii).

Both, Kapila and Devdatta, are jealous of each other and vie for Padmini’s attention. Both cut off their heads in a Kali temple to escape from their agonies. But in doing so, they do not think about Padmini or of what would happen to her after they are gone. When they do so, Padmini asks the same question to herself: “… Both
gone! And didn’t even think of me before they went?” (HV 101). When Padmini is about to cut off hers, the goddess Kali appears and stops her because: “Only you spoke the truth…” (HV 103). She offers a boon to Padmini for being ‘honest’. The boon is to bring back Kapila and Devdatta to life; Padmini puts the heads to the bodies and they come alive. But, whether in her excitement or intentionally, she mixes up the heads. Thus, when the bodies come alive, Devdatta’s body has Kapila’s head and Kapila’s body has Devdatta’s. Initially all the three are happy by the mix-up because they feel that the two friends have become one like blood- relations: “(Together) What a good mix! / No more tricks! / Is this one that / Or that one this? / Ho! Ho!” (HV 105). Padmini’s sub-conscious desire to have a ‘complete’ man may have made her commit such an error. She is very well aware that she cannot live with both the men, for that would be socially unacceptable. But, unlike the two men, Padmini is daring and honest in demanding and achieving what she desires. Her nature (and the playwright’s thoughts) are expressed through the song of the Female Chorus:

Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower? A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm. I have neither regret nor shame. The blood pours into the earth and a song branches out in the sky. (HV 132)

The song is a metaphor of the rigidities that patriarchal society forces on an individual, especially regarding emotions. Padmini represents the female principle that is bold and frank. She accepts the decision of living with Devdatta (Devdatta’s head and Kapila’s body), as Kapila (Kapila’s head and Devdatta’s body) says: “I know what you want, Padmini. Devdatta’s clever head and Kapila’s strong body” (HV 108). For a short period, she is happy in her created illusory world where there is the desired perfection: “Fabulous body – fabulous brain – fabulous Devdatta” (HV 113). Kamad shows that achieving perfection might not be completely impossible, but whether it is lasting or not, remains a mystery.

Padmini gives birth to a son. She feels as if she is in the seventh heaven of joy, for she has a ‘complete’ world to live in. Yet, the hint of transformation taking place in Devdatta’s body makes her uneasy. The dolls point out the change that comes in
Devdatta: “His palms! They were so rough, when he first brought us here. Like a labourer’s. But now they are soft-sickly soft- like a young girl’s” (HV 116). Padmini tells him that she had liked his manly smell of sweat rather than the sandal oil that he applied. She starts dreaming of Kapila, and thus, once again longs to be with him. She wonders whether such change might be coming over him too: “What could he be doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still, and his face dark? (Long pause). Devdatta changes. Kapila changes. And me?” (HV 119). ‘And me?’ is the question to which there is no answer. She cannot change, is not expected to do so. Yet she wants to change and go back to loving Kapila as she used to do. Padmini feels torn and tortured between the two men. She does not want her men to change. And yet they do change. But she has no say in it because male-dominated society never asks about the desires of a woman. A man does not change for a woman, but she has to. Padmini is helpless at the hands of her desires and is anxious to meet Kapila. Her dreams are revealed by the dolls through whom it is known that she has been thinking of Kapila:

Doll I: Look...

   Behind her eyelids. She is dreaming.

   A man ...

Doll II: But not her husband

Doll I: … I couldn’t see his face then.

Doll II: You can now. Not very nice-rough. Like a labourer’s.

   But he’s got a nice body – looks soft. (HV 118)

Doll I: There he is again.

Doll II: In the middle of the day?

Doll I: (Doubtful) I’m not sure this is the usual visitor. This

   one looks rougher and darker.

Doll II: It’s him all right. Look at his face. (HV 119)

Padmini dreams of Kapila as a man with a rough body, the original Kapila that he was, because that is how she remembers him and relates to him. At the first chance, she sets out into the woods, along with her son, to see Kapila. While moving in the woods, Padmini becomes an archetypal seeker. Her ‘way’ is a metaphor of her destination:

   ... I lost my way in the woods.... The wrong road stuck to my
   feet – wouldn’t let go.... I asked the villagers.... And the

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pilgrims. And the hunters. And the tribesmen. When there wasn’t anyone anymore, I asked myself. Everyone saw to it that I didn’t lose the wrong path. (HV 123)

Who is ‘everyone’ and what is the ‘wrong path’? They are, perhaps, society, which would see to it that a woman does not tread on the ‘wrong path’ by keeping a watch over her ‘moral’ ways. But Padmini says boldly that everyone guided her to a ‘wrong path’. Kapila tells her how he had fought with his body, beat it into shape and won over it. Padmini asks him: “The head always wins, doesn’t it?... Must the head always win?...” (HV 124-125). Karnad puts forth a question to his readers or audience about the adequacy of intellect to fulfil and satisfy human needs. The Vedas divide life into fulfilment of four aspects, viz. Dharma (duty), Arth (wealth), Kama (desire/sexual pleasures), Moksha (salvation). Without the fulfilment of the first three goals, the fourth goal, that of salvation, is not possible. Kama, the fulfilment of physical desires, is an equally significant aspect of life for both men and women. Thus, Padmini’s question regarding the triumph of mind over the body is one that leaves us with a problem, which has no solution.

Padmini is sensitive, and so Kapila’s tortured condition brings more disillusionment to her. She sees what the mix of heads has done, yet wants the body to win. She knows that the head wins over the body, but she cannot come to terms with this reality. She seems to have lived with ‘four men’ in one lifetime: “... I often remember it. It’s almost my autobiography now, Kapila! Devdatta! Kapila with Devdatta’s body! Devdatta with Kapila’s body! Four men in one lifetime” (HV 125). Both, Devdatta and Kapila, have been two different personalities, and after the mix making them four. But is a woman really allowed to live with more than one man at a time? A woman is not expected to do so otherwise she is labelled as ‘immoral’. Padmini wonders that if the same change had come over Kapila, would she have left him too for Devdatta:

... If Devdatta had changed over-night and had gone back to his original form, I would have forgotten you completely. ... He changed day by day. Inch by inch. hair by hair.... And as I saw him change, I couldn’t get rid of you.... Kapila, if that rishu had given me to you, would I have gone back to Devdatta some day exactly like this? (HV 25)
Padmim feels completely shattered and at a loss. The two men have fought their bodies and have triumphed. Padmim is the only one who has lost everything in this battle. Kapila asks her to go away, as her sight reminds him of past events. She can neither leave Kapila nor stay with Devdatta; she is caught between the two extremes of a conflict. She explains to Kapila that one must know how to keep a balance between the mind and the body. Every human being has to learn to do that to achieve perfection. She herself is complete, in a sense that the two men make her feel so. She is the only person who has grasped the meaning of 'completeness' in the true sense. The playwright conveys his own views through Padmini – that the head and the body have to co-operate and co-ordinate with each other, or one remains incomplete in someway. This in-depth philosophy of life is attributed to Padmini’s character, who says sensibly:

... Your body bathed in a river, swam and danced in it. Shouldn’t your head know what river it was, what swim? Your head too must submerge in that river – the flow must rumple your hair, run its tongue in your ears, and press your head to its bosom. Until that’s done, you’ll continue to be incomplete. (HV 126-127)

Padmim accepts the fact that her dream of a ‘complete’ man is merely an illusion. Her sub-conscious act of exchanging the heads has left her in a remote and dark corner. Both men have changed, have tried to shape their bodies according to the will of the heads. But Padmim remains a mere witness to the change and accepts the blame of being the one responsible for this conflict. Both Kapila and Devdatta have triumphed in their own way, only Padmim is the loser: “... I the better half of two bodies – I neither win nor lose.... It’s my fault. I mixed the heads up. I must suffer for it. I will” (HV 126). Padmim suffers in silence. She is neither asked for any opinion nor does she speak of her own free will. The men fight and kill each other, leaving the woman all alone. They never give a second thought to what would happen to Padmim. Kapila and Devdatta forgive each other, but they leave out Padmim, making her feel guiltier. The men, ignoring the woman and her emotions, also take the decision of death. Padmim decides to perform Sati and entrusts her son in Bhagavata’s care. She tells him to let her son live with the hunters for five years as Kapila’s son, and then take him to Devdatta’s father. She wants her son to achieve the ‘completeness’ that she herself could not achieve in Kapila or Devdatta. Padmim dies,
for she has no other way out, solving her problem in an existential way. Bhagavata comments on the condition of women who commit Sati, which is quite ironic and contradictory to reality:

... Thus Padmini became a sati. India is known for its pativratas – wives who dedicated their whole existence to the service of their husbands – but it would be no exaggeration to say that no pativrata went in the way Padmini did. And yet no one knows the spot where she went sati. (HV 132)

Even though women die for their men, they are not given due recognition. Pativratas and Satis are considered as great women; our mythology is replete with examples of such women. Yet she is ranked second, after her husband. Padmini’s death is an assertion of her will in a certain manner. Karnad brings to light the condition of such women as Padmini, who love two men for their different personalities. Yet, at the end it is the woman who suffers and is caught in a conflict. Is it possible (for a woman) to have an extra-marital relationship in order to fulfil the sense of perfection? It maybe possible, and the playwright asserts this opinion through the character of Padmini.

The female protagonist of the play The Fire and the Rain, Vishakha, is the most mature character, surpassing Rani, Padmini and Chitralekha. Vishakha lives a lonely life and longs for love and company. She does not feel ashamed to ask for love or to fulfil it. She is a woman who does what she believes in. Male-dominated society does not give any space to such women; hence, these individual women have to create a space for themselves. Chitralekha’s dying scream becomes the confident voice of Vishakha. She is free from any kind of rigidities, is full of confidence and has total individuality. She voices her need for love, both physical and emotional, openly. Patriarchal society does not care to find out what a woman wants or feels. The husband is the final authority; his decisions are the ultimate verdict. But a woman who is anguished being alone will revolt, and that is what Karnad points out through the character of Vishakha. She is the metaphor for a woman’s ego and self-respect. She is married to Paravasu, yet meets her lover Yavakri because he fulfils her need and longing for love and company. Initially, she refuses, but ultimately gives in to Yavakri’s persistence. Whatever she does, she does it consciously, unlike Rani or Padmini who work at a sub-conscious level.

Vishakha’s marriage to Paravasu is against her own will because she loves Yavakri. But her will is not significant, as she says: “I didn’t want to, but that didn’t
matter" (FR 16). The first year of married life is full of bliss. Her desires are fulfilled and she feels she is at the threshold of heaven. At the beginning of the second year, her husband tells her that they will start on their 'search': "... Search for what? I never knew...." (FR 16). She could never grasp what search it is. Paravasu uses her body and his own as instruments for experiments. She feels happy, but happiness is not all that counts for her husband. Yet, she yields to him without any shame: "... Nothing was too shameful, too degrading, even too painful. Shame died in me. I let my body be turned inside out..." (FR 16). Vishakha has a feeling that Paravasu is leading her to something, but they never talk of what it is. The day Paravasu receives the invitation to be the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice he goes away. It has been seven years since he is gone, and the place is nearby, but he never comes home even once nor bothers to find out how his wife is. He never thinks of what would happen to Vishakha after he leaves, never consults her or asks her of her desire. Yet she is waiting to have him home after the sacrifice is over. She has grown and matured with such experiences – experiences which even Yavakri does not have after attaining the Universal Knowledge: "You’re still lost in the fragrance of the jack-fruit, Yavakri. I have known what it is to grow heavy, burst open, drip and rot, to fill the world with one’s innards" (FR 16). Karnad shows how women in families have to suffer silently, have to give up their own desires, so their husbands can walk on the path of success. But how long can desires be suppressed? The torture of loneliness and silent suffering can drain out all emotions at some point in life. The same happens with Vishakha; she has been spending years in isolation. There is no one to speak to; words are precious like water in famine. She lives alone in the hermitage “… parched and wordless, like a she-devil” (FR 15). Her condition of helplessness is depicted by her in a beautiful simile: “… Alone, I have become dry like tinder. Ready to burst into flames at a breath. To burn things around me down at the slightest chance” (FR 16).

On his return from penance after ten years, the first thing that Yavakri remembers is Vishakha’s body: “The sweet sick smell of the jack-fruit, the maddening hum of a fly. The smell of your body. Ten years later I opened my eyes and I knew I was hungry for that moment” (FR 14). Vishakha is surprised and tells him: “That’s all gone, Yavakri. Indra may be immortal. But… my breasts hang loose now” (FR 14). She has become old and mature, perhaps lost her innocence. But she knows the hunger that Yavakri has – hunger for words, for company, for love. She keeps on talking, as she has not been able to express her feelings to anyone for ages. But when
Yavakri becomes impatient to take her physically and reminds her of the passage of time, she feels tormented to know that both the men in her life first of all love her body: “My husband and you! He left no pore in my body alone. And you – you think a woman is only a pair of half-formed breasts” (FR 16). Vishakha understands and knows the world as she has suffered silently for a long time. Sex is not a mere carnal instinct for her; it is something aesthetic and sublime, the knowledge of real beings, as she tells Yavakri: “I’ll give you the knowledge Indra couldn’t give you. My body – it has become light with speech now” (FR 17). Vishakha is bold and frank, very honest with herself and others. She succumbs to her heart’s desire. The woman in her gives way, and she experiences love with Yavakri. It cannot, by any means, be called mere ‘fornication’. She does what her mind tells her to do. Karnad transforms the original myth (where Vishakha is molested by Yavakri) and gives Vishakha an individual identity by making her do what she desires. As Shanta Gokhale observes: “… He (Karnad) transforms Vishakha from mere victim of molestation to an active agent who consciously yields to Yavakri, her beloved before he went away to do penance…” (32). When found by Arvasu she goes back home silently. She is neither afraid nor worried about her moral image. Vishakha faces her crude father-in-law Raibhya, very boldly. He sees her in a filthy state, so scowls at her and wants to know the reason for her delay. Even though he is a learned man, he uses foul language to abuse his daughter-in-law:

You go to fetch water. And your brother-in-law carries it back for you. Strange! What is happening here? Why are you so filthy? You look like a buffalo that’s been rolling in mud. (FR 19)

You whore – you roving whore! I could reduce you to ashes… But let that husband of yours handle you. Paravasu, Chief Priest of the sacrifice! Let him clean up his own shit! (FR 20)

In Indian society, a woman in a joint family has to give answers not only to her husband, but also to the other members of his family. Karnad, in this play portrays the relationship that a father-in-law and a daughter-in-law share. Vishakha is abused, kicked and called a whore by Raibhya. Yet she bears it all silently. Arvasu tells Vishakha to escape from Raibhya’s tortures, but she does not do so. She admits (very calmly) that she was with Yavakri who wanted to meet her alone. She is not afraid
when Raibhya announces that he would invoke a *kritya* to kill her. She is frightened only when she hears that the invoked *kritya* – the *Brahma Rakshasa* – is to kill Yavakri within twenty-four hours. And if Yavakri is not killed in the decided time, Raibhya would kill himself by entering the fire. Vishakha is the embodiment of selflessness; full of motherly affection towards the people she loves genuinely. She worries only about Yavakri’s life and requests Arvasu to go and stop Yavakri at his house where he can be safe, while she rushes to the cliff to warn him. In this process, she exhibits her real love for Yavakri, as she knows the essence of love for which she was parched. She does not wish Yavakri to be killed; she detests Raibhya and waits for his death: “... Once you are safe, I’ll happily watch that living corpse burn” (FR 22).

Vishakha represents the most mature, selfless and self-respecting woman of society. She belongs to the higher class but does not have any reservations of that caste. She dreams of living like a normal human being, an ordinary woman who enjoys the simpler moments of life. But Vishakha’s dreams are shattered when Yavakri reveals to her that whatever incidents took place did not happen accidentally, but had been arranged by him. Seducing her is a part of the challenge he has given to Raibhya and Paravasu to avenge them: “It was fortunate that you yielded. If you hadn’t, I would have had to take you by force” (FR 23). Vishakha is shocked to hear this and disillusioned to discover that he has obtained knowledge to be vicious, and would have molested her if she had not allowed him to make love to her willingly. Yavakri considers the *Brahma Rakshasa* as a challenge for power where Vishakha’s love and emotions become mere pawns in a game. Vishakha cannot believe that Yavakri, to whom she has surrendered both body and soul, has deceived her. She feels humiliated as an individual. She had offered her love more as a mother than as a woman parched for sexual desires. Her pain comes out in her own words:

> I was so happy this morning. You were so good. So warm. I wanted to envelope you in everything I could give. It was more as a mother that I offered my breasts to you – Why is life so contrary, Yavakri? One thinks one has stepped onto a bit of solid ground-a little haven – and the earth gives way. (FR 24)

Vishakha is not ready to compromise at the cost of her female dignity. Suddenly she becomes calm, and to avenge her humiliation, she throws away the consecrated water that could save Yavakri. She cannot tolerate men using the female body as a medium
to fight with each other. Yet when the wail of the demon is heard, her urge to save
Yavakri’s life cries out to him to run. The humanity and selfless love that Vishakha
exhibits cannot be compared with the qualities of any other female protagonist of
Karnad.

When Paravasu comes home in the middle of the night, Vishakha is surprised.
She tells him that even her death would not have brought him home, but the rumours
of her fornication are enough to do so: “I was sure you wouldn’t come home even if I
were on my deathbed. But my fornication was reason enough, wasn’t it? Whatever
you heard about Yavakri and me... was no rumour” (FR 31). Even the rumours of a
wife having an ‘illicit’ relationship can make the whole society stand up and question
her. Vishakha tells Paravasu that her relation with Yavakri is a truth and accepts it
openly and courageously in front of her husband. She believes in being ‘human’ and
in enjoying life like other ordinary human beings; she wants to be ‘happy’ as others.
In her absolute need to be a human being, she does not mind committing errors:

I suppose that would be too human. But what’s wrong with
being human? What’s wrong with being happy, as we were
before you got Indra into you? I shouldn’t ask. I should be
silent. And you, in any case, will be silent. My silence followed
by yours. Silences endlessly repeated. Perhaps they too will
describe a whole universe. But I am sick of silence. (FR 32)

Vishakha knows that she has no say in her husband’s deeds or decisions. She is not
expected to question him and must remain silent, just as Rani is expected to do. But
the irony is that Paravasu does not question her nor ask for any explanations. Yet his
coming is proof enough to show how much he trusts Vishakha. She shows him boldly
that both, Yavakri and he are almost similar – they both go away when they feel like
and come back with no explanations: “Yavakri and you. How much you resemble
each other. You both go away when you feel like it. Come back without an
explanation. As though Indra is explanation enough! He isn’t. Not for me” (FR 31).

When a woman has to spend endless time with crude and ignorant men around
her, she is exploited and becomes helpless. Vishakha explains to Paravasu that
Arvasu is never home and she is alone with Raibhya at home. Raibhya takes out his
frustration on her because he is jealous of Paravasu:

Something died inside your father the day the King invited you
to be the Chief Priest.... On the one hand, there’s his sense of

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being humiliated by you. On the other, there’s lust. It consumes him. An old man’s curdled lust. And there’s no one else here to take his rage out on but me. (FR 32-33)

Vishakha’s character draws sympathy as she becomes the helpless victim of a male-dominated society and has to accept all kinds of rude behaviour of men. Being a woman men use her as a mere object. Raibhya uses the body of his daughter-in-law to take out his rage and jealousy towards Paravasu. Indian society considers the relationship between a father-in-law and a daughter-in-law as sacred. Can such a relationship be called sacred? Vishakha’s mental torture, which is the outcome of this relationship is almost similar to that of Chitralekha’s who is compelled to suggest an ‘immoral’ proposal to her father-in-law.

Vishakha has no regrets for what she has done and so boldly accepts her ‘fornication’. She bears all the tortures alone and endures every suffering with no word of protest, but feels dead due to loneliness, depression and silence. In her condition the few moments spent with Yavakri are blissful and dream-like. She is able to forget her sufferings with him:

At least Yavakri was warm, gentle. For a few minutes, he made me forget the wizened body, the scratchy claws, and the blood, cold as ice. And he paid for it with his life.... Grant me this favour, please. Kill me. For all your experiments you haven’t yet tried the ultimate. Human sacrifice! (FR 33)

Vishakha lays herself openly before Paravasu and requests him to kill her if he so desires. This very truth elevates her status and forces her husband to accept her as his ‘teacher’. Karnad calls this state of mind as ‘guiltlessness’ and tells Dev:

There is no character as Vishakha of The Fire and the Rain in Indian literature. She is actually an original... character... She takes the initiative. She knows her outlook towards life... Vishakha keeps a control over all matters. (Rang-Prasang 32)

Paravasu does kill, but he kills Raibhya because he feels that the old man has disturbed him in his sacrifice. He does not do this for Vishakha’s sake, but only for a selfish purpose. He asks Arvasu to perform the rituals and the penitential rites. Vishakha is mature enough to understand what would happen in future if Arvasu performs the rites. Moreover, having motherly feelings at the core of her heart, she
does not want Arvasu to suffer the same cycle of worldly tortures, politics and intricacies of power, which were endured by her, Paravasu and Yavakri. She asks him to refuse to perform the rites and live his own life happily: “Refuse. He killed his father. Let him atone for it. Don’t get involved in it... Live your own life” (FR 35). But Paravasu ignores what she says as if Vishakha does not exist at all. At the end her forecast does come true. What is surprising is that such a strong character disappears abruptly from the middle of the play. From Act II onwards, Vishakha is no more found in the play. Karnad gives no information about what happens to Vishakha or where she goes, almost as if he has forgotten her from the story. But the readers or audience cannot forget a character like hers because she succeeds in getting recognition as well as identity through her mature understanding and behaviour. She elevates physical love to an aesthetic level, almost worship-like state. And she never experiences or expresses feelings of guilt about her actions.

The same play also has the character of a young hunter girl Nittilai. She is innocent, yet intelligent; like Vishakha she, too, is full of worldly wisdom and maturity. She is full of human kindness, and shows it towards all. She thinks that Yavakri’s penance for knowledge is useless because it cannot save dying people: “What is the point of any knowledge, if you can’t save dying children and if you can’t predict your moment of death” (FR 11). Nittilai does not live in an illusory world and has a realistic view of life. She feels disgusted thinking of how the high-caste Brahmins worship their gods and do penance secretly: “… why are the Brahmins so secretive about everything?... what are they afraid of? Look at my people. Everything is done in public view... You can feel it come and go. You know it’s there” (FR 10). Nittilai shows her anger fearlessly towards Yavakri who has seduced Vishakha: “Some people put the treacherous viper to shame” (FR 18). She understands that Vishakha has not surrendered to Yavakri by force: “No one leaves a full pot of water” (FR 17). Yet she can sympathize with the latter as she knows how lonely Vishakha’s life must be. But she too, is a victim of the same patriarchal society. A woman belonging to any caste or age is considered a dependant of society. When Arvasu fails to turn up, Nittilai’s father gets angry and marries her off to some man, without her consent: “He felt angry, humiliated. ‘This daughter of mine has made me a laughing stock in the eyes of the world’, he said, ‘I’m marrying her off to anyone who’ll take her’” (FR 27). She has to give in, for she could not raise her voice in protest against what her family/society chooses for her.
But Nittilai is bold enough to run away from her husband to look after Arvasu, her real love. She risks her own and her family’s reputation, unlike Paravasu who betrays his own family. She is even ready to spend her life with him as his sister. She looks after Arvasu and the Actor-Manager’s family like a mother: “... we’ve become dependent on her. For food, for nursing, for laughter...” (FR 45). Nittilai explains to Arvasu that it is no use fighting against his brother. He must prove himself in a manner that is calm and tactful. And when Arvasu asks whether he should sit in a corner with his hands crossed like a eunuch, she tells him: “... Better that then become the man you hate” (FR 44). She does not want him to become like Paravasu – deceitful and evil. Nittilai asks Arvasu to show his talent of acting, and thus prove himself. She loves peace and talks sensibly, explaining to Arvasu that the cycle of revenge will go on if someone does not stop it. She readily goes into hiding in the forest when she knows that her brother and husband are out to kill her. Before she goes away, she expresses her happiness to Arvasu for playing the role of the demon Vritra because the demon is more realistic, one who knows what death is:

I’m glad you’re not playing Indra. I don’t like that god of yours.... He is immortal. When someone doesn’t die, can’t die, what can he know about anything? He can’t change himself. He can’t – can’t create anything. I like Vritra because even when he is triumphant he chooses death. I always wonder – if the flowers didn’t know they were to fade and die, would they have ever blossomed? (FR 51-52)

When it comes to saving Arvasu, she runs to him without thinking even once of being caught. She understands Arvasu so well that she comes to know that the mask of the demon Vritra has started overpowering him. She knows that the scene in the play has reminded Arvasu of the injustice done to him by Paravasu. She rushes to him and removes the mask. But in doing so she is caught and her brother and husband slash her throat and kill her. She lies dying like a sacrificial animal. Arvasu cannot endure to see her dying, yet when he has to choose a boon granted by Indra, he asks for the release of the Brahma Rakshasa as he knows that even Nittilai would have wished the same had she been alive. Nittilai’s humanity is also one of the reasons for Indra’s appearance and rains, but it is at the cost of her life. K. Chandrasekhar observes: “... Nittilai is invested with such a surfeit of good qualities that it gives rise to the unworthy suspicion that she maybe Karnad’s equivalent of the ‘noble savage’” (12).
In *Tale-Danda*, Jagdeva refuses to see a woman's face till his goal is achieved. He has no sympathy for his wife who waits for him patiently. He does not want her to disturb him. He feels that a woman might tempt him and render him helpless. Patriarchal society is ruled by the age-old notion of woman being a seductress and an evil influence. Lalita's only concern is about her young daughter who cannot even stand the smell of leather. For her, her daughter's well-being is more important than the ideals: "It's my child's life! She gets a splitting headache if she so much smells burning camphor. She is so... so... tender.... Each time she returns from the cobblers' street, she throws up and takes to bed" (TD 41). Even when Lalita speaks out of concern for her daughter, her husband, thinking her as ignorant, silences her. At this, Gangambika retorts: "... Women and cattle, they are all the same to you.... A woman is just a ripe mango on a roadside tree for all of you, isn't she? One more challenge to your manhood!" (TD 42). When Sovideva declares his rule, the order announces: "... Women and the lower orders shall live within the norms prescribed by our ancient tradition, or else they'll suffer like dogs" (TD 90). In earlier days women have been categorised as lower class and compared to animals and inanimate objects. But modern times have definitely seen a lot of change. And that is what Karnad's female protagonists represent, as seen in his journey from 'Chitralekha' to 'Vishakha'. Karnad makes a mark when his female protagonists rebel and cry out their anguish. He presents them as individuals speaking their minds, maintaining their status and dignity. They are not the weaker sections of society, but equivalent to men, and are human beings who believe in themselves. They are always in search of a new meaning to add to their individuality, in search of a spiritual experience that can make life beautiful and 'complete'. Thus, Karnad explores through the examples of such women the possibility of metamorphosis in society or individual lives that comes about with the passage of time.

In these plays the socio-political aspect deals with issues of equality among human beings not only at the level of gender but also at the level of caste and class. Along with gender division for ages Indian society has been divided into castes, thus creating a wide chasm among people. The basic Hindu society in the olden times rigidly and firmly believed in caste-system called the *Varnas*. Society was divided into *Brahmins* (priests, poets, ministers, teachers), *Kshatriyas* (kings and warriors), *Vaishyas* (tradesmen and merchants) and *Shudras* (craftsmen and menial labourers). According to Hindu mythology, these four castes emerged from the body of *Brahma,*
the Creator of the Universe; the Brahmins from His mouth, Kshatriyas from His arms, Vaishyas from His thighs and Shudras from His feet. Hence, the Brahmins were considered the highest caste, the embodiment of learning and wisdom, and they would not even sit beside a low-caste person because the myths justified their superiority in the social hierarchy. Stanley Rice observes:

If, then, it be admitted that Brahmans, at least in the earlier stages, became the superior caste by reason of their priestly office and all that is thereby implied, it is not unnatural that they should have made use of their position to glorify themselves, as the priesthood has shown itself apt to do in other countries. That they did this in extravagant fashion, claiming privileges unheard elsewhere and even arrogating to themselves the position divinities may be admitted. (122)

The lower-castes consisted mainly of labourers doing menial work. They were exploited and oppressed by society. According to B.R. Ambedkar, “Caste-system is not merely a division of labourers – which is quite different from the division of labour – it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other” (67). Leaders like Gandhi, Ambedkar etc. tried to eradicate such a system in which human beings are not placed on an equal level. Though they did succeed to some extent, society has not yet witnessed a total eradication of such a system. Karnad tries to bring the problems of such social issues (in contemporary times) into focus through plays like Tale-Danda and The Fire and the Rain.

Tale-Danda is a play with a socio-political theme. Its relevance to contemporary times is quite apparent. Karnad himself says in the Preface to the play:

I wrote Tale-Danda in 1989 when the ‘Mandir’ and the ‘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.

The play is set in the period of the twelfth century. But the issues that it raises are very relevant to modern times. Caste-system was very rigid in those days. The central character Basavanna, the saint-poet, tries to remove such social evils. He and his followers shed off their individual castes, and come to be known as sharanas or the
devotees of Lord Shiva. They tried their best to treat all human beings as equals. But the chaste upper class Hindus could not accept this. The play concludes as the ideals of Basavanna go down to dust and the city of Kalyan is steeped in bloodshed. His movement gained momentum only to end in violence when a Brahmin girl marries a low-caste boy. All the sharanas consider each other as equals, and so there is no discriminating line between them. When the enthusiastic Jagdeva comes home, he brings his tanner friend Mallibomma to his Brahmin house, announcing to the watching people: "... Are you all listening?... This is my friend Mallibomma. He is the son of a tanner. And I am taking him inside our house. Are you satisfied?" (TD 4). He voices the hypocrisies of rituals that are absurd and meaningless. He has to perform them because society has compelled him to do so. Jagadeva realizes that rituals cannot remove human fear of death. He also informs his mother that Basavanna has gone to Bannoor to bring untouchables into their fold. The King, Bijjala, respects Basavanna and his fold for the very fact that they do not believe in caste-system. He himself is a Shudra, a low-caste barber, who has become the King of Kalyan. His forefathers had tried many ways to attain the higher caste. They had ravaged the land as robbers, had ruled as feudatories, married into every royal family or even bribed Brahmins with cows. He explains: "... All this so they could have the caste of Kshatriyas branded on their foreheads...." (TD 14). But nothing helps, and everyone in the kingdom knows Bijjala’s caste. Bijjala feels hurt that his low-caste is of more importance to his subjects rather than his love for them. He does believe in equality, but knows well: "... 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 – a shepherd – a scavenger!” (TD 14-15). Bijjala’s caste is his drawback, especially for his subjects. But Basavanna has never considered him as a low-caste. For him all are equal, and he treats the King with the respect that he deserves. Bijjala is completely aware of the fact that all his life only the sharanas have treated him as an equal without reference to his lowly birth. He feels grateful that they think him ‘human’: "... They treat me as – as what? – (Almost with a sense of wonder) as a human-being” (TD 15). It is only because of Basavanna that Bijjala feels relieved in spite of his low caste. If there had been a king of higher caste, he would have never understood what it is to be treated as a lowly being. Bijjala can comprehend all these and agree with Basavanna’s ideals of merging all the castes into one caste, for he thinks that this kind of a change in the caste-system is a great thing to work for.
Kamad puts forth his views on the caste-system through this play. He shows how conditioning can ruin a whole society and create violence and bloodshed. When a Brahmin girl Kalavati is betrothed to a low caste boy Sheelavanta, the upper class society raises a hue and cry against the wedding. They consider it as a sacrilege. Even Basavanna and Kakkaya could foresee that such an alliance was unacceptable because it is against the rigid norms of the caste-system made by society and no one can be free from the worldly bonds, as Kakkaya says: “The worldly surround us. Will they take kindly to it? Will they accept?” (TD 38). Kakkaya tells them that he knows well what the horror of caste-distinction is, but he and Basavanna are able to comprehend that their ideals need time to translate themselves into practice. It is too early to act on the ideals, as there could be dire consequences. Basavanna is aware of the violent results that the act would produce. He wants the people to understand his preachings properly before implementing them. He is confident that one day he will be successful in his mission: “Some day this entire edifice of caste and creed, this poison-house of varna-ashrama, will come tumbling down. Every person will see himself only as a human being. As a bhakta. As a sharana. That is inevitable” (TD 39). A society needs to be free from such norms in order to have an equal status for its members. Inter-caste marriages, though common now, are not easy. The same questions and rigidity keep on occurring again and again. Basavanna shows us that even though these reforms are needed, they are not readily accepted.

Even Bijjala warns Basavanna that such a marriage can infuriate society and can cause havoc. He himself is an erudite man and comprehends well what is the need of society during his rule; he knows how the upper caste Brahmins would react. The queen’s priest, Damodar Bhatt is a staunch believer in the caste-system and is of the opinion that it is something given by God through the Vedas. It is one’s dharma to protect it and not break its sanctity. He is a representative of the higher-class Brahmins who feel that such an inter-caste marriage is a disease for society. He further explains: “... the Rig Veda tells us that the four varnas flowed out of the Primordial Man: the Brahmin from the head, the Shudra from the feet. So what we have in this wedding is the desecration of the body of that Purush” (TD 55). Damodar Bhatt tells Indrani, the courtesan, that Basavanna himself is a Brahmin and so he should not commit such a sacrilege. Indrani argues with him that the more important fact is that the sharanas have worked much for the needy and the destitute. But that is of no importance for Bhatt. He tells Indrani that a civilized society is possible only
due to the Vedic traditions that could unite all the differences into one. He feels that society is so conditioned that it can sustain itself only if the traditions are followed: "... How large-hearted is our dharma! To each person it says you don't have to be anyone but yourself. One's caste is like one's home -- meant for one's self and one's family. It's shaped to one's needs, one's comforts, one's traditions" (TD 56). Ultimately, when the wedding takes place, there is a great uproar. The higher-class people could not voice themselves. But Prince Sovideva, in order to avenge his humiliation, retaliates against the sharanas and the King for supporting them. There is bloodshed all around. The sharanas are killed mercilessly. The fathers of the young couple are also killed. In the end, the sharanas have to flee from Kalyan, and all this is because of the rigid, prevalent caste-system of society.

The same issue of caste-distinction is seen in another perspective in the play, in the scene where Bijjala asks a servant to climb on his shoulders and see if Basavanna is coming. The point here is that when the need to save oneself arises human beings forget all cultural barriers, even if he is a king. What the playwright tries to show, though ironically, is something practical and helpful for society's redemption from rigid norms. In one of the last scenes, where Bijjala is kept imprisoned, he tries to find out whether Basavanna and his followers are coming to save him or not. When he hears the news that they are approaching towards the palace, he rushes to see how many of them are there. This scene is ironical as well as philosophical too, where Bijjala tries to see what is taking place through the eyes of a low-caste boy. He goes into the temple sanctum, asks Mariappa, a servant, to come in and climb up to see the sharanas. As there is no ladder lying around, Bijjala asks him to climb on his shoulders and take a look outside. In his frustration and excitement, Bijjala forgets the distinction between a king and a servant, a highborn and a lowborn. Another way of looking at this scene can be that Bijjala too, is of a low caste and believes in Basavanna's ideals, so could easily forget discriminations based on caste or class. Karnad himself transforms this social viewpoint to a philosophical one. In a discussion with Ananthmurthy and Prasanna, Karnad says:

... What I wanted to achieve in this scene was... the notion of transcendence. The political significance of a boy from a lower caste is not as important to me as the idea that Bijjala is seeking his liberation through this low caste boy. For, what the
boy sees and comments upon is important for Bijjala’s liberation. (Indian Literature 134)

In Tendulkar’s Kanyadaan, a Brahmin girl marries a Dalit boy as part of a reform. But she is soon disillusioned in her ideals, and the consequences are horrible, as she cannot adjust to the life-style of the ‘lower castes’. In Karnad’s plays too, disillusionment of social ideals does come, but in a different manner. The Fire and the Rain is another illustration of the rigid caste-system, where a high caste Brahmin boy Arvasu is looked down upon by society because he wants to marry a low caste hunter girl Nittilai. Arvasu is a Brahmin and wants to be an actor. But acting and actors are considered to be a part of low castes, so he cannot pursue his wish. Nittilai is the hunter girl whom he loves. Nobody approves of Arvasu’s choice; he is considered ignorant and his wish is of no significance. Arvasu is hesitant to meet Nittilai’s tribal elders where he will have to make a show of his manhood. He is also told that as there is famine, the villagers have nothing to do, and so such meetings are a source of entertainment for them, especially the women who consider it their prerogative to chew upon a Brahmin groom: “... The women will be there of course. In hordes. It’s not often that they get a Brahmin groom” (FR 6). Karnad points out how an inter-caste marriage becomes almost a show. Arvasu is forbidden to touch Nittilai until they are married. Earlier he could not touch her because she is a low caste woman. Arvasu explains that he is neither bright nor learned, nor will he ever perform great deeds. So, no one cares as to whom he marries or what he does, and Nittilai need not be anxious about him. But Nittilai’s tribe does not trust the high castes for they find them deceiving and hypocritical: “... These high caste men are glad enough to bed our women but not to wed them” (FR 8). Nittilai does not see anything great in the rituals performed by the high castes; she wants to know why all the rituals are kept hidden from everyone. The lower castes have no taboos of any kind. They perform rituals in the open for the public to see and their gods are not so secretive. Society has played even gods in a caste-hierarchy; the gods sought by Brahmins are of higher level than those of the lower classes, as Andhaka tells Nittilai: “The gods that their priests seek are far mightier than yours. Don’t talk of the two in the same breath” (FR 10).

Arvasu reaches late for the meeting of the Elders of Nittilai’s tribe because he has to attend to the dead body of Yavakri. He stops to bathe on the way, as he could not touch anyone with his impure hands after performing the rites for a dead person. His
high caste has taught him to do so. This makes him late for the meeting. Her father thinks that Arvasu has deceived them and marries her off to some other man. Thus Arvasu’s caste and traditions ruin his love life:

... I knew it was getting late, but I had just cremated a dead body. I couldn’t bear the thought of touching you with those unclean hands. An untouchable wouldn’t have cared. An outcaste wouldn’t have cared. But my cursed caste wouldn’t let me go. (FR 34)

Arvasu is disillusioned by his caste and tells Nittilai that she will never be able to comprehend what the people of his caste are capable of. Her tribe can perform minor, harmless spells, but his is capable of performing spells, which are beyond imagination and full of terror. Arvasu thinks that he is being blamed, cheated and thrown out as part of a conspiracy, which does not want him to marry Nittilai. As a revolt against all his humiliations he decides to act because he feels: “... I am an outsider... Everywhere” (FR 49). His angst of being an ‘outsider’, of not belonging anywhere, neither to the Brahmin caste nor to the low castes, is justified. The Actor-Manager also thinks that being of a higher caste Arvasu might not agree to act in his play. The Actor-Manager is aware that actors are considered of a lowly profession, and are ostracized from society. When he goes to give Arvasu’s message to the King, he is asked to make his plea from a distance so that his lowly profession does not pollute the sacrificial enclosures. This illustrates how acting and actors were considered as low born. The same point is also emphasised in Paravasu’s advice to Arvasu:

The sons of Bharata were the first actors in the history of theatre. They were Brahmans, but lost their caste because of their profession. A curse plunged them into disrepute and disgrace. If one values one’s high birth, one should not touch this profession. (FR 3)

The sphere of caste system revolves around communal harmony too. Though it is more of a political issue, society is also responsible for maintaining communal harmony in a country. In a country like India, where there are many religions, communities and castes, a lot of tolerance is needed to accept the differences of other religions and communities. In the name of Hindu-Muslim feud, India has experienced many violent riots like those of Mumbai, the Ayodhya Mandir-Babri Masjid event or the more recent riots of Gujarat. Karnad brings into focus this issue too, and it is a
significant aspect of his plays. *Tughlaq* discusses this issue explicitly; it is a play about a Muslim ruler trying to be fair to his Hindu subjects and who, ironically, does not succeed. Sultan Tughlaq exempts the Hindus from paying the *jiziya* tax and welcomes their complaints. He promises to give justice equally to all, and the subjects fear this most, as a Hindu puts it:

... 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 a Hindu, but you are also a human being’ – well, that makes me nervous.

(TQ 148)

The Hindus do not trust a Muslim monarch and Aziz takes advantage of the same hostility when the shift of the capital takes place: “I hope you checked whether they were Muslims before burying them.... Actually I ought to send you back to dig them up again. Its against the orders to insult or cause harm to Hinduism” (TQ 189). Such discrimination is initiated by the authorities and the subordinates take advantage of it.

Tughlaq is not married and has no heir to his kingdom; marriage has no social value for him. Karnad ridicules the sanctity of the institution of marriage. He shows it as a mere plaything without morals. The *Kafir* that Aziz meets has eight children without marriage, as he could not find time to marry. Marriage becomes a mere deed to be performed. The social system has degraded a lot where a son kills a father for power and the throne. Patricide is seen in *Tughlaq, Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*. All these characters – Tughlaq, Sovideva or Paravasu – commit patricide without any guilt feeling. Karnad, very successfully, reveals the contemporary problem where a son fights against his father for property and/or power. And yet, society considers a son as the supreme liberator, one who feeds the soul after death. Bijjala, in *Tale-Danda* tells Basavanna that he should look into his son’s welfare as a son is the ultimate goal of life, one who helps the father’s soul to reach heaven: “... A son is the final goal of human existence!... he is the one who’ll keep your soul fed till eternity” (TD 20). Though society has been changing in its outlook for sometime now, these social problems have not been eliminated absolutely. The playwright relates its relevance to the present day situations very emphatically.

But Karnad’s plays are not limited only to social issues; they deal with other areas such as politics, philosophy and religion. In a country like India, which has various religions and cultures, politics is as important an aspect as society. Through his plays,
Karaad brings forth political issues related not only to India but also to the rest of the world. He links up the issues to the present day situations and feels that none of them can be irrelevant, for they are on-going problems of the world since ages. From the times of Kings and Sultans to the Britishers and to the present-day politicians, the issues have not changed at all – only the situations have changed. The lust for power still corrupts the human mind and Karnad’s *Tughlaq* is a superb example of it. Karnad calls this play ‘contemporary’, which may seem ironical. Yet, a close observation reveals a striking parallel between Tughlaq’s reign in the fourteenth century and the Nehruvian era of the nineteen-sixties. Like Tughlaq, Nehru’s ideals and visions also failed due to an inability to relate to the present. Though the theme of the play is historical, the treatment is political. The play links politics to people, history and religion. Thus, it has a significant relevance even to the present times.

The opening of the play informs us of how Tughlaq came to the throne by murdering his father and brother. He is not hesitant to commit patricide for power and does not even feel guilty about it. In fact, he openly admits to his crime: “I killed them – yes – but I killed them for an ideal” (TQ 204). He goes to the extent of justifying his crime, which reminds one of the similar act in Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*. Ratansingh understands the Sultan very well and tells Shihab-ud-Din: “I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt…. I am glad to escape Sultan’s impartiality and be alive” (TQ 171-172). Tughlaq’s politics spare none. He does not let anyone come in his way of achieving success. Though Tughlaq has declared that anyone can openly and freely criticize him, he does not let that happen. He plans a conspiracy against the reverend Sheikh-Imam-ud-Din. He himself declares in his kingdom that everyone has to come and listen to the Sheikh, but his soldiers are instructed to secretly stop the people. The Sheikh is not as clever as the Sultan, and thus falls a prey to his strategies. He agrees to go as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk who was marching towards Delhi. As they had a physical resemblance, Tughlaq makes him wear his royal robes to make him look exactly like the Sultan. Ain-ul-Mulk kills the Sheikh, thinking him to be the Sultan. Tughlaq acts as though he has been deeply affected by the Sheikh’s death: “It was a terrible sight. They brought his body into my tent and I felt – as though it was I who was lying dead there and that he was standing above me looking at me. I should have been there – in his place” (TQ 170). Ain-ul-Mulk feels
guilty of killing a saint, hence surrenders to Tughlaq. But the ‘generous’ Sultan frees him and returns his kingdom too. The reason he gives for this gesture is:

You remember the chess problem I solved the other day?... I drew a sketch on the floor and showed him the solution. He said he liked it, then looked harder for a couple of minutes and said: ‘No, there’s a flaw here’. And he actually showed me where I had gone wrong! Think of that! I had spent days on that wretched problem and he spots a flaw within half a minute.

I had to forgive him (TQ 171)

Tughlaq knows very well that whatever turn events have taken is as planned by him. He was aware of the fact that the Sheikh would be killed and Ain-ul-Mulk will suffer from guilt feeling; he uses a single strategy to get rid of two enemies obstructing his success – Sheikh and Ain-ul-Mulk.

Another problem that the playwright deals with in Tughlaq is of the ideal to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. Issues related to Hindu-Muslim unity are of great relevance in contemporary times, where in the name of religion, there are communal riots and political upheavals. It is again an example of the destruction of unity and secularism in the country, as is clearly depicted in Mahesh Dattani’s Final Solutions. Tughlaq wants his subjects to live harmoniously, which will also enable him to rule without any obstacles. He wants the trust and loyalty of all subjects, so relieves the Hindus from paying the jiziya tax. But the Hindus doubt him and the Muslims are angry with him. He shifts the capital to Daulatabad thinking that it is a Hindu city and will make his Hindu subjects happy. He pretends that he is doing this for the love of his Hindu subjects, but the actual reason for it is that Delhi is not free from invaders and lacks peace:

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 Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom.... Only those who have faith in me may come with me. (TQ 149)

But he makes every subject of his kingdom come to Daulatabad, and during the shift the ordinary and poor people suffer a lot. People like Aziz take undue advantage of
the Hindu-Muslim feud and fill their pockets. Aziz brings in the sensitive issue of casteism and justice towards Hindus on the pretext of Tughlaq’s orders. This reminds one of the similar present day situations where politicians try to destroy communal harmony for their own advantage.

Tughlaq comes to know of the Amirs’ plan to murder him at prayer (which is headed by Shibab-ud-Din). He gets his soldiers to kill Shihab, while he continues with his prayers. After Shihab’s betrayal, Tughlaq becomes ruthless, for he realizes that his people will not comprehend his ideals. He feels he has been too lenient with them, and so decides to be harsh and cruel. He announces his decision to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad as a compulsion for every subject:

... I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul 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.... Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now. (TQ 1B6)

Tughlaq gets his stepmother killed because she got Najib murdered. She is the person whom he loves and trusts the most. He cannot bear her ‘betrayal’, which is too harsh for him to digest. He punishes his stepmother by announcing the strictest punishment for her and humiliates her by saying:

The others died unjustly. You deserve to die... You are worse than an adulteress. But I can’t think of a worst punishment for you. Take her to prison.... Tell the Nayab Vizier I want her stoned to death publicly tomorrow morning. (TQ 205)

The killing of his stepmother is a degradation of his innermost self. While moving to Daulatabad corruption spreads widely, bribery starts on a large scale and people are treated mercilessly. For economic advancement, Tughlaq introduces copper coins equivalent to the silver dinars. His people cannot accept the new currency and it adversely affects the economy of his kingdom. Deceivers such as Aziz take excessive advantage of such policies and there are counterfeit coins all over the place. Tughlaq tries to be honest about his flaws in front of his people to show them how devoted he is to them. But that seems very ‘unkingly’; he says things that are just fashionably honest and do not damage his power. All this is a part of his political game.

Tughlaq makes use of religion as a weapon to wield power over people – prayer, which is a symbol of religious idealism, of a connection between man and divine
aspiration and a sacred part of religion, is polluted with intrigues and murders. Amirs hatch a plot to kill Tughlaq during prayer; he also kills his father, brother and Shihab during prayer. He bans and revives prayers whenever he likes, and thus plays with and shatters people’s faith: “But our prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled. There will be no more praying in the kingdom” (TQ 186). After a period, he invites saints from various places to revive the banned prayers and puts on a show of grandeur and devotion: “… My kingdom rejoices at the arrival of your gracious presence…. Our streets have waited in silence for the moment when the call to the holy prayer will ring in them… Only you can save me now” (TQ 209). He is incapable of grasping the essence of praying with a pure and sacred heart, for prayer cannot justify a crime. Though the Sultan talks of religion very devotedly, it is not kept free from his political intrigues. Religious leaders like Haidri and Hood are imprisoned for speaking the truth openly. Tughlaq destroys the sanctity of religion and makes it a puppet in his hands. But his people know the truth, which is known from the orders of the guard to the people after Tughlaq’s long speech about the prayers: “All right, all right. Go home! What are you waiting for? The show’s over!…” (TQ 151). Tughlaq’s whims become mere entertainment in his political games. The same kind of political intrigues is seen in modern-day scenarios too (the Ayodhya-Babri Masjid issue, the riots in Gujarat or the on-going Kashmir problem).

Even minor characters in Tughlaq exhibit their involvement in the intrigues of politics. Aziz, Shihab-ud-Din, Najib, Ratansingh, the Amirs etc. are all experts in political intrigues in their own way. Aziz is most successful in giving Tughlaq a dose of his own medicine, as he is the only one who has been able to comprehend the quintessential nature of politics. He is completely ‘drenched’ in politics, corruption and bribery. Aziz believes in having such an authority where he can not only rob a man, but also punish him for being robbed. He disguises as a Brahmin and takes advantage of Tughlaq’s decision to impart ‘fair justice’ to Hindus. Then he robs people on his way to Daulatabad. He takes huge sums as bribery even from poor people. He brings in casteism and a show of justice towards Hindus on the pretext of Tughlaq’s orders. He knows as many political games as the Sultan. Aziz is an absolutely corrupt man; he brings to memory characters from Shakespeare’s plays such as Iago (Othello) and Falstaff (Henry IV Part I). He almost overshadows Tughlaq in his political intrigues and can outdo any of the Sultan’s tricks, for he has imbibed its inner meaning. Aziz disguises as Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid and goes to the
Sultan to cheat him. When Aazam, his best friend tries to escape from the dirty world of politics, Aziz kills him. He describes politics as the best world: “Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world: politics! It’s a beautiful world – wealth, success, position, power” (TQ 190). Ironically, it is only a knave like Aziz who is able to comprehend the ideals and politics of the Sultan. Tughlaq sees a mirror image of himself in him. He appreciates Aziz’s courage and understanding, and ‘punishes’ him by making him an officer in the State. He explains this act to Barani: “All your life you wait for someone who understands you. And then –you meet him – punishment for wanting too much!... As he said, ‘One day suddenly I had a revelation’” (TQ 218). Thus, Aziz triumphs over Tughlaq, proving himself more powerful and authoritative. Najib too, is capable of playing tricks in politics. He advises Tughlaq on how to go about snubbing those who raise their voices against him. And Ratansingh betrays Shihab to avenge his father’s death. Karnad’s Tughlaq can be compared to G.P. Deshpande’s Chanakya or Tendulkar’s Ghashiram Kotwal, where the political intrigues are the same for the attainment of supreme power. Karnad’s play puts forth a contemporary issue that has however been present in the world for ages. Tughlaq is not merely about history; it is much more than that. In his analysis, Bhayani observes: “The real encouragement for Tughlaq is the present day questions of the country. Tughlaq’s policies, his madness, his failures, are all present today” (21).

Karnad’s plays prove that history does not vanish with time but remains ever present. The same is seen in Tale-Danda, a play, which also deals with politics and power-hungry characters. These characters are contemporary, in the sense that they still exist in the present times. This play is about politics taking place in a kingdom, about a son taking power from his father forcefully. Bıjjala is not happy with his son Sovideva because he behaves in an unprincely manner, so he denies favours to him. Sovideva is angry and decides to avenge it on Basavanna (whom he detests) but whom his father trusts blindly. He opens up the Treasury in order to play some filthy game on Basavanna, but Jagadeva and other sharanas do not let him tamper with the royal wealth. Sovideva dislikes the sharanas, and the Treasury incident infuriates him all the more. He swears to avenge the humiliation at the Treasury: “I shall bury them alive! Hack them to pieces and feed them to my hounds!” (TD 7). Damodar Bhatt informs Sovideva that the sharanas are more loyal to Basavanna than to the King. He, too, dislikes the sharanas because they have mingled all the castes, and so assists
Sovideva in his revenge. He instigates the prince to take action against the King who supports the sharanas, and thus uproot the sharana tradition. He showers on Sovideva elaborate titles and proclamations, which the prince does not deserve. The only aim of Bhatt is to maintain the hierarchy of the caste-system, and he stoops to the level of dirty politics to do so. Sovideva, along with his supporters, conspires to overthrow Bijjala and take charge of the kingdom, even if it be by force. They remove all the faithful servants of the King and replace them with their men. Bijjala cleverly understands the conspiracy, but finds it difficult to explain it to his queen. He repents being Sovideva’s father. The craze for power makes Sovideva so blind that he kicks his father severely. Sovideva’s men kill Kallappa, a young and loyal servant of Bijjala; Damodar Bhatt justifies the killing by saying that the whole world is full of various people and they all survive somehow or the other. But an honest man like Kallappa, who lacks imagination, can disrupt the design of society. They find him dangerous and so get rid of him. Sovideva’s politics does not spare anyone – from the lowly Kallappa to the King. Karnad shows us how power and authority can make a human being corrupt and devoid of any sense or emotion; people are killed and tortured ruthlessly for a throne. Damodar Bhatt tells Bijjala that they have decided to make the present King retire voluntarily and place the crown on Sovideva’s head. So they keep Bijjala and his queen imprisoned.

Meanwhile, the sharanas have a conference at Basavanna’s house to discuss the ways of supporting the King. They refuse to attribute any glory of the inter-caste marriage to the King, for they feel that the King has not done any deed, which can be glorified. They think that the fight between Sovideva and Bijjala is a trivial matter of politics and they need not worry about it. It is an ironic comment on the kind of politics at the familial level: “But why? It’s a family squabble. A routine political event” (TD 67). Basavanna considers it betrayal to the King but the sharanas do not think so. They feel that such a betrayal is nothing unusual for their King as he has also deceived his rulers: “Betrayal is a big word. But not one to which our monarch is a stranger. Let’s not forget that the palace he’s now locked in once belonged to his trusting Masters” (TD 67). The playwright brings to light the fact of how little trust the subjects have on their rulers. This is a contemporary matter, as even in the present day people do not trust their leaders. The rulers, today, are totally engrossed in selfish motives and want power in their hands. In doing this, they neglect the people towards whom they have duties to perform. When the rebellion against the inter-caste
marriage begins, Jagadeva and other revolutionaries get together to avenge the royal household. They decide to attack the palace while Sovideva is unsuspecting and cut him into pieces. But at Sovideva’s palace, Manchana Kramita advises him not to take any action against the sharanas because: “... The sharanas have lost their drive and in course of time are bound to revert to caste for sheer survival....” (TD 79). Though Bhatt does not support this opinion, Sovideva silences him by saying that no one dare disobey him – the ‘King’. He declares his intention to strike havoc among sharanas, and decides to go to his in-laws’ house. Thus, when Jagadeva and others attack the palace, they are told it is empty except for the old king Bijjala. Jagadeva refuses to go away without killing anyone, as he feels that they would be called cowards if they did so. So he decides to meet Bijjala; he persuades the King to come out of the temple sanctum and strikes him with his sword. Jagadeva is overcome with a feeling of revenge and wants to kill Bijjala merely because he could not lay his hands upon Sovideva. He feels he has to kill somebody of the royal family, so that the world would not laugh at him: “He’s our only chance... If we go out empty-handed, we’ll go down in history as incompetent clowns. Not just our enemies but our own people will laugh at us” (TD 85). After killing Bijjala, Jagadeva, overcome by a sense of guilt, kills himself.

At the end the whole city of Kalyan is in chaos; it burns and people are killed like worms. Everywhere there are gruesome scenes of murder, rape, rioting, looting etc. Even Damodar Bhatt is killed and Basavanna is dead. The sharanas flee from Kalyan, but Sovideva gives orders to pursue them and kill each one of them. He does not want any voice to rise against himself, so makes an announcement according to which there is no freedom to think, speak or express oneself:

The King is father to his people and the people shall love him and obey him like his offspring. No tongue shall wag against the King or his family or his retinue or his officers.

From this moment all sharanas foreigners and free thinkers are expelled from this land on pain of death.... (TD 90)

And through all this violence, Sovideva’s coronation continues. In a fight between two political parties innocents are sacrificed. These scenes are reminiscent of Indira Gandhi’s rule, especially during Emergency. No one was free to move about at one’s own will. Karnad, in this play, also points at the existing issue of violence that takes place in the name of a religious structure. Basavanna decides to go to Maddur to solve
a fight between the *sharanas* and Jains. He explains that violation of any order or provocation is wrong; and to do it in the name of a structure or religion is worse still. It reminds us of the on-going fight over the structure at Ayodhya. The play, hence, successfully proves that no history remains a mere matter of the past; it is always in the present, in some form and in some issue. Politics is seen in *The Fire and the Rain* too, where cousins fight for supremacy over each other. Yavakri and Paravasu want to prove themselves more powerful than the other. Paravasu betrays his own brother to sustain his position of authority; Yavakri molests a woman to avenge his father’s humiliation and establish himself most powerful; Raibhya kills his nephew to satisfy his ego, and also feeds a grudge against his own son Paravasu for being appointed to a higher position. Thus, political intrigue is almost a never-ending matter in any time of history in the world.

But Karnad’s greatness as a dramatist is not limited to issues of the social or political sphere. He moves on to depict much more; his philosophy of life is put forth through his characters who have a softer, human side too. None of the themes, be it social, political or philosophical, can be discussed without discussing the characters. Both, his male and female characters are representatives of his views and opinions. All his characters are multi-dimensional and are made of various shades of life—neither totally black nor white, but shades of grey. They are neither entirely humane nor villainous, but are like ordinary, everyday human beings, full of vices and virtues, bringing to memory the Shakespearean character Friar, in the play *Romeo and Juliet*, who says: “Many for many virtues excellent / None but for some / And yet all difference?” (II. iii. 13-14). Karnad’s characters are very successful in delivering all his viewpoints through action, dialogue and interaction with other characters. As discussed earlier, social and political themes are related to the characters; similarly even philosophical and devotional themes come out through the characters. Both philosophy of life and the personality of the characters remain inter-mingled. This can be observed through the analysis of the characters, especially the male characters.

In *Yayati* Karnad talks about the burden of responsibility. Though Karnad does not consider this as a modern play, it surely tells the tale of any modern man. The playwright here expresses his opinion through the character of the Sutradhar, a character present in most of his plays. The Sutradhar says that no person, whether hightborn or lowborn, can escape from the burden of responsibility. And that is the crux of the play, where everyone wants to escape from his or her responsibilities.
Sharmishtha is satisfied that being a servant she has no responsibility. Both Devyani and Yayati turn away from their responsibilities. Devyani is the one who is responsible for Sharmishtha's presence in the palace, and hence the conflict arises. Karnad portrays Yayati as a person who loves youth and wants to enjoy every moment of it. He is a metaphor of modern youth who tries to search for ways to escape from duties. Yayati is energetic, lustful and power loving. He makes a desperate bid to cling to life that is full of youth and energy, while Puru, though young, is disillusioned and depressed. He seems to be a loner, always in search of 'something' from the past. The two characters, Puru and Yayati, though a contrast to each other, are also shades of the same personality — both escape from their responsibilities. On hearing the curse of old age, Yayati is shocked and refuses to accept the responsibility of what he has done. He blames Sharmishtha for the curse and wants his youth back: “If I have to retain my identity, I have to retain my youth...!” (YA 50). Karnad points out the desperate human need to cling to life and youth, but no one barters old age or death for material gains, as everyone has to bear the fruits of one's own deeds. In the same way no one comes forward to take on Yayati's old age (even when offered wealth and half the kingdom) except Puru. Puru thinks that such a sacrifice would bring him wisdom and lot of bliss. It would help him to create his own individual identity. Sharmishtha explains to him: “Remember, the pride of sacrifice is also a kind of poison” (YA 60). But Puru does not think on these terms; he tries to escape from the present — from being a prince and a husband. He does not even think once about his young wife who might be expecting so much from him. Rajinder Nath observes: “Yayati is an egotist who wants to cling to everything which he's got. Puru wants to skip a few mgs to become an enlightened soul. Both are immature in their own ways and both court eventual disillusionment.” One thinks that he can attain youth eternally and enjoy life, while the other thinks that old age is the best way to attain wisdom. They do not realize that each stage of life comes at its time as Nature commands. Hence, both die a certain kind of death at some point. The final recognition comes to both through Chitralekha, Puru's young wife, who finds the reality very harsh to bear and commits suicide. Her death is the final disillusionment for Yayati and Puru, who suddenly realize their responsibilities. But by that time Devyani has left Yayati, Swarnalata has gone mad and Puru's eyes are dried up, for there is no water in his old eyes. The ultimate result is complete destruction in the social and familial order. Thus, Karnad shows that the burden of
responsibility is an eternal one, which humans have to carry throughout life, reminding of Frost's lines which can be relevant in this context: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep / But I have promises to keep / And miles to go before I sleep..." (193)

In Tughlaq, there is a different philosophy of life as exhibited by the playwright. Tughlaq is the most humane, erudite and misunderstood person. Tughlaq is almost larger than life. Even in present-day history he is known as the 'mad' king. But his madness is seen in his visions and ideals that his subjects never understand, for the ideals were far ahead of his time. Tughlaq is a 'modern' man caught in crisis and conflicts inside and outside. His 'divided' self is very torturous for Tughlaq. The playwright relates the character to philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of a whole country, which a dreamer like him controls. Tughlaq becomes a complex creation split into various other characters. Yet, it is a pity that no one grasps his ideals. He is existentially alienated from society, people, and family – even his own self. Christine Gomez describes it: "Not only is Tughlaq alienated from the society in which he lives, he is also estranged at the inter-personal level from the individuals around him" (115). Another shade of Tughlaq's personality is his poetic and visionary nature; he is full of wisdom. He wants to create an 'Utopia' for his people, wants them to confide their worries in him. He wants his subjects to approach him with a fearless mind. He worries only about his subjects and wants to reach out to them. He wants the people to share their joys and sorrows with him, and confide their secrets in him. He tells of his ideal dream to his stepmother:

I pray to the Almighty to save me from sleep. All day long I have to worry about tomorrow but its only when the night falls that I can step beyond all that....Then again I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: 'Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then, let's pray. Let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with – ours now! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come! I am waiting to embrace you all! (TQ 155)
Tughlaq tries to work as much as he can for his people, foregoing his sleep, but they could never recognize his motives: “But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven’t even opened their eyes to the light of today?” (TQ 181).

Tughlaq is a man of high erudition, well versed in Urdu and Greek. He reads Sukrat and Aflatoon, and cannot ‘unlearn’ all the poetry or philosophy because: “... I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world... They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now I shall have to kill the part of me, which sang to them....I’m sorry. But it can’t be done” (TQ 165). Barani appreciates Tughlaq and his learning, and Tughlaq accepts his own limitations in front of Barani:

Barani: You are a great man, Your Majesty...

Muhammad: (Laughing) And you are a good man, Barani, and that’s more important. (TQ 171)

Karnad is of the opinion that all human beings are full of flaws and limitations. But one has to go on living and searching for that ‘something’ which overcomes all the limitations. Tughlaq’s dream rose-garden becomes a hill of counterfeit copper coins. Aazam tells us how every night the Sultan digs into the heap of coins, raises his fists and lets the coins trickle down. It is the anguish of a tortured, disillusioned man, the climax of his failure. Tughlaq’s visions are broken; his ‘Utopia’ is shattered when he realizes his error of demanding more understanding from his people. His existential alienation becomes all the more poignant here when juxtaposed with his earlier idealism. Tughlaq shares his vision (in Sylvia Plath’s words) of a ‘beautiful fusion with the things of this world’ with a young guard on the ramparts of Daulatabad. This scene recaptures a magical moment when Tughlaq feels himself in harmony with nature and everything around him:

One night I was standing on the ramparts of the old fort here. There was a torch near me flapping its wild wings and scattering golden feathers on everything in sight. There was a half-built gate nearby trying to contain the sky within its cleft. Suddenly something happened – as though someone had cast a spell. The torch, the gate, the fort and the sky – all melted and merged and flowed in my blood-stream with the darkness of the night. The moment shed its symbols, its questions and answers, and stood naked and calm there the stars throbbed in my veins. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke,
was the sky. Suddenly a sentry called from far: ‘Attention! Attention!’ And to that challenge the half-burnt torch and the half-built gate fell apart. (TQ 194)

There is nothing that can comfort Tughlaq, not even religion, for he knows that even religion is not easy to achieve: “... go to Mecca. Sit there by the Kaba and search for the peace...What bliss! But that isn’t easy” (TQ 196). Karnad shows that when there is anguish within an individual, then not even religion or prayer can soothe him. Tughlaq also tries to pray, but cannot do so because he knows that, like Macbeth, his hands are so full of blood that nothing can give him peace: “… I was trying to pray – but I could only find words learnt by rote which left no echo in the heart” (TQ 206). These are the confessions of a man disillusioned by his own ideals. No human being is free from the pulling tortures of life’s conflicts. All of us have to live by the rules of Nature; only God can uplift us. Tughlaq, too, cries out to the Almighty to purify him and raise him to a spiritual level. He cries out to God to shower him with mercy and free him from the tortures of death: “… I started in your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of You. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud?” (TQ 205). Yet he does not lose faith in God. When Aziz, a rogue, confesses his deeds of deception and disguise, Tughlaq accepts defeat at Aziz’s hands and ‘rewards’ him. He knows that life is not always reasonable and beautiful; logic is not so easy and justice is not so simple: “If justice was as simple as you think or logic as beautiful as I had hopes, life would have been so much clearer. I have been chasing these words now for five years and now I don’t know if I am pursuing a mirage or fleeing a shadow” (TQ 219). He does not know what he has been searching for for years. Everything appears to be a mirage or a shadow for him, which is always out of human reach. Even his philosophy cannot soothe him or give him bliss. Life is full of contradictions and hence not always beautiful.

Aazam and Aziz, in an existential vein, are almost similar to Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. Both of them, like Tughlaq, have a revelation of the futility and absurdity of life (though in different ways). Karnad brings to our notice another facet of life through these two characters. He shows how life becomes absurd and futile at certain times. Aazam assumes a world-weary mood that seems a parody of Tughlaq’s existential alienation and realization of the meaninglessness of life: “It’s so hot – I’m fed up of life, I’m fed up of the whole
bloody world” (TQ 197). He speaks of the absurd in the physical sense and wants to
destroy the individual self, while Aziz has revealed his existential vision as that which
gives him bliss. In such a vision he finds meaning and life. The playwright points out
the reality of how life assumes meaning only after being decayed; he conveys that
death is the ultimate meaning of life. This is put forth through the character of Aziz,
when he recalls the time he was an officer engaged in stuffing corpses with straw for
exhibition:

Such famous kings, warriors and leaders passed through our
hands then! Beautiful strong bodies and bodies eaten up by
corruption – all, all were stuffed with straw and went to the top
of poles… One day, suddenly I had a revelation. This was all
human life was worth, I said. This was the real meaning of the
mystery of death – straw and skin! With that enlightenment I
found peace. (TQ 217)

Aziz represents the human mind, which discovers gains as well as life in void and
nothingness. Karnad is successful in portraying these characters in various shades of
black and white; they reveal an intense awareness of the absurdity of life, similar to
that of Macbeth who sees human life as: “… a tale told by an idiot, full of / Sound
and fury signifying nothing” (V. v. 26-28).

Although life may signify nothing, yet human beings strive to achieve goals in
their life. Everybody wants to achieve ‘completeness’ and ‘perfection’ in life, but that
is not always possible. In Hayavadana, Karnad brings out his deep understanding of
the human world and life’s cyclic system. He shows that people pray to Lord Ganesh
to remove all obstacles, but this Lord Himself is a perfect embodiment of
incompleteness and imperfection:

…How indeed can one hope to describe his glory in our poor,
disabled words? An elephant’s head on a human body, a
broken tusk and a cracked belly – whichever way you look at
him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of
incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that
this very Vakratunda Mahakaya, with his crooked face and
distorted body, is the Lord and Master of Success and
Perfection? Could it be that this Image of Purity and
Holiness… intends to signify by his very appearance that the
completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend? (HV 73)

Karnad tells us that there are no words to describe the glory of this elephant-headed Lord, yet the question remains that how can this God grant completeness to human beings. But this incompleteness is also God-given and no mortal being can comprehend it or unravel its mystery. Human beings have to live with it because no one is perfect; not even God. They should only pay homage to Him and not question His mysterious ways. Thus, the connotation of the elephant-headed God seems a very complex symbol revealing not only the theme of the play, but also the philosophy of human life. Both, Padmini and Hayavadana are in search of ‘completeness’, of something beyond their reach. Their search is genuine and eternal, yet is difficult to attain by one being or in one life. Hayavadana is successful in achieving a complete world – that of a horse, an animal. But Padmini is at a loss, for human beings cannot have ‘perfection’ altogether. She wants to achieve a fusion of the best of two worlds – the body of Kapila and the mind of Devdatta. This fusion would be her ‘ultimate beauty’, her ‘complete man’. For the time being she is successful in achieving this ‘completeness’ by sub-consciously or unknowingly mixing up the cut heads of Kapila and Devdatta. But the mix does not last long, for the body begins to take over the mind. Here, Karnad also de-mystifies the age-old belief of head being superior to body, and proves that the physical body and its wants are equally important.

Padmini is happy in her created, illusory world where, for the time being, everything is perfect. Devdatta realizes that his body acts out of its own whims: “... But this body doesn’t wait for thoughts – it acts!” (HV 113). Yet there is something that hints at the transformation that takes place. Devdatta begins his studies of the text and Kapila beats his body into shape. But Kapila’s tortured condition brings disillusionment to Padmini; he tells her to go away as her presence reminds him of the past. He tells her that the body also has memories of touch which one cannot comprehend or recognize because the same head was not there: “... One beats the body into shape, but one can’t beat away the memories in it... That the body should have its own ghosts-its own memories?” (HV 126). Kapila has become embittered and moulds his body into a tough one by labour, which is done by his head. His head overrules his body and shapes it; his body is his identity as he tells Padmini:

When this body came to me, it was like a corpse hanging by my head. It was a Brahmin’s body after all – not made for the
woods.... the moment it came to me, a war started between us... Now I can run ten miles and not stop for breath. I can swim through the monsoon floods and fell a banyan. The stomach used to rebel once – Now it digests what I give. If I don't, it doesn't complain. (HV 124)

As Suman Bala points out: “Kapila cannot live by his head but by labour. He trains the Brahmin’s body by hard physical labour. Conferring superiority on head entails negation of body and this starts the conflict between the two” (196). Similarly, Devdatta also experiences the same conflict: “I’m a Brahmin, Padmini, My duty... It was fun the first few days because it was new. All that muscle and strength. But how long can one go on like that? I have the family tradition to maintain – the daily reading, writing and studies…” (HV 116). Karnad explains that one must know how to keep a balance between the body and the head. The head must know what experiences the body has had, and vice versa. Padmini tells the same to Kapila. But at last she has to accept that the head always wins. Her question, “… Must the head always win?” (HV 124-125), is posed to mankind, which thinks that the head is superior to the body. Ultimately, being pulled between the head and the body, Kapila and Devdatta decide to kill each other because their anguish is such that they are rendered helpless and lost. Kapila’s question sums up the whole understanding and struggle of life: “…Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?” (HV 126). There is no answer to this question, for it is a human being’s destiny to remain incomplete and full of flaws. The irony is that Devdatta wants Kapila’s power but not his wildness, while Kapila gets Devdatta’s body but not his wisdom. Nature cannot be deceived and nothing can be gained without struggle.

Karnad offers the view that one has to accept life as it comes; happiness is also illusory and has to be accepted as it is. He feels that life is not to be considered in depth, not to be penetrated into so as to be forced to face its stark reality. If one does so, s/he will be a sufferer. This view is pointed out in his play Naga-Mandala, where all the three main characters make a happy compromise with life because human nature has to adjust to society. Rani is not absolutely unaware that the man who visits her at night is not her husband; she doubts: “But last night... he had blood on his cheeks... and shoulders. Now...” (NM 48). Yet she does not object even after she is pregnant. Rani has a clash between aspiration and reality. But she conveniently makes a compromise and does not reveal the truth. She decides that her son should light the
fire to cremate the cobra: “... She sits staring at the snake. Her eyes fill with tears.... She bows down to the dead snake, then picks it up and presses it to her cheeks” (NM 63). Rani’s predicament poignantly reflects the human need to live by fictions and half-truths, the need not to push the search for truth beyond the point where the whole edifice of day-to-day living may come tumbling down. She must have suffered to know the mystery behind the split personality of her husband. Yet she wore a mask and took on compromised happiness. The cobra also accepts Rani’s suggestion to live in her hair and she considers it as a symbol of her marriage: “This hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live there happily, for ever” (NM 64). The cobra knows that Rani is a human being and can only be the partner of a man who is forever a human. He also compromises his love for Rani. Even Appanna suffers, for he knows that he has never slept with his wife, but still has to accept her and the son born to her. Rani shows that life can be made and turned at one’s own will; whether to escape life or not is an individual’s decision, but life does not allow any definite conclusions. The playwright points out that though life is not easy, it has to be taken for granted in certain matters. Nobody is completely happy; everyone has to live with some kind of compromised happiness. There is nothing one can do about certain things, as the Story says: “When one says ‘And they live happily everafter’, all that is taken for granted.... It is something one has to live with, like a husband who snores, or a wife who is going bald” (NM 60). One has to keep on struggling to achieve complete bliss; this is the paradox with which human beings have to live.

In The Fire and the Rain, Kamad discusses the importance of knowledge and power, just as he does in Yayati. He shows that high learning and knowledge are not everything that helps a human being to achieve power. Even human kindness and understanding is of significance, as shown through the character of Nittilai. Her description of the drought-affected people brings out her sympathy towards them: “You should see the region around our village. Parched. Every morning, women with babes on their hips, shrunken children, shrivelled old men and women gather in front of my father’s house – for the gruel he distributes” (FR 10). She speaks her mind about Yavakri saying that his Knowledge is useless if it cannot save the dying children. Nittilai represents the humane aspect of kindness and sympathy, which is equally important in life. Even Yavakri feels disillusioned after attaining Universal Knowledge. Like Padmini, he too is on a search for something that is impossible and out of human reach. He gains knowledge in a way that is against Nature, and fails to
understand this aspect even though he belongs to the high-born, learned Brahmin caste. Karnad reveals the farce of penance and high learning. Yavakri tells Vishakha that such penance is not as easy and simple as people think it to be. He describes the difficulties he had to face in the forest such as insects, demon-like mosquitoes, heat etc., which tortured one. Indra tried to explain to him what is knowledge in the true sense, and that it requires efforts and experiences: “... you can’t master knowledge through austerities. It must come with experience. Knowledge is time. It is space. You must move through these dimensions” (FR 13). Karnad feels that knowledge can be obtained only at the feet of a guru, through one’s own labour. Yet, Yavakri's obstinacy forces Indra to grant him the boon of Universal Knowledge. But he realizes that what he has achieved is only ‘knowledge’, not ‘wisdom’, because wisdom is to be ‘acquired’: “... one day I decided I had won. So I have come back. I have no clear recollection how I arrived at that conclusion.... Some knowledge, but probably little wisdom. I know now what can’t be achieved. That itself is wisdom, isn’t it?” (FR 14). Yavakri is like Puru, who wants to attain wisdom through a short cut. But wisdom cannot be had in that way. Another philosophical idea that Karnad puts forth in this play is that the same repeated words could create different meanings every time. Here, the playwright delves into a profounder thought through Paravasu who voices this philosophy. Paravasu tells Arvasu that if one asks a question, it evokes an answer; but if one goes on asking the same question again and again in the same words, a new nuance of meaning can arise: “...you could repeat a question and an answer without altering a syllable, endlessly, and create a whole new universe of meanings, more acceptable to you!” (FR 31). Thus, a whole new set of meanings is created through words, which can be moulded to one’s own convenience.

Karnad’s philosophy is not limited to this area, but moves on into the religious/devotional sphere too. His pre-occupation with religion, God etc. has been seen in almost all his plays, as he himself observes in a discussion with Ananthmurthy and Prasanna: “Relationship between man and God has been one of my preoccupations in my plays” (Indian Literature 128). This aspect is also seen in Tughlaq because Karnad says that: “... if you look at Tughlaq’s history carefully, you realize that his relationship with God is total” (Indian Literature 128). Tughlaq bans prayers for years, and then retrieves it by calling a saint; he communicates to God in good and bad times equally. He looks upon God as the only one who can retrieve him from his disillusionments. He tries to strike a oneness with Him. The same issue is
also dealt with in *The Fire and the Rain*, but is clearly seen in *Tale-Danda*. The interesting element of this play is that Karnad has created a fascinating character out of a saint. Basavanna does not appear idealized; his *bhakti* gets communicated when he speaks to himself, as he humbly says: “I don’t have in me / bhakti enough / to equal a sixth / of a mustard seed” (TD 23). Karnad shows the glory of action through this character. Basavanna believes that he cannot demand of anyone to act as he wishes; everyone has to act according to his or her conscience and only listen to his or her inner self. He believes that there is no knowledge without the right action, as the Vedas call it *karma*:

> What use / is knowledge within / as long as there’s no action without? / If there’s no body / Would there be shelter / For the breath of life? / Can one see one’s face / If there’s no mirror? / ...What use is bhakti if it only hides its face? (TD 68)

Basavanna does not believe in imposing any compulsions even in matters of faith. He feels that in a crowd and in noise they could not hear even the Lord’s voice. One needs to revert to silence, needs to become a wanderer in order to hear the Lord: “And in the cacophony of the crowd, we do not even hear the Lord’s voice. One needs to go back again to where there is silence – where one again becomes an itinerant” (TD 69).

All the verses and ideals of Basavanna are not only religious but also philosophical. The scene where Basavanna reveals the great saint Allama’s vision to Jagadeva is primarily sublime. Karnad, through this scene, shows his knowledge of the higher goals of life and proves that the Lord ties each one to the other with such bonds, which are beyond comprehension. Basavanna asks Allama what is ‘I’ and how does one recognize it. The saint asks him to watch what it is, and saying so he pours out his whole life from his body. He treats Basavanna to visions of all events in his life, which is a mingling of joy and pain, beauty and filth, life and death. He shows his childhood, his youth, and his lust for a dancer, her death etc. Basavanna also sees himself and his associates in this vision:

> ... Everything. Not just the ordinary or the simple or the holy or the beautiful. Along with that, the grotesque and the evil. Filth beyond belief. As though a river full of spring blossoms also carried decaying flesh, rotten hair, uprooted hair, a flood of pus – the stench interwoven with the fragrance. (TD 32)
The whole scene is picturesque, layered with many possible interpretations. It speaks of how the world is full of good and evil intermingled at the same time. The saint Allama had gone through all the experiences of worldly-life as is seen in Hermann Hesse’s novel *Siddhartha*. The protagonist, Siddhartha, decides to go through all worldly experiences in order to discern the purity of renunciation. He has physical relations with a prostitute, runs a business, eats good food, drinks wine, wears rich clothes etc. But after experiencing it all, he learns that: “This game was called Sansara, a game for children, a game which was perhaps enjoyable played once, twice, ten times — but was it worth playing continually?” (69). What the playwright conveys in this play is also on the same lines.

Kamad feels that in such sublime thinking, *bhakti* does not merely mean singing songs in praise of the Lord. It demands much more, many more complex experiences and knowledge of life. This can be linked to the instance in *The Bhagavad Gita* (chapter xi) where the Lord shows Arjun the vision of the Universal Form. Arjun prays to the Lord to show His Universal Form, and the Lord shows him how the whole Universe is manifested through Him: “Thaikasthm Jagatkritisnam Pasyadya Sacaracaram / Mama Dehe Gudakesa Yacchanyaddrustumicchasi” (Line 7). (Translation – Arjun, behold in this body of Mine, comprised in one limb, the entire creation both animate and inanimate and whatever else you desire to see). The Lord shows Arjun how the sun, the moon, all the gods, all the galaxies and all the three worlds are manifested in Him. He also shows His radiant form that gives birth to humans, and the fearful form in which all human beings went into His thousands of mouths after death. Some were licked up and some crushed between His teeth. Being afraid and terrified at this sight, Arjun prays to Him (chapter xi): “Adrstapurvam Hrsitosmi Drstva / Bhuyena ca Pravyathim Mano Me / Tadeva me Darsaya Deva Rupam / Prasid Devesa Jagannivasa” (Verse 45). (Translation – Having seen that which was unseen before, I feel delighted; at the same time my mind is tormented by fear. Pray, reveal to me that divine form, the form of Vishnu with four arms. O Lord of celestials, Abode of the Universe, be gracious). A similar emotion of fear and disbelief arise in Basavanna on seeing the visions of Allama. Overcome with beauty and horror, Basavanna too, like Arjun, closes his eyes. Whenever he recalls the vision he is overcome by emotions and feels a shiver. Thus, he transcends all worldly glory and in the true sense becomes a *bhakta*. In this play, Karnad moves away from the simpler philosophies of life to the more complex and sublime ones, where he shows
his knowledge of bhakti, the world and renunciation. He points out how the Sansara is full of good and evil, and how one must still live in it enduring everything. But what to choose and accept out of it is totally an individual’s decision. Thus, Karnad is a playwright whose plays comprise of multi-layered themes.

As mentioned earlier, Karnad’s plays deal with a variety of themes. His plays take inspiration from myths, legends, folk tales and history, which allow him to make free use of a variety of dramatic devices. These devices lend the plays a new technique, especially at the performance level, and they lend a flavour of its own and make them a class apart from others. His plays are multi-dimensional, dealing with strategies used not only in modern theatre, but also in folk theatre. These devices get interwoven into the plays and lend an extra quality to his works. Karnad has attributed these devices with human qualities and they become individuals in their own way. They are independent characters in the play and stand out as an important part of the play. They hold a mirror unto life. Such an example is the device of the sub-plot, which merges with the main plot at some level, yet remains independent. The sub-plot is parallel to the main plot and adds to its meaning. Karnad does not allow the sub-plot to disappear completely. It is so prominently carved out that there is a level of suspense in the events of the sub-plot, and it in turn, intensifies the emotions of the main plot and lends it a further development in the action of the play.

For instance, in Tughlaq, Aziz and Aazam are a part of the sub-plot. They also work as the comic pair (the Akara and Makara of Natak performances) to which the response of the audience/readers is quicker. They also work as agents to distance the audience/reader from getting totally involved in the story, the Brechtian technique also known as ‘theory of alienation’. This pair provides comic relief while still linking the sub-plot to the events of the main plot. The sub-plot provides a reaction to the action in the main plot and vice versa. Aziz comes across as the shrewd washerman who is only interested in selfish motives. He takes advantage of Tughlaq’s policies and checkmates him in political intrigues. M. Sarat Babu, in his study of the ‘Rescue Triangle’ observes that though Tughlaq starts as the Persecutor, at the end he becomes the Victim and Aziz the Persecutor. Aziz understands human psychology, and therefore knows how people will react to the damnation of a virtuous man. When Tughlaq asks Aziz what his real identity is, the latter replies: “... I am a dhobi from Shiknar.... But it would be a grave injustice if I were punished... What if I am a dhobi...? When it comes to washing away filth, no saint is a match for a
dhobi” (TQ 215-218). Tughlaq sees his mirror image in this rogue and so he is ‘punished’ and posted as an Officer in the State. Hence, when Aziz comes out victorious over Tughlaq, the sub-plot merges with the main plot.

Similarly, in Hayavadana the sub-plot moves along with the main plot in relation to its theme. The title of the play derives its name from that of the protagonist of the sub-plot, indicating its significance; haya means horse and vadana means face. Thus, it is the story of a horse-headed man, who is in search of ‘completeness’ like the protagonist of the main plot, Padmini. Hayavadana brings to memory the image of the donkey-headed weaver in Shakespeare’s A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream. This horse-headed man can speak, act and think like a human being. The play begins and ends with Hayavadana’s story, thus making it a covering shell for Padmini’s story. Hayavadana’s mother was a princess who fell in love with a white stallion and married him. The child of their marriage, Hayavadana, is left alone to search for his roots, to find a society where he fits in. He tells Bhagavata that he cannot find any solution for his ‘incompleteness’, and is frantically in search of something that will make his head and body one. He has been to all kinds of saints, tried all types of medicines and has been to various holy places, but all in vain. Again, the playwright brings to notice another issue of beliefs in saints and holy places, which is seen among the people even in present-day times. Even today people tend to think that such places or men will give them a solution to their problems. Hayavadana also tries the same, but there is no result: “… I’ve tried them all…. I’ve covered them all. And what did I get out of all this?” (HV 81). Hayavadana has an identity crisis within himself. His is the search of a common man, to rise from animal instincts to human level. Bhagavata advises him to go to goddess Kali, and the latter does so. He prays to the goddess to make him complete, but his prayer becomes ironic, because before he can say ‘man’, the goddess blesses him and vanishes; he becomes a complete horse, thus re-asserting head over body, and feels happy to be ‘complete’. He regrets having a human voice, which he wants to shed off in order to achieve perfection. Padmini’s son is the only one who laughs at Hayavadana’s singing. The boy, who is autistic, laughs out loudly, thus shedding his silence. He asks Hayavadana to sing a song, and when the latter tries to laugh, he ends up in a proper neigh, shedding off the human voice. Both the boy and the horse have been able to shed off their unwanted aspects while enjoying themselves with each other. Hence, the sub-plot moves on the same lines as the main plot, for it is proven here too that the head wins over the body.
Perhaps the head represents the thinking part of a human being, and so is essential for existence. The body is the symbol of animal instincts – the biological demands. It merges with the head and makes one complete. But the completeness of Hayavadana proves that the body is equally important as the head, as Kurkoti puts it:

The sub-plot of ‘Hayavadana’, the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. The horse-man’s search for completeness ends comically with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the Uttamanga, the human head. (Three Plays 70)

The same theme of perfection is carried on in the play Naga-Mandala, whose sub-plot has the tale of blind Kurudavva and her son Kappanna. Karnad portrays the irony and the meaninglessness of the brightness of daytime for a physically blind person. But he takes this blindness of the old woman and juxtaposes it with the story of Rani. Kurudavva showers affection on Rani and gives her an aphrodisiac to win over her husband, which she herself had used in her youth to win a husband. Kurudavva is a clever and mature woman and knows the ways of the world. She insists on calling her son ‘Kappanna’, which means ‘the dark-one’ because her blind eyes know only the darkness. Rani’s story also runs parallel to Kurudavva’s story. Through the character of the blind woman Karnad satirizes the human beings who can ‘see’ only the physical world and not beyond it. She is used to darkness and does not stumble on the path. She can see through the shams and hypocrisies of life, which others with eyes cannot see. The darkness of the night is the light of the day for her and she does not need anyone to depend upon: “Thoo! That’s the problem with having eyes: one can’t see in the dark. That’s why I have been telling… to let me go on my own at least at night” (NM 35). Kurudavva’s blindness is a genuine physical reality which can be juxtaposed with Rani’s sub-conscious blindness of an illusory lover like Naga. For both, the dark night brings hope and the light of the day is of no use. They find their way in the dark and are silent about it. Karnad explains to Kurtkoti in an interview: “The blindness of the mother in the sub-plot is genuine, but the blindness of Rani is ambiguous…. This is how I have tried to juxtapose these two plots in order to create a complex of meaning” (Contemporary Indian Theatre 82). Yet another juxtaposition that Karnad tries is in the context of the search of something that is beyond one’s reach; Rani is in search of her lover, who is not her husband but a serpent – a non-
human entity – who comes from some mysterious world. While, Kappanna falls in love with a girl who is a Yakshini from some other world. Kappanna leaves his mother and goes in search of this girl. Both Rani and Kappanna search for something in the external, supernatural world, which is beyond their reach. Kuruddava’s search for her son is futile because he has slipped into a world of illusion. She experiences the same emotions as Rani experiences when Naga goes away from her; Kurudavva goes about searching for her son, just as Rani is searching for a proof of her innocence. This is the search of existence. Human beings keep on hoping or thinking that they would reach their destination one day. A search beyond the physical world is a search beyond the physical existence. Kurudavva’s search leads her story to merge with Rani’s story, wherein the latter starts wondering about the former’s condition, and in this way tries to grasp the mystery of her own situation: “Why should she suffer like this? Would sight have helped her? Do desires really reach out from some world beyond right into our beds?” (NM 58). The sufferings of the blind woman open Rani’s eyes, and she gains strength to face her ordeal. Thus, Karnad successfully shows that the sub-plot can work as an individual story and still have a close relation with the main plot.

In addition to this, Karnad also utilizes the device of Prologue and Epilogue to achieve the inter-mingling sub-plot. The Prologue in Naga-Mandala has a separate identity of its own, and is capable of being a play by itself. It is a powerful device that marks the beginning and the theme of the play. Karnad conveys, through the Prologue, his opinion that folk-tales should be passed on from generation to generation otherwise native literature would die. This legacy would also help to elaborate the folk traditions. This is suggested through the character of ‘Story’, who like the Sutradhar in Yayati or the Bhagavata in Hayavadana, tells the story of Rani. She tells the Man that her story should not be confined to him, but should be passed on to others also: “There is a condition, however... You can’t just listen to the story and leave it at that. You must tell it again to someone else” (NM 26). The story of Rani is possible only because of ‘Story’ who tells it to everyone. It says that every individual has his/her own identity, his/her own story, and one person’s life-story cannot be the same for the other. When the Man asks her about Kappanna’s disappearance, the ‘Story’ tells him: “… that is Kurudavva’s story.... I am only Rani’s story.” (NM 60). The ‘Story’ serves the purpose of chorus and is a multi-dimensional character, which talks about the future and comments upon life. The
'Story' is similar to the Telugu folk tale 'A Story in Search of an Audience', which appears in Ramanujan’s collection of folk tales called *Folk-tales From India*. In *Naga-Mandala*, there are 'flames' made into characters, giving them an identity of their own and making them comment on life, as the Man says: "I had heard that when lamps are put out in the village, the flames gather in some remote place and spend the night together, gossiping" (NM 24). They are metaphors of women and provide a wider range of characters to the audience/ readers. These flames gossip, criticize and are even jealous like human beings:

Flame 1: That master of our house, you know what a skinflint he is! He is convinced his wife has a whole in her palm, so he buys all the groceries himself. This evening, before the dark was even an hour old, they ran out of kusbi oil. The tin of peanut oil didn’t go far. The bowl of castor oil was empty anyway. So they had to retire to bed early and I was permitted to come here. (Laughter)

Flame 2: (Sneering) Kusbi oil! Peanut oil! How disgusting! My family comes from the coast. We won’t even touch anything but coconut oil. (NM 23)

The dolls in *Hayavadana* also do the same; they speak of the inner psyche of Padmini, which she might not be able to express openly. Her dreams and desires are known through them:

Doll I: Look …

Behind her eyelids. She is dreaming….  

A man …  

Doll II: But not her husband. (HV 118)  

Doll I: There he is again…. (Doubtful) I am not sure this is the usual visitor. This one looks rougher and darker.  

… (Baffled) But he’s climbing a tree!  

Doll II: (Almost a wail of disappointment) He’s dived into a river! (HV 119)

The dolls also indicate the passage of time when they speak of the change that comes over Devdatta or the changed Kapila in Padmini’s dreams. They also narrate incidents such as Padmini’s growing pregnancy and then the birth of her son (incidents showing passage of time). The dolls have an air of superiority, unlike the flames. The
flames are more tolerant and patient than the dolls. The reason can be, perhaps, that
the flames represent a rural milieu, while the dolls represent the urban one:

Doll I: This is the least we deserved. Actually we should have
got a palace. A palace. A real palace!
Doll II: And a prince to play with. A real prince! ...
Doll I: Only a prince would be worthy of us.
Doll II: We should be dusted every day...
Doll I: ... dressed in silk ...
Doll II: ... seated on a cushion self ...
Doll I: ... given new clothes every week ...
Doll II: If the doll-maker had any sense, he’d never have sold
us. (HV 114)

Dolls represent society and the people. In Karnad’s plays, inanimate objects are
(more) observant and smart. Dolls also provide comic relief and the underlying irony
on the ways of the world. They swear at Padmini and Devdatta, and abuse them when
they are thrown away to have new ones:

Doll II: She wants new dolls.
Doll I: The whore
Doll II: The bitch. .... ...
Doll I: (To Devdatta) You wretch – before you throw us out
watch out for yourself.
Doll II: Cover your wife before you start worrying about our
rags. ...
Doll I: (To Devdatta) Watch out, you fool ...
Doll II: Refuse, you idiot .... ...
Doll I: Villain ...
Doll II: Rascal ...
Doll I: Swine ...
Doll II: Bastard ... (HV 121)

The purpose of giving these objects a human status is to satisfy the question of
authenticity about the action in the play. They help to build up a social background
and familiarize the audience with the milieu where the action is going to take place.
Even goddess Kali is given very common, human qualities. She sleeps all the time
because no one comes to worship her anymore. Hence, she has lost the habit of being
awake at such an hour. She yawns while talking to Padmini or Hayavadana and gives them the boons lazily:

... Behind the curtain one sees the uplifted blood-red palms of the goddess.... The drums stop and as the goddess drops her arms and shuts her mouth, it becomes clear she has been yawning (Completes the yawn)

All right. Open your eyes and be quick. Don’t waste time. (HV 102)

The goddess tells Padmini that she approves of her truth and honesty. She does not save Devdatta or Kapila because they lied to her. She feels angry and jealous as both of them offer their heads to her only for selfish purposes:

The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That fellow Devdatta – he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it – head to him and arms to me!... Then this Kapila, dies right in front of me – but ‘for his friend’. Mind you! Didn’t even have the courtesy to refer to me. And what lies! (HV 103)

Karnad merges fantasy with reality with the help of flames and dolls. These inanimate objects bring out that truth of human life, which the Man, who appears in the Prologue of Naga-Mandala, wants to escape from. They put it forth for us to understand and interpret. The Man, who talks directly to the audience like a narrator, is a writer, and through him Karnad talks about the plight of writers. His status is that of a creative human being who has to suffer punishment for writing boring plays:

I asked the mendicant what I had done to deserve this fate. And he said: ‘You have written plays. You have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who came trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs, that all that abused mass of sleep has turned against you and become the Curse of Death.’ (NM 22-23)

There is self-analysis on the part of the Writer who is in Man, which is a critique of creative fertility. At the end, he agrees to pass on the tale to others, also adding his own interpretations to the play. Thus, he provides two extra endings and leaves it to the audience/readers to accept the one they like, a device, which is an effective one in Karnad’s plays.
The Fire and the Ram has a Prologue and an Epilogue. The Prologue is the initiation of the action; the Actor-Manager bring a message to Paravasu from Arvasu who decides to act because of some personal experience: “Dear elder brother, you once said to me: ‘... If one values one’s high birth, one should not accept this profession.’... But today I am a criminal. I have killed my father, a noble Brahmin. I already stand tarnished. I may now become an actor” (FR 3). What is the actual reason behind such bitterness is seen as a flashback in the three acts. The culmination of that action is in the Epilogue. The Epilogue works as a climax to the play; it has a significant role, and an inter-mingling of reality and illusion are seen in it. Karnad has delved into various technical aspects of drama and the Epilogue is one of them. There is a play-within-a-play that reminds us of a similar technique in Shakespeare’s Hamlet or Tendulkar’s Silence! The Court is in Session. The play wherein Arvasu plays the role of the demon Vritra is an illusion, while the reality is the deception of Paravasu towards Arvasu. There is a juxtaposition of these two situations and their contrast comes out. The play shows how Indra has already destroyed Brahma and wants to destroy his brother Vishwarupa in order to be supreme. Vritra, the demon protects Vishwarupa, in contrast to old beliefs of demons being destructive. Karnad comments on the hypocrisies of gods, who are also scheming and sly. Vritra believes: “They say gods should never be trusted... Even their silences have double meanings” (FR 54-55). Indra strikes Vishwarupa when he is alone, and the former screams: “Why Brother? Why, why, why?” (FR 56), resounding Arvasu’s cries when he is dragged by the guards after Paravasu’s deception. This cry haunts Paravasu, for he sees his own self in Indra and speaks out that he never intended to deceive his own brother. He had done so out of the fear of losing his high position. This fear is so great in human beings that it can overpower any kind of love:

... Indra didn’t mean to kill him... He was panic-striken.... He saw a face by the altar. Whose face was it? The face of my dead father? Or of my brother, who is a simpleton, yet knows everything? Or was it my own face? Cold fear tore through him. He stood paralysed. When he came to, he heard a voice asking: ‘Who are you?’ His own voice. There was no choice now but to go on, to strike. But to think that the fear had lain coiled inside him and he wasn’t even aware. (FR 55-56)
In the play within, Vritra is loved by his elder brother, while in actuality Arvasu is deceived by his elder brother and is blamed for patricide. The former is illusory, while the latter is real—the reality being contradictory to the illusion; Vritra is merely a character that Arvasu is enacting, an illusory bond. Yet the character takes over and illusion is merged with reality. In his frustration Arvasu goes beyond reality and sees Paravasu in Indra. He is agitated, and attacks the Actor-Manager (playing the role of Indra) with force. He loses control over himself and burns the sacrificial enclosure, allowing his bitter and painful memories to be aroused. Nittilai brings Arvasu to his senses, but dies at the hands of her brother and husband. All these make the real Indra appear to bless Arvasu. Arvasu, being persuaded by the Brahma-Rakshasa, asks for his eternal release instead of Nittilai’s life. And then it also rains. The sacrifice works and it rains, but at a heavy cost. Arvasu gains nothing out of it, yet he is happy for the poor, starving people. Thus, the Epilogue ends the play on a climax, where it merges with the earlier Acts and provides a conclusion. The Epilogue can be independent and stand on its own, but at the same time it is difficult to separate it from the play, as it is the crux of the whole play.

All the plays of Kamad have a constant technique of illusion and reality merging with each other. In Yayati the illusion is the image of youth that Yayati has after the supposed exchange. The reality is that he has grown old, but he does not want to accept it, and is happy with his illusory youth. Puru feels that his old age will give him wisdom and this is an illusion on his part. The fact is that wisdom comes only with experience and old age cannot bring it. In their exchange of bodies, they forget about Chitralekha, who is waiting for her youthful and virtuous husband. The disaster begins when Chitralekha cannot accept the old Puru. She screams out when her dreams are shattered; she tells Yayati that by the time Puru gets back his youth, she shall be old. She asks him to accept her as he had accepted everything related to Puru’s youth: “The virtues that I had taken on in him, not a single has been left out of it… but those virtues are still in you… You have snatched youth from your son. That is why the logic is that everything related to him must be accepted by you” (YA 76-77). Chitralekha transcends the barriers of social order, labelling herself immoral. She takes poison and dies, and this brings about disillusionment in Yayati. He realizes his folly and accepts the reality of life; the same happens with Puru. In Tughlaq, the shift from Delhi to Daulatabad is an illusion. Daulatabad is the illusion and the reality is
Delhi, which fails completely. The subjects are not happy with this shift. They have
to uproot their identities, are exploited on their way, and so, dislike it:

Young man: ... And isn’t that long white thing the road from
Daulatabad to Delhi?... But it looks no bigger than a thin
snake from here.

Old man: And four years ago that snake bit a whole city to
death. (TQ 192)

This failure is the result that marks disasters in various aspects of society, and brings
about disillusionment to Tughlaq. The rose-garden of Tughlaq is another shattering
image of Tughlaq’s dreams. The beautiful garden is full of counterfeit coins; every
night the Sultan visits it, runs his hands in the heaps of these coins and lets them
trickle down. The illusory world that Tughlaq wants to create is broken.

In *Hayavadana*, the realization of not achieving her ‘complete’ man, dawns upon
Padmini when gradually the head starts taking over the body. What Padmini desires is
something that all human beings wish to have. It is an illusion, a fleeting mirage, for
no one can achieve ‘completeness’ in one life. There is always something that is
missing in human life. Padmini, unable to comprehend this at first, mixes the heads
and is happy in her illusory world. Her act is the point where illusion and reality
intertwine within each other. But this world does not last long as the head and body
have a conflict between them. Ultimately, the head begins to shape the body
according to its needs. Thus, Padmini is again in the same situation from which she
has tried to escape. She is disillusioned when Kapila tells her that the body is not free
of its memories:

Memories of touch – memories of a touch – memories of a
body swaying in these arms, of a warm skin against this palm –
memories which one cannot recognize, cannot understand,
cannot even name because this head wasn’t there when they
happened.... (HV 126)

Padmini comes to realize the reality that the head emerges as the winner and merges
with the body: “The head always wins, doesn’t it? Must the head always win?” (HV
124).

Rani’s illusion in *Naga-Mandala* is very clear from her relation with Naga.
Appanna, her husband, is the harsh reality in her life. He does not care for her and
keeps her locked. But when Naga comes, he showers love and care on her. She may
have known sub-consciously that the nocturnal visitor is not her husband, as the 'Story' explains: "... when her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realize it was someone new? Even if she hadn't known earlier?" (HV 60). When she sees the image of a snake in the mirror or the dead hound and the mongoose, she never gives a thought to them. Perhaps she does not want to lose the love that she has received; she keeps the illusion going because it is more enjoyable than the reality. In *Tale-Danda*, the ideal to bring about equality among all the castes is the illusion. Basavanna is quite aware that the ideal is not feasible enough to be put into action: "Until now it was only a matter of theoretical speculation. But... this is real" (TD 38). But the followers are so blinded by it that they do not even think twice in implementing their ideals. They all talk of the wonderful society that will come about once the equality is established: "Should we care if the ignorant scream their heads off? Should it affect us?... And then one day, enlightenment dawned. It'll happen to others too" (TD 38). In the end all the *sharanas* flee from the city of Kalyan and the ideals also vanish with them. There is bloodshed all around and that is the only reality left. Thus the illusory society goes down in dust when reality overtakes it.

Another significant aspect of Karnad’s plays is the use of the unique technique of metamorphosis – one that is rarely found in any other Indo-English play. Metamorphosis, here, can be understood in the sense of physical, mental or spiritual. Karnad also deals with metamorphosis at the level of inner self, one that transforms a human being to other aspects of life than the mere worldly ones. Ayappa Paniker and C.N. Nair, in their book on *Kathakali*, use the phrase ‘multiple transformational acting’. This terminology becomes an element that lends a significant momentum to any work of art. Makrand Paranjape describes it as ‘shape-shifting’ and says that: “Shape-shifting is the term cultural anthropologists and folklorists use to describe the transformations that are so common in the myth and folklories of most cultures” (87). He further elaborates it:

... shape-shifting is a universal motif... its meanings and functions change depending on the context.... shape-shifting is a means of exploring similarity and difference.... it proves the underlying similarity and interchangeability of all life, vegetal or animal or human.... all life is of the same substance... therefore be transformed from one to the other. (88)
Shape-shifting is deeply embedded in the drama form, as, firstly, the actor playing a character pretends to be someone else. Through this device, the playwright forces us to think about such situations where one person has to be ‘other’. Mostly this device is found only in those fantasies, fables, folk tales or myths that deal with non-realistic aspects of life. It is also associated with the supernatural element, thus meaning that it is crossing the limits of nature. In most of the Western fairy tales and legends, metamorphosis brings creativity and bliss. In tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* or *Cindrella*, the ugly beast turns into a prince or pumpkins and mice become vehicles to carry one towards the destined bliss. But Indian mythology and folk tales have metamorphosis as evil leading to disastrous consequences: in *Ramayana* Maricha disguises as a deer to take Rama away from Sita, or Ravana who takes the form of a sage to abduct Sita. For Karnad shape-shifting is a means of working out ideas. It is a central metaphor in his plays. Paranjape describes the use of this device in Karnad’s plays: “... like mathematics: hold one thing constant, change another... keep pushing the idea to its logical conclusion” (94). Shape-shifting is found prominently in Karnad’s plays as they are based on myths, legends or folk tales consisting of supernatural or non-real elements. It is found in his plays in various forms such as disguise, interchangeability, multiple or split personalities, masks, inanimate objects etc. All these become vehicles in working out the story of his plays. As discussed earlier, these changes lead towards destructive results, such as utter disaster or death. One who is transformed has to suffer the punishment. Shape-shifting takes place only under unusual circumstances at the behest of a powerful person or spell.

*Yayati* deals with transposition of bodies. Yayati is cursed by his father-in-law to have untimely old age and this curse can be averted only if someone else takes it on him/her. The only person who agrees to do this is his young and newly wed son Puru. Yayati exchanges his old-aged body on the pretext that: “Many works, which I took on hand, have been left in between... I’ve learned their situations... Pururaj does not have experience.... On finishing the works, I shall return Pururaj’s youth” (YA 74). Yayati has an extreme lust for life, while Puru wants to prove his valour and have fame and maturity even before his age. He thinks that old age can give him wisdom and knowledge of life. He explains his reason for this sacrifice: “… I want to know the final essence of it. I want to know which is the strength that gave birth to my forefathers” (YA 60). Both try to achieve their desires by exchanging their bodies. They forget that one does not achieve wisdom through old age, but through the
experiences of life. This exchange of bodies brings death to Chitralekha and a fall in the social order. In Tughlaq, the shape-shifting is not so much on a physical level as on a geographical or psychological level. Tughlaq has multiple sides to his personality; he changes himself suddenly from a caring and kind king to a tyrannous and murderous one. He has many qualities in him, which he takes on as and when needed. Tughlaq is a great role player, while Aziz, his double, is an expert in disguises. First he disguises himself as a Brahmin, and takes undue advantage of Tughlaq’s ‘magnanimity’. Later on, he disguises as the saint Ghiyas-ud-din-Abbasid, the holy man, and plays with religion. He is able to outsmart Tughlaq: “… Your Majesty, which other man in India has spent five years of his life fitting every act, deed… I only acted according to Your Majesty’s edicts” (TQ 217).

Hayavadana deals with the exchange of heads, just as Yayati deals with the exchange of bodies; the mere difference being that in the former the action happens without the knowledge of the victims, while in the latter it is sub-consciously done. Padmini seeks a boon from Goddess Kali and thus, transposes the heads of Devdatta and Kapila to achieve a ‘complete’ man for whom she has been yearning. The exchange is between the heads of Devdatta and Kapila, represented through masks, thus bringing forth ‘four’ men in total: “… Kapila with Devdatta’s body! Devdatta with Kapila’s body Four men in one lifetime” (HV 125). But for Padmini, Devdatta and Kapila the end result is death, for this exchange does not last long and ultimately, being victims of the inner conflict, all three embrace death. Karnad depicts two deaths of Kapila and Devdatta – one, when the heads are exchanged, and the second is the physical one. In Naga-Mandala it is known to the readers or audience that the child is Naga’s. But (after the exchange) it is difficult to say clearly whether Padmini’s son is Devdatta’s or Kapila’s. He does not completely belong to either of them, and so remains ‘incomplete’ until he meets Hayavadana – the horse-man. Hayavadana has the head of a horse and the body of a man. He is also in search of ‘completeness’ and identity like Padmini’s son. He, too, achieves a boon from the same Goddess and becomes a complete horse.

In Naga-Mandala, the snake has been affected after Rani pours the magical portion into the anthill. The snake falls in love with Rani so desperately that he transforms himself as Appanna, Rani’s husband, and comes to her. He loves and caresses the lonely Rani who is ill treated by her real husband. As our mythology has it, a snake can assume a human form even though it is a non-human being, as the
‘Story’ says: “As you know, a cobra can assume any form it likes” (NM 38). It is only when the Naga assumes the form of Appanna that the play develops. Though surprised at first, soon Rani accepts Naga’s love as she craves for it. She bears Naga’s child and is very happy. But this happiness doesn’t last for a long time as the real Appanna accuses Rani of adultery and she has to go through an ordeal to prove her innocence. After her triumph in the ordeal, she is transformed into a living goddess from an adulteress: “She is not a woman. She is a Divine being!... Indeed, a Goddess!” (NM 59). Though this metamorphosis is only at an external level, it forces Appanna to submit to Rani. He goes through a conflict because he knows that he is not the father of the child. In the end, when Naga sees Rani in Appanna’s arms, he cannot bear it, and (in one of the conclusions) he ties himself in her hair and dies. Hence, once his shape-shifting is discovered, he can no longer continue living a double life. And Rani too, suffers from mental torture, for she must be aware that Naga is not her husband, yet his death disturbs her. The Epilogue of The Fire and the Rain has Arvasu not just as himself but also playing the character of the demon Vritra. The disguise of an actor is more soothing for Arvasu because Vritra is not betrayed by his elder brother. The play has metamorphosis in the form of disguise or ‘taking on’. But it becomes dangerous when the same disguise takes over Arvasu’s senses and he destroys the sacrificial enclosure. Paravasu commits suicide by entering the blazing enclosure, Nittilai is killed while helping Arvasu and the Brahma-Rakshasa remains caught in a limbo between birth and death. The end result is violence, hatred, revenge and death. The reality is disaster, as drama critic Ralph Yarrow puts it: “Death is central to all three plays (Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, The Fire and the Rain)…. The presence of death is a mark that these characters have passed across a threshold” (42).

Metamorphosis is also seen at the supernatural and inanimate levels; the flames, the ‘Story’, the dolls, the masks etc. take on the human attributes and behaviour. The ‘flames’ in the Prologue of Naga-Mandala take on the aspect of gossiping at an old temple. In the New Flame’s story of the old woman who knows a story and a song, the ‘Story’ takes on the form of a young lady and the song becomes its sari. If this shape-shifting had not taken place, there might not have been Rani’s tale. In many of the plays, Karnad has also used animal imagery to compare human life. Rani dreams of the eagle, whale and stag who help her to escape from her torturous life; Nittilai calls Yavakri a viper and compares his intentions to a dangerous animal; in Hittina
**Hunja** it is the dough cock that is the symbol of the basic human nature. Another significant element of metamorphosis is through the use of masks. Masks have been used in ancient Greek and Indian drama as symbols to represent the characters. Mask, according to Karnad, is an important part of Indian drama and dance. *Kathakali*, the ancient dance form is amongst the first to use masks to represent various characters. Karnad feels that the use of mask gave him a wider scope to experiment with the themes of the plays. In *Hayavadana*, there are only masks to represent the characters – Devdatta and Kapila are known through the masks that they wear or exchange later on. Even Hayavadana wears the mask of a horse to depict his incompleteness. *The Fire and the Rain* deals in detail with the importance of mask and how one should learn to work with it. The Actor-Manager explains to Arvasu:

> ... Now surrender to the mask. Surrender and pour life into it. But remember, once you bring a mask to life you have to keep a tight control over it, otherwise it’ll try to take over. It’ll begin to dictate terms to you and you must never let that happen. Prostrate yourself before it. Pray to it. Enter it. Then control it. (FR 52)

It is very necessary to pour life into the mask and make the characters life-like, but along with this, it is also necessary to keep a hold over the mask and see to it that the characters do not control the actors. Arvasu fails to control his mask, and hence under the influence of Vritra’s mask, burns the sacrificial place. The Actor-Manager realizes this and shouts: “It’s the mask – it’s the mask come alive. Restrain him – or there’ll be chaos” (FR 57). It is only when Nittilai removes Arvasu’s mask that he is calm and controlled.

All these impersonations cross the limits of their originality to the extent that the whole individual identity of a character has to face severe metamorphosis. They face identity crisis, and become confused, like in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* where the protagonist turns into a huge insect; there is chaos regarding their identity. An important point is that the two complexities or forms are quite contradictory to each other. Yayati and Puru are at two extremes of ages and their desire for life is completely antithetical; Naga and Appanna, as body and person, are very obviously different; *Brahmin* and *Rakshasa* are at opposite ends of the behavioural circle; Kapila and Devdatta also differ in heads and bodies. Hence, the actor playing these roles also has to display two contradictory characters without losing the essence of
any of them. The intentions, feelings, behaviour etc. of each transformed form differs from the other. In this sense, shape-shifting also works at an outer level of drama where the same actor also plays two extreme characters like Arvasu and Vritra, Appanna and Naga or Kapila and Devdatta. Thus the changes that an actor goes through is a unique experience, as expressed by Yarrow: “What is it like then, to act here? What happens to my body as actor, that body which may also become the communion channel for those who receive my signs?” (43). And what are these signs? Here, it may mean that the transformation is more promising and eluding. Does it mean that happiness is attained at such a cost? Naga-Mandala shows adultery as a cure; Naga, the illusion is more admirable than the human Appanna. A night spent with him is more pleasant than a lifetime with the real husband. In Hayavadana two men in two different bodies love the same woman; Indra, in The Fire and the Rain, is immortal, so he cannot comprehend the complexities of human life, while Vritra is more wonderful because he knows what death is. All this knowledge works at the psychological level of human mind where the changed persona can be one's own 'other' self, which is hidden inside somewhere. So 'I', the conscious, has some 'other', the sub-conscious, hidden within it. The 'other' maybe a snake, youth, incompleteness or a family divided against itself. One wants to avoid it or kill it because it disturbs the conscious. Human beings are afraid to face it or accept it. One must search for it, as in Karnad’s plays. As Yarrow says: “... for Karnad’s work, I have to find my snakeness, my horseness, my doubleness. It is an internal job” (44). Perhaps, it is only the actor who is free from this ‘otherness’, as it is merely a character for him/her, a role-play. But this can happen only when s/he keeps himself/herself distanced. This leads on to the significance of what Karnad illustrates about metamorphosis being important for integration and dissolution of ‘I’ and ‘other’. Therefore, the distance between illusion and reality has to be necessarily maintained because after the illusion is broken, the consequences are shattering, like the characters of Karnad’s plays. As Paranjape puts it: “... In the end, shape-shifting in Karnad’s plays is a means to illumination and self-knowledge, not only for the characters, but for the audience” (95). Human being remains almost lost and disillusioned in the end, as if robbed of his/her conscience.

In addition to the themes, characters and devices of Karnad’s plays, there are a few other factors that cannot be overlooked. These factors provide a profound meaning to the text. For example, Karnad also comments on the language spoken by
the various strata of society. This is easily seen in plays like *Tughlaq* or *Tale-Danda*, where there is a portrayal of a wide panorama of people. Most of them are common, ordinary people who also comment on what is happening around them so as to develop the plot. Just as in Shudraka's *Mrichchhakatikam*, in these plays also various kinds of people like a king, a saint, a priest, a guard, and a prostitute etc. are seen. Hence, it also lends an interesting outlook on the language spoken by all these people. The priest in *Tale-Danda* speaks a high-levelled Sanskrit; the *sharanas* speak the common language through which they can reach out to all. The surprising aspect is that King Bijjala speaks a rustic language, unlike the usual royals like Tughlaq, who is capable of highly erudite oration. He is a folk character, a barber by birth. Hence, in the interaction with common people, Bijjala is easily understood, while Tughlaq is highly misunderstood. Damodar Bhatt appreciates Sanskrit as an ornate language, which is unchanging and austere, while the regional language changes with every different person, place and also time. One’s language is attached to one since birth, like a family or a caste. A language is one’s identity as Karnad puts it: “... Everyone is born into a language. Will it be possible to give up caste without giving up the language that comes along with...” (*Indian Literature* 33). Thus, a disciplined language can add a flavour of its own to the play. The English translation may not have different regional flavours of the same language but the original Kannada version does carry it. That is why even the title of the play marks a difference, for instance, the title *The Fire and the Rain*, where ‘Fire’ and ‘Rain’ represent many metaphorical aspects other than the physical ones. The original Kannada version is called *Agni Mattu Male*. The use of the word *Agni* is explained by Karnad as a Sanskrit word that carries “connotations of holiness, of ritual status” (FR 63). *Agni* is the holy fire that burns in sacrificial altars, is a sacred element used in all ceremonies. *Male* means purely and simply rain. Thus, these two words also set up as oppositions between the Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit) and Dravidian (Kannada) language. While the title *Tale-Danda*, in a literal sense means ‘death by beheading’, as *Tale* means head and *Danda* means punishment. But as seen in the play none of the characters die by being beheaded physically. Thus, the beheading refers to the end of a tradition, of a movement, of an ideology. The title is symbolic, for at the end, the ideological movement of Basavanna comes down rolling. Head being cut may mean the thoughts and ideals cut off. And as the head is considered the thinking part of the body (as
discussed in *Hayavadana*), its beheading is quite metaphorical. Karnad accomplishes his creativity even in matters of language and titles of his plays.

Hence, this study attempts to prove that Karnad’s plays are not one-dimensional but multi-dimensional. There’s hardly any aspect of theatre that is missed out. Karnad wishes that people in India would visit the theatre more often; he wishes the Indian theatre would be more appealing, as when he tells Dattani in a conversation: “And I hope there will be a genuine broad-based Indian theatre” (*Indian Review of Books* 8). His plays endeavour to give a glimpse into an entire world of theatre, not only in content and themes, but also in techniques and stagecraft. His plays are sufficient enough to be a whole theatre. Karnad’s genius can never be underestimated and shall remain a landmark in the history of Indo-English drama.
NOTES


