CHAPTER I

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SECTION I
THE TRADITION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA: A BRIEF SURVEY:

The present study makes an attempt to critically examine the way Karnad makes use of myth and history in his plays. In other words, the study analyzes in what way Karnad deploys some of the unnoticed episodes from myths, legends and folk-tales in his plays and how he makes use of history to show its relevance to the contemporary issues. But before we proceed to analyze his plays from this perspective, it will be beneficial to take a brief survey of the tradition and achievement of Indian English Drama.

India is an ancient country known for her variety of cultures, customs, languages and literatures. It has a gigantic and rich dramatic tradition of its own. However, it is difficult to trace the origin of the Indian drama and determine the specific date of its inception. But one thing is certain that the journey of Drama starts with the Classical Sanskrit plays. Therefore, its origin can be traced back to the ancient times. Over two thousand years ago, we had our own theory of drama known as *The Natyashastra* by Bharatamuni. The two great epics of India, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* have inspired many creative writers for centuries together. At the very beginning, the Indian drama relied on the epic and mythical literature and thus it was closely linked to the Hindu religious and philosophical tradition. The Classical Sanskrit Drama gave us a few renowned playwrights like Asvaghosa, Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka, Visakhadatta and Harsha. The period in which these playwrights produced their plays was regarded as the rich and the golden age of Sanskrit Drama.
The earliest Sanskrit plays were based on the Vedas and Upanishads. In our ancient classical literature, drama has been regarded as ‘the fifth Veda’ and it is pertinently termed as the ‘Drishya Kaayva.’ H.H. Anniah Gowda gives us an interesting account of the origin of drama.

Taking recitation from the Rig Veda, imitation from Yajur Veda, melody from Sama Veda, Siva contributed “tandava” dance of violent emotion, Parvati contributed “Lasya” of tender feeling, Vishnu contributed the four dramatic styles, there was born “Naatyashyam Pancham Vedam”, the fifth Veda called Nataka or Drishya Kaayya. (40)

In Appendix 1 to the Collected Plays Vol.2 in his note on The Fire and the Rain, Karnad also gives the details of the birth of Drama. Indra and the other gods requested Brahma to provide entertainment that could restore the health of the society.

The Sanskrit plays like Abhijnana-Sakuntalam, Vikramorvasiyam and Malavikagni - mitram of Kalidasa; Swapanavasavadattam of Bhasa; Uttararamacharita of Bhababhuti and Venisamhara and Mudrarakshasa of Visakhadatta are some of the worth noting plays. In fact, they form an imperishable part of our literary heritage. However, from the seventh century onwards, there was noticeable decline in the quality and originality in playwriting in Sanskrit. With the decline of the Sanskrit drama, the folk theatre in regional languages started dominating the stage.

Later on it was Sri Sankara, a saint-philosopher tried to refresh the Vedic religion and culture. He preached the importance of religion which obviously gave rise to the Bhakti cult. Indians were known for their cultural heritage and religious fervour; they held the religion and Vedas in high esteem. Thereafter, the Indian saints like Tukaram, Ramadas, Kabir, Chaitanya, Tulsidas and Basaveshwara also highlighted the
importance of Bhakti. The spread of the Bhakti cult was chiefly responsible for various kinds of popular dramatic performances in various regions of the country, namely, *Ramlila, Raslila* and *Nautanki* of North, *Tamasha* of Maharashtra, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Jatra* of Bengal and *Yakshagana* of Karnataka etc. Apart from the stories from the epics and legends of the country, satires on men and morals also formed the theme of these performances. In this way, according to S.K. Bhatta, in the process of evolution of the Indian drama, the Classical Sanskrit Drama and the folk theatre made a great impact upon each other. (4)

These dramatic performances were followed by translations of Sanskrit plays into regional languages. With the establishment of British regime in India, a search for a new theatre was strongly felt. Further, the British education made its everlasting impact on the social structure of the country. The most vital thing is that the war of Independence of 1857 gave rise to a new awakening among the people. As a result, a number of twentieth century writers gave a new turn to the Indian writing and thought expressing the contemporary urge for freedom. In this way the drama served as an instrument for bringing about awareness among the common people of the country.

Though it is difficult to classify Indian English plays and playwrights into definite categories, for the convenience of our study, they can be divided broadly into two phases- the Pre-Independence and the Post-Independence.

**THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PHASE:**

Initially drama as a genre of Indian English literature was not so popular as compared to the other genres like poetry and fiction. In spite of certain limitations and hindrances, Indian playwrights continued to write plays in English. K.M. Banerji’s *The Persecuted*, published in 1831, is perhaps the first Indian play in English. It is a social play dealing with a
crucial issue of traditional values and the new ideas brought in from the west. M.K. Naik, an eminent scholar, rightly states that Indian English drama saw the first light of the day when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote *The Persecuted* in 1831. (1982 97) However, the real journey of Indian English drama started with the publication of Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Is this called Civilization?* in 1871. He himself rendered some of his plays into English viz *Ratnavali* (1859) and *Sermista* (1859). Since then sporadic attempts were made to write plays in English. Later on in the early twentieth century, under the impact of British Drama, Indian English Drama became conspicuous in the literary world.

The playwrights of the Pre-Independence period were greatly influenced by the Shakespearean tradition and classical dramatic tradition. In this context M.N. Sundararaman aptly states:

Indeed, most of the dramatists of the Pre-Independence period have been deeply influenced by the classical traditions as also by the characteristics of the popular stage of the folk art…and the western (traditions)…(3)

The Pre-Independence era witnessed eminent playwrights like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Haridranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai who made substantial contribution to the growth of Indian English Drama. In this phase we find plays and playlets particularly dealing with the themes from legends and epics, events from history and the problems of contemporary society. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, the two renowned poets of India, were the first Indian dramatists in English worth considering. It is important to note the fact that Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and H.N. Chattopadhyaya are known as the ‘big three’ in the realm of Indian English drama. That is why their contribution to the growth of Indian English drama is to be taken into consideration.
Rabindranath Tagore is a prolific dramatist who himself translated most of his Bengali plays into English. All these appeared in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1936). His plays are mainly known for their originality and for skilful blending of spiritualism, symbolism and lyrical quality.

Tagore’s widely acclaimed plays *The Post Office* (1914) and *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1914) in Bengali were translated respectively by Devabrata Mukhopadhyaya and K.C. Sen in to English.

Some of the earliest plays of Tagore are *Sanyasi* (*The Asectic* 1884), *The King and the Queen* (1889), *Sacrifice* (1890), *Chitra* (1892), *Karna and Kunti* (1897) and *Gandhari’s Prayer* (1897). His later plays such as *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1914), *The Waterfall* (*Mukta-Dhara* 1922), *The Red Oleanders* (1925) and *The Post Office* (1914) are written in the allegorical and symbolic mode, and are considered to be his most vital contribution as a dramatist. He also wrote a number of romantic playlets based on Buddhist themes. They are *Malini* (1912), *The Worship of the Dancing Girl* (*Natir Puja* 1926), and *The Untouchable Girl* (*Chandalika*, 1933).

Besides being a great poet and playwright, he was an actor and a theatre artist well-versed in the great dramatic tradition. Greatly influenced by Kalidasa, Shakespeare and Ibsen, he tried to bring coordination between the East and the West.

Another significant contemporary of Tagore is Sri Aurobindo who wrote plays directly in English and imitated the blank verse drama of the Elizabethans. He was a versatile genius who was not only proficient in the great classics of Greece, Rome, France, and Spain but was fully acquainted with the rich Sanskrit Literature. He was a great creative artist with abundant knowledge of Indian philosophy, culture, and society. *Perseus, the Deliverer* (1942), *Vasavadutta* (1957), *Rodogune* (1958), *The Viziers of Bassora* (1959) and *Eric* (1960) are complete plays which
underscore the need for love as love alone is the great remedy for all forms of evil.

The last name of the ‘Big Three’ in the realm of Indian English drama is Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. He is one of the multifaceted playwrights of contemporary India. His dramatic output could be classified as devotional plays, social plays, historical plays and miscellaneous plays.

His seven plays entitled as *Poems and Plays* (1927) dealing with the lives of some Maharashtrian saints, could be incorporated in the category of devotional plays. They are - *Raidas, Chokhamela, Eknath, Pundalik, Saku Bai, Jayadeva and Tukaram*. They are all written in verse, and are playlets rather than full-length plays. The first play, Raidas deals with the cobbler-saint of that name. And Tukaram, the last one in this group is said to be the best in terms of characterization and plot construction.

The most significant of Harindranath’s social plays are found in his collection of *Five Plays* (1937). They are *The Window, The Parrot, The Sentry’s Lantern, The Coffin and The Evening Lamp*. *The Window* and *the Parrot* depict the playwright’s acute awareness of the social problems. In *The Sentry’s Lantern* the dramatist symbolically expresses the hope of the dawn of a new era for the poor. *The Coffin* satirizes the world of the bourgeois artist, and *The Evening Lamp* is dedicated to “those who may be able to light it towards the New Dawn of Realism”. (Iyengar, 1974:197)

Despite the remarkable and abiding contribution of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Chattopadhyaya, Indian English Drama “has never reached the high status of prose fiction or poetry…. (the) dramatists have not solved the problem of fusing dramatic stories with dialogue and sense.
of good theatre, all of which are indispensable to the success of a play on the stage.” (William 121)

A.S.P. Ayyar was also a notable playwright who wrote six plays on social and reformist themes. Some of his famous plays are: In the *Clutch of the Devil* (1926), *Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1943), *Sita’s Choice* and Other Plays (1935), *The Slaves of Ideas and Other Plays* (1941). *Sita’s Choice* deals with a social problem of the remarriage of a widow. In Ayyar’s plays the purpose is more important than craftsmanship and plot and characterizations are also driven into margin.

T.P. Kailasam is also a prominent playwright in the Indian English Literature. He had an excellent knowledge of the English and Western dramatic traditions. He wrote both in Kannada and English. His English plays are *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna or The Brahmin’s Curse* (1946), *Keechaka* (1949) and *A Monologue: Don’t Cry* (1933). In his English plays, he employs classical themes which deal with contemporary issues.

His subtle power of observation and deep understanding of human nature enabled him to create convincing characters like Polee Kitti, Ranganna, Nagatte, and Satu. As a playwright, he reveals an excellent fusion of genius and intuitive vision. He had a great power of imagination and a thorough knowledge of the theatre.

So far as the Pre-Independence era is concerned, among the few women playwrights, only name that seems to be worth considering is that of Bharati Sarabhai. She was profoundly influenced by the Gandhian philosophy. So her first verse play *The Well of the People* (1943) clearly reflects the impact of Gandhi. It deals basically with the theme of untouchability. The protagonist is portrayed vaguely and her thoughts and actions lack vigour and vitality. “The ideas are beautiful but the action gets lost in the midst of verse and sentiment.” (Anniah Gowda 45) Her
second play *Two Women* (1952) written in prose realistically presents a picture of Indian womanhood. There is a fine blending of the material and the spiritual world in the play.

J.M. Lobo Prabhu seems to be the significant name in Pre-Independence Indian English drama. He wrote a number of plays but only two plays, *Mother of New India: A Play of the Indian Village in Three Acts* (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945) appeared before Independence. His *Collected Plays* was published in 1956. He is well-known for his skilful dialogue writing and creating admirable situations. However, his characters do not appear life-like and convincing.

Apart from the major playwrights of the Pre-Independence era, a few more names of playwrights may be taken into consideration, though they have made little contribution to Indian English Drama. Among them are: S. Fyzee-Rahamin (*Daughter of the Ind*); Sudhindra N. Ghose (*Colours of a Great City : Two Playlets - The Defaulters and Pippa Dances*); R.K. Narayan (*The Watchman of the Lake*); K.R.S. Iyengar (*The Storm in a Teacup and The Battle of the Optionals*); D.K. Roy (*Life of Chaitanya*); Balwant Gargi (*The Vultures and the Other Plays*); and Mrinalini Sarabhai (*The Captive Soil*).

While commenting on the contributions of the playwrights of Pre-Independence phase, Dr.S.Krishna Bhatta concludes:

... the playwrights of the phase have not fully exploited the abundant sources of our history, epics and legends....most of the playwrights of the phase do not seem to write with a distinct awareness of the question of the staging of their plays. Their plays appear to be primarily meant to be read. (1987 90-92)
POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA:

During the early phase of the Post-Independence also there has been no notable development in Indian English Drama. However, one important thing about the plays written in this period is that they show a greater impact of the West. It appears that the playwrights of this period have made various types of experiment in handling the themes and characters and also in employing new models and techniques. Initially they did not get a chance for staging their plays. Most of theatres were occupied by the plays written in regional languages. Indian English plays were given only occasional performances. There was, in fact, no regular school of Indian English Drama. However, during this period, the westerners showed their keen interest in Indian literature in general and Indian English Drama in particular. Some of the plays written by the prominent playwrights like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Gurucharan Das received a good response in the West. A few plays like Das’ Mira, Pratap Sharma’s A Touch of Brightness and Asif Currimbhoy’s The Dumb Dancer were successfully staged in Europe and U.S.A. It was really a remarkable achievement. In India, the Theatre Group in Mumbai and other agencies also staged the plays of these playwrights.

It is to be noted that after Independence most of the plays were written in prose. However, some playwrights like G.V. Desani, P.A. Krishnaswamy, Manjeri Isvaran, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy were drawn to poetic drama. G.V. Desani’s Hali (1950) is the finest poetic play of this period which received great appreciation for its rich imagery and symbolism. It is an autobiographical play which depicts a serious love affair. It was successfully staged in London and India. P.A. Krishnaswamy’s The Flute of Krishna (1950) is another poetic play which depicts devotee’s unflinching faith in God. Manjeri Isvaran’s Yama and Yami (1948) written in poetic prose brings out the incestuous love of
Yami for her brother. Lakhan Deb has written three verse plays: Tiger Claw (1967), Vivekanand (1972) and Murder at the Prayer Meeting (1976). Tiger Claw and Murder at the Prayer Meeting are historical plays. The first one is about the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji and the second one, showing great impact of T.S. Eliot, is concerned with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

If we look at the galaxy of Post-Independence playwright, we come to know that the number of prose playwrights is larger than that of verse playwrights. Asif Currimbhoy is one of the notable playwrights in Indian Writing in English. He has published about thirty plays, the first of them being The Tourist Mecca (1959). He is a prolific writer focusing the various subjects like contemporary politics, social and economic problems, the East-West encounter, psychological tension, Indian philosophy, religion and art.

Currimbhoy’s social concerns are clearly reflected in his plays, The Doldrummers (1962), Thorns On a Canvas (1968), The Hungry Ones (1965) and The Miracle Seed (1973). The Doldrummers, a play in two-acts was banned by the government soon after its publication but later on the ban was lifted. It was presented on the stage in 1969 by the Little Theatre Group in Delhi.

The major political events which attracted Currimbhoy’s attention are the partition and its aftermath in The Captives (1968), the liberation of Goa from Portuguese domination in Goa: A Tragedy in Two Acts (1964), Indian freedom movement in An Experiment With Truth (1969), the Naxalite movement in Inquilab (1970), the Bangla Desh war in The Refugee (1971) and student unrest in Gujarat in The Dissident M.L.A. (1974) and the birth of Bangla Desh in Sonar Bangala (1972). In short, Currimbhoy incorporates all the contemporary issues in his plays. Therefore, he is one of the most successful playwrights in Indian English.
drama. He is said to be “India’s first authentic voice in the theatre.” (Agrawal, 2002 40)

The contribution of Mahasweta Devi, renowned Bengali playwright, should also be taken into consideration. She has written several plays of which *Mother of 1084*, *Urvashi O Johnny*, *Aajir*, *Bayen* and *Water* are worth noting. Mahasweta seeks to throw light on the predicament of the individuals placed in different social situations. Her plays show her commitment and concern for the downtrodden section of the society who are deprived of their basic rights. She fights for the Dalits and Tribals. “Her non-dramatic writing, especially activist writings also reveal her concern for human rights…..” (Dasan 137)

The other notable playwrights in the Post-Independence era are Pratap Sharma, Girish Karnad, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurucharan Das, Gieve Patel, Lakhan Deb, M.V. Rama Sarma, Santha Rama Rau. The most outstanding playwrights of this period are Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani. And even Manjula Padmnabhan and Dina Mehta are also contemporary playwrights whose plays can be taken into consideration.

Pratap Sharma’s plays *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has a War Cry* (1970) criticize social hypocrisy. His plays become successful on the stage in the foreign land. Sex seems to be the major theme of his plays. Nissim Ezekiel’s Three Plays: *Nalini : A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem : A Tragedy*, *The Sleep Walkers : An Indo-American Farce* (1969) are remarkable for bold thematic experiments and masterly use of irony and fantasy. *Son of Deprivation*, a short play was also published in 1969. The main feature of Ezekiel’s plays is a skilful use of ironical fantasy.

Gurucharan Das’ *Larins Sahib* (1970) is a historical play which deals with nineteenth century colonial India. Das’ *Mira* (1971) portrays the saint Mira’s selfless love for Lord Krishna which was “successfully
produced as a ballet in New York, and as a play in Bombay.” (Iyengar, 1974:734) His another play, *Jakhoo Villa* which deals with the theme of decadence in modern Hindu family in Simla.

There are other important Indian English playwrights in this phase who have contributed in their own ways to the growth of Indian English Drama. M.V. Rama Sarma’s *Collected Plays* (1982) is a group of eleven plays on divergent subjects. *Youth and Crabbed Age, Like to Like* and *This Busy World* are his playlets in which the impact of Bernard Shaw is strongly felt. *Shakuntala, Marpessa* and *Urvasi* are plays dealing with the theme of love. *Towards Marriage* (1954) and *The Carnival* are both realistic and satirical. *The Mahatma* (1979) deals with the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi.

Santha Rama Rau’s play, *A Passage to India* is modelled upon E.M. Forster’s famous novel *A Passage to India*. M. Krishnamurti’s *The Cloth of Gold* (1951) is a dance drama set in feudal times. K.S.R. Sastri’s *Droupadi* is a very interesting retelling of the Mahabharata story. D.M. Borgaonkar’s *Image Breakers* (1938) is a problem play on the marriage institution.

these playwrights reveal the fact that “playwriting in English by Indian is not impossible.” (Yadav 9) They speak volumes of the fact that the future of Indian English Drama is certainly bright and optimistic.

GREAT EXPERIMENTORS AND INNOVATORS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA:

The plays discussed so far under the Pre-Independence and the Post-Independence phases (except the plays of Tagore) were those originally written in English. Among the plays translated into English, there are a few which were first written in the regional languages and subsequently translated into English by the authors themselves. It is observed that dramas written in regional Indian languages and their English translations have achieved a notable growth in the recent decades. In this modern era, cultural interaction has become a significant factor. In order to connect the two globes and make the foreign readers familiar with Indian tradition and culture, there is a need for English translation of literature in the Indian languages. R.K. Dhawan’s remark in this regard seems to be pertinent. “The translations have forged a link between the east and the west, north and south, and contributed to the growing richness of contemporary creative consciousness.” (1994 185) Playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Rakesh Mohan and Mahesh Dattani have made bold innovations and experiments. They have used themes related to the present social scenario in order to bring about social change and make people aware of the need to renovate the present social structure and usher in a renewed and better social system. Broadly speaking a number of Twentieth Century writers have given a new turn to Indian writing and thought. Contemporary Indian writing is rich, complex and stimulating.

Among the regional playwrights, Girish Karnad is the one who himself has translated his plays into English. He is widely appreciated for
his technical experiments as well as displaying a wide range of themes and subjects. He merges myth and reality, past and present; he brings in legendary and historical figures in an effort to carry his message of restructuring the present society. Karnad came on the scene at the right time, when Indian drama was at the threshold of a new era of innovation and experimentation. The Progressive Theatre Movement which had begun in 1920s, made advancement in 1940s and ultimately gave rise to Indian People’s Theatre Association. This association known as IPTA played a very important role in the regeneration of theatre and other arts.

If we look at the playwriting in the Post-Independence scenario, we realize that the Post-Independence Indian Drama has made a fresh ground both technically and thematically. The playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad seem to be greatly influenced by the dramatic style of Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, Eliot, Sartre, Camus and Brecht. These Indian playwrights, who truly, present the modern Indian sensibility, have been acclaimed as pioneers of modern Indian drama. Novelty in technique is one of the important traits of the plays written during this period. The major focus here is on the feelings and experiences of the ordinary men engaged in day-to-day struggle for existence.

Vijay Tendulkar, a noted screen and television and short-story writer is a famous contemporary Indian playwright. He has been the most influential dramatist and theatre personality in Marathi. Initially working as a journalist, he came across all kinds of violence and evil things in the society. Tendulkar exposes various forms of violence in his plays like *Vultures* (*Gidhade*, 1971), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972).

In his early plays, Tendulkar depicts the sufferings of the urban middle class people. Later on the focus is shifted to ugliness of his characters’ psyche. For instance, his later play *Silence! The Court is in*
Session (1967) shows how inhuman treatment is meted out to women in a male-dominated world. Here, the technique of ‘play-within-the play’ is deftly used to bring out the inner agonies of Miss Benare. In Sakharam Binder (1972) the focus is on the ugliness of human nature. In this play, Sakharam, the Binder, indulges in illegal sexual relations with several women to satisfy his insatiable lust. For the first time, Tendulkar made a bold attempt to bring neglected areas of our common life into the theatre. Ghashiram Kotwal (1972) which was performed in the theatre thousand times in India and abroad, is a political drama. It is an excellent combination of Marathi folk performance and contemporary theatrical techniques. It shows the abuses of power, corruption, sex and violence. In short, he vehemently criticizes hypocrisy, promiscuity, dishonesty and such vices existing in the society. He has introduced bold innovations, made significant experiments and given new dimensions to Indian drama. His play Silence! The Court is in Session bagged him a place among leading Indian playwrights in late sixties while his Ghashiram Kotwal brought him international fame in the mid-seventies.

Badal Sircar appeared in the Indian theatre at an appropriate time when Indian drama was at the threshold of a new era of innovation and experimentation. He is an eminent Bengali playwright who has written more than forty five plays. He introduced a new dramatic idiom in Bengal. His play, Evam Indrajit is a classic of contemporary Indian theatre. He firmly believes that theatre is an instrument of social transformation. His plays like Evam Indrajit (1962), That Other History (Baki Itihas, 1964) and There’s No End (Shesh Nei, 1971) and Pagla Ghoda (Mad Horse - 1967) deal with political, social, psychological and existential problems. Evam Indrajit strongly reminds us of Beckett’s Waiting for Godot.
Greatly influenced by the Russian playwright Grotowski’s concept of ‘Poor Theatre’, Sircar formulated his ‘Third Theatre’ which surpasses the confines of the urban commercial theatre and the indigenous folk theatre. (Reddy 133) Putting aside all the stage props like sets, costumes, lights, sound, etc. Sircar’s Third Theatre lays stress on the most important tool that is the human body. Through his Third Theatre, Sircar wants to focus on the nature of exploitation in the realm of industry and agriculture and to establish equality by making people aware of their existence. He wrote several plays after the formulation of the Third Theatre. *Procession* (1972), *Bhoma* (1974) and *Stale News* (1979) are the plays in English version based on the concept of the Third Theatre. Sircar has attempted to revolutionize the Indian drama by introducing his concept of the Third Theatre. The influence of Sartre and Camus is evident in the themes of his plays. His plays offer a faithful representation of the contemporary society. The meaninglessness of modern life is the major concern in his plays.

Mahesh Dattani is another important and dynamic playwright in Indian English Drama today. In 1998, he won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his plays *Final Solutions* and *Other Plays*. He is a well-known for his contribution as playwright, actor, director, dancer and teacher. After the outstanding contribution of Badal Sircar, it is Mahesh Dattani who has given a new direction and sense of purpose to Indian English Drama. The first volume includes eight plays such as *Seven Steps Around the Fire, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Final Solutions, Tara, Dance Like a Man* etc. and the second volume including two earlier plays contains ten plays such as *Thirty Days in September, Clearing the Rubble, Mango Souffle, The Swami and Winston, Morning Raga, Uma and The Fairy Queen, EK Alag Mausam and The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child*. His plays bring forth some of the important problems
of the modern society like sex, religion, communal tension, feminine identity, hijra marriage, homosexuality and lesbian relationship and crime and disease etc. Therefore, his plays appear to be revolting and sometimes outrageous. Bijay Kumar Das calls him, “a playwright of contemporary urban India.” (32) Apart from contemporary issues, he shows his love of music and dance. The love of music and passion for dance are depicted through the protagonists of *Dance like a Man* and *Morning Raga*. Dattani, being himself a stage performer, lays stress on theatre and the performance of the actor. In fact, the audience comes to know the worth of a play only when it is performed on the stage.

Dattani raises the various issues like sexuality, criminality, and focuses on the topical subjects like communal violence and horrible diseases like Aids and makes the characters to express their views unhesitantly.

If we look at the growing success of the plays of Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan, we can certainly remark that the twenty first century seems to be productive era for Indian English Drama. Dattani focuses on the mean, ugly and unhappy sides of human life. Manjula Padmanabhan’s pioneering play *Harvest* won Onassis Award and achieved world wide popularity. It seriously portrays the mean and inhuman world in the metropolitan city like Mumbai where mothers sell their children in exchange for the handful of rice. She has also written five monologues entitled *Hidden Fires* which brings out violence in its various forms prevalent in the society. Both, Dattani and Padmanabhan are dynamic and promising and will certainly contribute to the growth of playwriting. Therefore R.K. Dhawan highly appreciates their dramatic efforts. He writes: “Very recently Indian English drama has shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused life into this branch of writing.” (S. Shukla 7)
In conclusion, it can be said that it is mainly the drama in Indian languages and the drama in English translations that have registered a remarkable growth in recent times. They have contributed a lot to the development of India English Drama. On the basis of the excellent plays written by Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan, we may say that the Indian English Drama has achieved a considerable measure of success in the recent times. However, “it is still struggling for its authenticity and identity; it is making a faltering but steady march towards its destination. It has, of course, survived the test of time and it has all the possibilities and potentialities to carve a niche for itself in days to come.” (Yadav 13)

Now-a-days Indian theatre in English has started emerging with a distinctive and vigorous identity. The plays of the leading playwrights of contemporary Indian stage like Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and the women playwrights like Mahasweta Devi, Manjula Padmanabhan, Uma Parameswaran reveal the fact that the Indian English Drama will surely flourish and prosper in the near future.

SECTION II
THE CONCEPT OF MYTH AND HISTORY:

In the realm of Indian English Drama, Girish Karnad holds a prominent place as a contemporary playwright. Earlier most of the Indian English plays produced were meant to be read and far away from the theatrical performances. But Karnad’s plays make good reading and they also make excellent theatre. He deftly makes use of myths, legends and history in his plays to present the contemporary issues. He firmly believes that the roots of contemporary issues are deeply embedded in them. He attempts to interpret myth and history in the modern context focusing on
“the presentation of complex cultural fabric of India. Karnad loves to discover less known and obscure myths, tries to understand their significance and relate them to the chosen story.” (Nigam 35) He is master craftsman in whose writing we find a fine blending of genius and intuitive vision, a fertile imagination and subtle sense of wit and humour.

The present study makes an attempt to critically examine the way Karnad makes use of myth and history in his plays. To put it in other words, the study attempts to analyze in what way he uses myths, legends and folktales in his plays and how he deploys history to show its relevance to the contemporary themes. Before we proceed to analyze Karnad’s inclination behind using myth and history to present the contemporary problems, it would be fruitful to know the basic concepts of myth and history and their implications in the present context.

The present section incorporates a general view of myth and the concept of myth is discussed briefly. The origin of myth, myth as an early literary form, its function, its relevance to society and societal traditions regulated by myth are considered here. The section also points out how a playwright rewrites myth to suit his self as well as the sensibilities of his times.

The term ‘myth’ has been interpreted variously. It is derived from the Greek word mythos which means ‘fable’, ‘tale’, ‘talk’, or ‘speech’. In fact, myth is a much disputed term which eludes exact definition and precise categorization. At the outset, it is necessary to understand the general nature and function of myth in some detail.

Myth is a vehicle of cultural transmission. It deals with the stories and legends of kings, martyrs and historical figures of the society to which it belongs. Sometimes, it decides the spiritual temper and the morals of society. It is an informing structure through which the culture of the community is explained.
Northrop Frye, the most influential among the myth critics, offers a simple definition of myth in his essay ‘Literature and Myth’. He states: “A myth, in its simplest and most normal significance, is a certain kind of story, generally about a god or other divine being.” (Frye, 1967 27)

The New Gresham Encyclopedia explains the meaning of myth as follows:

The word myth originally simply meant speech, then in a narrower sense, a tale or tradition, particularly one handed down from prehistoric times giving, in the form of a story about a god or hero, some ancient belief regarding the processes of nature, customs or problems of cosmogony. (53)

While explaining myth and its character, Webster’s New World College Dictionary states that myth is “a traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis but serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites, etc. of a people; myth usually involves the exploits of gods and heroes.” (954) According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, myth is “a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people.” (842) And the Dictionary of Literary Terms states the characteristic features of myth at some length:

Myth is an anonymous story, rooted in primitive folk beliefs, presenting supernatural episodes to explain natural events and phenomena. Myths attempt to interpret creation, divinity and religion; to explain the meaning of existence and death; to account for natural phenomena, and to chronicle the adventures of racial heroes. Myths have less historical background and more supernatural elements than
legends….and they are the product of a racial group, rather than the creation of an individual. Every country and literature has its mythology. (125)

According to Victor Turner myths inform us about how chaotic things took proper shape and how human life began on the earth. He states:

Myths relate how one state of affairs became another; how an unpeopled world became populated; how chaos became cosmos; how immortals became mortal; how the seasons came to replace a climate without seasons; how the original unity of mankind became a plurality of tribes or nations; how androgynous beings became men and women; and so on. (576)

In the opinion of M.H. Abrams, myth is actually a narrative of a real experience in the past, what we call myth today is not an imaginary tale, but a real life experience of the primordial society. In his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, he says:

A myth is one story in a mythology – a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, and to establish the rationale for social customs and observances and the sanctions for the rules by which men conduct their lives.”

(Reprinted 2007 106)

In Abram’s definition of myth, three points are significant: First, the hereditary character of myth, second, the belief of the particular cultural group, and third, the importance of the super-human beings. He further clarifies that the central figure or the protagonist in a myth is
always a super-human being. If the protagonist is a man rather than a supernatural human being, the story is usually not called myth but legend.

Like M.H. Abrams, some other myth critics also believe that myth is history that took place in some ancient eras. In other words it can be understood as “idealized or exaggerated history.” (Rose 1) Thus, we can say that it is a reality that happened in the ancient past presented with literary exaggerations. While commenting on the reality in myth, Malinowski rightly remarks:

Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction such as we read today in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. (632)

Mark Schorer, in his book *William Blake, The Politics of Vision* defines myth thus: “Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configuration, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend.” (qtd.in Guerin, Labour and et al 159) Alan W. Watts states that: “Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories – some no doubt a fact, and some fantasy – which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life.” (Ibid 160) Watts’ definition of myth is similar to that provided by C.G. Jung, the psychologist. His oft-quoted definition is that myth is “a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of human psyche.” (Campbell 382) Therefore, myth is related with the universal mind (the collective unconscious), and not with the individual mind. As such, myths can be called the treasure of the experiences of mankind.
With the help of myths and rituals, primitive thought establishes a particular kind of relation between past and present. Levi-Strauss, a French anthropologist emphatically affirms that the primitive mind is linked with the present. He states:

Mythical history is paradoxically both separated from the present and conjoined with it… Through ritual, the mythical ‘separate’ past is connected on the one hand with biological and seasonal periodicity and the other with the ‘conjoint’ past which links, from one generation to another, the dead with the living. (qtd.in Golf, 1992 7)

For Levi Strauss myth contains the structure of thought. He clarifies that though certain symbols and particular relations differ from culture to culture, there is an unbroken continuity in the human mind. In his view, “the psychic unity of mankind is demonstrated,” in myth and his “theory of structure varying from culture to culture is predicated by the point at which differences are merged in sameness or correspondence.” (qtd.in Lal, 1992 7) The Salient feature of myth is its flexibility by which it maintains its relevance to the present perspective. Simultaneously, it rotates on two planes of time that is the past and the present. Though it takes birth in the past time yet it surpasses the spatio-temporal dimensions. The mythical moment’s palpable presence can be perceived even in future in its particular form. In reality, it is a creative because from the primitive time to the present one, there is a continuous reinterpretation and creation of new myths. And to consider myth as only primitive seems to be a wrong concept. In the stage of evolution, its relationship can be with the primitive mind (i.e. a part of the collective unconscious) that interlinks the past with the present.

Myth is an inseparable part of the Collective Unconscious. According to C.G. Jung the materials of myths lie in the Collective
Unconscious of the race; the wide spread similarity between myths results from their common inheritance. In the cultural process, the mythical experience is never hidden because every race tries to recognize its collective ego through these myths. Through the chemistry of cultural process, myth is transformed; carrying the individual and the collective ego in the vehicle of novel perspective, and it gains a dignity and dimension in literature and art. Owing to its flexible nature, the gap between the past and the present is bridged, and it plays a significant role in the creative writings of eternal value. Homer’s *Iliad*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and in the Indian tradition Valmiki’s *The Ramayana* and Vyasa’s *The Mahabharata* are such mythical creations which gain significance in one-dimensional mobility of time in the past, the present and the future. That is what Jung refers to when he says that the “primordial images” and “psychic residua” are “the countless typical experiences of our ancestors” (617) which are inherited in the collective unconscious, and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams and private fantasies.

All these definitions of myth are possible because the term ‘myth’ has received a bewildering variety of interpretations. Therefore, Joseph Campbell aptly points out: “There is no final system for the interpretations of myths, and there will never be any such thing. Mythology is like the god Proteus . . .” (381)

According to M.H. Abrams, there is a close association between myth and ritual. He says, “Most myths involve rituals – prescribed forms of sacred ceremonials – but social anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals.” (2007 106) Arthur Cotterell also refers to the origin of myths “as deriving from rituals.” (2) Northrop Frye also expresses the same view when he says that “Myths ….. may arise in the first place to account for a ritual or a law” (1963 32)
Nand Kumar also endorses the same view: “Most scholars today would agree that in ancient societies there was considered an essential relationship between myth and ritual practice: myth clarified the prescribed action of rites; and rites in turn, enacted mythical narrative in stylized dramatic form.” (3)

Lauri Honko also emphasizes a close relation between myth and ritual. He clearly states that:

A myth expresses and confirms society’s religious values and norms; it provides patterns of behaviour to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and establishes the sanctity of cult. The true milieu of myth is to be found in religious rites and ceremonial. The ritual acting out of myth implies the defence of the world order; by imitating sacred exemplars the world is prevented from being brought to chaos. The re-enactment of a creative, for example, the healing wrought by a god in the beginning of time, is the common aim of myth and ritual. (49)

Various thinkers have attempted to postulate theories of myth. Hence a number of viewpoints regarding myth are available to us. James Frazer in his *Golden Bough* stressed the idea of Northrop Frye that actions, gestures and dances were the sources of primitive myths. Abrams, Cotterell, and Frye trace the origin of myth in rituals and point out that there is an inherent relationship between folklore and myth. In the passage of time the ritual forms lost contact and they passed into myths. However, folktales form a continuum with the literary fictions. The most popular fictions of the past and present are based on folktales. On the line with the folklore, myths have an abstract story pattern. The things that happen in stories take place in myths also. Northrop Frye in *Fables of Identity* writes: “Myth as compared with folktale….are usually
in a special category of seriousness: they have believed to have “really happened”, or to have some exceptional significance in explaining certain features of life such as ritual.” (1963 32) Frazer sees ritual as mainly arising from magic, which eventually lost its place of importance to religion. Besides, it came to be believed that “gods themselves are adepts in magic, guarding their persons by talismans and working their will by spells and incantations.” (240)

Myth was, thus, in part a fiction which had been created to explain hoary, old customs. It was, in fact, a later form of earlier custom or customary belief. The ritualistic interpretation of the nature of myth by Frazer was further elaborated by Jane Harrison. In her essay, From Ritual to Art, she suggests that myth and drama arose from ritual related to a demi-god of whom Dionysus is considered to be a manifestation. According to Jane Harrison, “ritual does not always develop into art, though in all probability drama as art has always to go through the stage of ritual.” (323)

Another theory connects myth with archetypes. Maud Bodkin emphasized archetypal literary criticism. In her Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, she examines The Ancient Mariner and The Waste Land and demonstrates the significance of archetypal patterns and imagery in the personal unconscious and in social history. This same aspect can be strengthened with the ramification of myth criticism and can be discerned in the opinions of critics such as James Frazer, Carl Jung and Northrop Frye. Frazer in The Golden Bough which shows the etiological or visual functions of mythology strengthens this concept of argument saying that the ritual actions, gestures and dances are the sources of myth. He “identified elemental patterns of myth and ritual that….recur in the legends and ceremonials of diverse and far-flung cultures and religions.” (Abrams, 2009 23) Frazer is of the opinion that the actions of human
beings were transformed into myths with the passage of time. Northrop Frye also expressing his view emphasizes the archetypal significance of myth. He writes: “. . . it is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth is the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative and archetype when speaking of significance.” (1972 429)

However, these anthropologists applied their theories in relating myth to literature; philosophers like Ernest Cassirer related myth to metaphysics. To Cassirer, myth was not an explanation of primitive man’s thoughts and beliefs, but an interpretation of his state of feeling. In An Essay on Man, Cassirer says “the real substratum of myth is not a substratum of thought but of feeling” (81). Myth arises from certain feelings like fear of death. In either case, this much should be clear, that pervasive and powerful yet more or less ineffable phenomena or their felt experience tended to become myths.

The interpretation of myth as an expression of feelings or the inner state of the people who participated in creation and perception of myth led to the psychological study of myth. In The Cambridge Companion to Freud, Neu Jerome observes that Sigmund Freud looked upon myth as projection of the unconscious, which was the repository of sexual fantasies. Myth was, according to Freud, analogous to dreams. He illustrated his point through Sophocles’ rendering of the Oedipus myth. To Freud, the myth was not a mere manifestation of the psychology of Sophocles or an exclusive, specifically individual character called Oedipus. He suggested that the rendering intended “rather to show how the play serves as a collection, publicly constituted fantasy that corresponds to the incestuous and rivalrous fantasies harbouried by each member of the audience as repressed residues of childhood.” (qtd. in
Thus being essentially projections of the personal unconscious, the myth prompted each member of the audience to read into or superimpose upon Sophocles’ projections his or her own inner complexes. The Sophoclean ‘telling’ was, of course, only one among many tellings of this pattern. Such projections eventually consolidated into a ‘collection’ or commonly held myth.

Carl Jung accepted Freud’s theory of myth as a projection of the unconscious but refused to attribute the origin of myth solely to concealed sexual desires or of sexual expression. In other words, Jung departed from the Freudian argument based on instincts in the Unconscious. He put forward the idea of the collective consciousness, which he believed was a stratum of the unconscious that was deeper than the personal unconscious. In the words of Carl Jung:

We mean by collective unconscious, a certain psychic disposition shaped by the forces of heredity; from it consciousness has developed. In the physical structure of the body we find traces of earlier stages of evolution, and we may expect the human psyche also to conform in its make-up to the law of phylogeny. It is a fact that in eclipses of consciousness – in dreams, narcotic states, and cases of insanity – there came to the surface psychic products or contents that show all the traits of primitive levels of psychic development. The images themselves are sometimes of such a primitive character that we might suppose them derived from ancient, esoteric teaching. Mythological themes clothed in modern dress also frequently appear. (1989 183)

This collective unconscious, according to him is a universal and specifically human phenomenon. Its contents are almost the same everywhere, in all human societies, among all individuals. The common
patterns among these are called archetypes. Myth and fairy tale are only the more well-known expressions of these archetypes. They express the deepest unconscious feelings of the human race. Myths especially are “fundamental expression of human nature. When a myth is formed and expressed in words, consciousness, it is true, has shaped it, but the spirit of myth -- the creative urge it represents, the feelings it expresses and evokes, and even in larger part its subject matter -- come from the collective unconscious.” (Fordham 27)

In the light of the foregoing discussion, it can be said that Jung’s theory that myth is an expression of the collective unconscious seems in some way more acceptable than Freud’s attribution of it solely to hidden sexual desires. But what is it that makes such an integral part of the collective unconscious? It is probably the crises, choices, dilemmas and moral struggles that it depicts which hold good for most societies in all ages. For instance, the moral struggle which arises from the sexual relationship between mother and son in *Oedipus Rex* seems to be basic to most societies.

Joseph Campbell reduces Jung’s theory of archetypes to a single archetype, the hero, who is “the perfect microcosmic mirror of the macrocosm.” (347) In the course of his life the hero may attain the status of a demi-god who sets an example to every human being to whom that particular myth has become familiar. Such an aura is created around his life. The mythologized version of his life becomes so strictly and inviolably ritualized that questioning any particular incident or instance in the complex shape of the myth becomes taboo to society. Even if the hero happens to make a choice which is particularly unacceptable or even reprehensible to the society at some stage of its subsequent history, forceful moralizing arguments tend to quickly justify it.
The ‘agnipariksha’ of Sita in the Ramayana is a point to be considered. After Rama rescues Sita, she is asked to enter the fire to prove her purity. It has been always and immediately justified by the explanation that Rama’s situation (his role and responsibility as king) forced him to do so. In this way, to use Campbell’s words, the entire Ramayana attempts to show how Rama is the “Perfect microcosmic mirror of the macrocosm.” (Ibid) Campbell also accepts the Freudian idea of similarity between myth and dream. He believes that like dream, myth is a “spontaneous production of the psyche.” (Ibid 4) Thus Campbell seems to arrive at an understanding of myth through both Jung and Freud and consequently he provides us with a wider base for the consideration of the history of a myth in its initial stages as well as during its transmission in subsequent ages. Campbell’s comprehensive approach allows us to look at myth in a more flexible way than most of the individual theories we have surveyed so far.

II

So far we have briefly discussed the theories of the origin and consolidation of myth as postulated by scholars and thinkers. Studies on myth and mythology have broadened the scope of the subject. Myth is studied in relation to subjects like theology, fine arts, astrology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and geography. Of these, the relation between myth and literature is an important one because it is the primary source through which myth reaches people. Let us consider the way myth has been interpreted by some literary writers and critics. Let us begin with Eliot’s review of “Ulysses, Order and Myth” which is a defense of the mythical method adopted by James Joyce in his novel Ulysses. In the review, Eliot strongly supports Joyce by stating that in “using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” Joyce “is pursuing a method which others
must pursue after him.” (1973 177) Eliot’s defense of Joyce’s mythical method arises from the realization that myth is “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” (Ibid)

We can say that Eliot’s essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* seems to have, in principle and implicitly, anticipated this kind of demand for a mythical method. In this essay, he strongly states that whenever one praises a writer, one should praise him for those aspects of his work in which he least resembles his predecessors. And for a writer to be praised thus, he must have a historical sense which “involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.” (1972 72) It is this historical sense which makes a writer “traditional”. Eliot may not speak explicitly of myth but his discourse on the past and the present and his views of Joyce’s mythical method seem suitable to our discussion of myth and its various interpretations. Myth, it would then appear, is in fact one kind of manifestation of the past. And, according to Eliot, “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (Ibid). Eliot entrusts the responsibility of such alteration to tradition, to writers who are aware that “the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way” (Ibid 73) and who also attempt to produce and develop this consciousness throughout their literary career.

Eliot states that the creative and informing power operating on the writer is tradition but he does not in this essay identify the factors of tradition which make possible the creation of new works of literature out of older ones. The task of identifying the factors of tradition has been performed in the essay *The Social Context of Literary Criticism* by Northrop Frye, who says that a society does not simply produce plays or poems but develops an entire literature. Writers draw their themes, genres, and technical skill specifically from this body of literature and not
only generally from their life. And the chief factor that contributes this literature is myth which “recounts something that is (or at least has been perceived as) centrally important for a society’s history, religion or social structure.” (Frye, 1973 148) However, Frye points out that the function of myth in literature is different from its function in society:

Myths…. enable members of a society to hold together, to accept authority, to be loyal to each other and courageous against attack. Such myths are verbal constructions designed for specific purposes. In literature, myths are disinterested: they are simply forms of human activity and as such they communicate the joy that brings to pure creation. (Fry, 1973 156-157)

But one has to admit that there is more to myth in literature than this “Joy” and one needs to advance Frye’s notion maintained in examination of specific cases. Through an examination of Girish Karnad’s plays in the present thesis, it is hoped that we shall see that in literature myth has more roles to perform than providing “Joy” to writers and entertainment to readers.

Coming back to Frye’s understanding of the function of myth, we may note that Frye alludes to the primary meaning of myth as “a certain type of story” (1963 30) which forms the “matrix of literature and major poetry (among other forms of literature) keeps returning to it. In every age poets who are thinkers…..and are deeply concerned with the origin or destiny or desires of mankind…..with anything that belongs to the larger outlines of what literature can express….can hardly find a literary theme that does not coincide with myth.” (1963 33) the paradigm proposed by Frye brings out the continuity and inevitability of the use of myth in literature. Not only is it inevitable that literature will use myth thus in every age in one way or the other but also that the readers will need this
means to sustain them amidst doubts, complexities, perplexities and in the face of existential cruxes like death.

While our study relates to the presence of myth in literature, we should remember that the role of myth is not restricted to literary people only. Irrespective of one’s literary background, every individual encounters myth in his/her life. The story of a myth may be narrated in the form of tales by an elder, probably a grandmother. In later life, the versions imbibed from these tales continue to influence a person. In addition, revivals of contact by means of books, various parts of the process of education like history lessons, mass-media including traditional country theatre and ritual, political propaganda and so on, continue a person’s exposure to mythology. In fact, the survival of ancient myth even to the present day is marked by its elastic response to change. Myth adapts itself according to the purpose and the situation in which the narrator and the narratee find themselves in the process of narration. The diverse tellings may be influenced, for instance, “by the beliefs of individual communities, the literary conventions of regional culture and the specific configurations of social reforms.” (Richman 8) A study of such tellings leads us not only to oral and written literatures but also to other forms of art besides literature, all of which manifest themselves as probably the most intelligible links between myth and society.

The myths of ancient civilizations reach us only by virtue of the fact that they became a part of the written tradition. Oral tradition is the earlier form through which myth was communicated to the people. But unlike the written tradition, it reaches less number of people. In the written tradition, myth gets recorded and can be preserved for future generations as well. Myth, in the oral tradition, is however less static and more versatile since it permits changes. David Buchan says, “Where high
literature relies primarily on the written word, folk literature relies primarily on the performed word.” (977) Literature under the oral tradition is referred to as folk literature or folklore. When it enters the written tradition it is no longer called folklore. Thus, folklore is the origin of the classical literatures of the world. They were translated into the written tradition. In this process, folk literature would have undergone transformations or alterations depending upon the translator. In the oral tradition, myth manifests through human memory in various forms like harikathas, puppet theatre, musical recitals, traditional dramas etc. Hence the modifications myth undergoes are numerous. Such tellings, moreover, often become local and personal experiences, being confined to a particular group or a place. Moreover, as Wendy Doniger says in *Fluid and Fixed Texts in India*, within the same group or place “the same event happens over and over again, but it may not happen exactly in the same way each time, and yet each happening is true.” (35) That is, the way it comes to mean something to the reader is variable even as some essential form of the myth is taken for granted by almost everyone. Indeed at such times of narration, variation may take quite unexpected forms. For instance, Ramanujan, in his essay “Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five examples and three thoughts on translation”, mentions a telling of the Ramayana in Kannada sung by some traditional bards. In that telling, “Sita is believed to be the daughter of Ravana (here called Ravulu). Ravana is supposed to have himself delivered Sita through his nose.” (36) Obviously such a detail is at variance with the ‘received’ versions of the Ramayana.

With the growing dominance of written culture over the oral tradition in India, the different tellings of the Rama story came to be recorded and preserved in the written form which began to appropriate to itself the status of authoritative version. Ramanujan’s essay “Three
Hundred Ramayanas” attempts to show that not merely the social location but also the ideology of a particular place or group affects the telling of any myth. Ramanujan provides surprising examples from the Jaina tellings of the Rama myth like Vimalasuri’s Ramayana in which “the Rama story no longer carries Hindu values.” (33) The sympathies of these tellings are obviously with Ravana who is assumed to have been “malignized” (Ibid) by the Brahmins who certainly seemed to have privileged platforms for telling the story. Thus the Ramayana was translated in many regional languages which became the tool for the spreading of the Rama story among the people in many regions of India and this change also worked changes in the shapes of myths.

Thus it is interesting to see how myth gets created and propagated in the society through the medium of literature. Every nation tries to glorify its culture, society and myth. It is through the Christian myth the Westerners tried to ‘civilize’ the orient in the colonial context. During colonization, the Westerners spread Christianity and the Christian myth throughout the territories that they had colonized. They considered their religion and myth as superior to all others. The colonized nations realized the need to glorify their native myths and began glorifying them. In his work, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, Otto Rank says:

The Prominent civilized nations such as the Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews and Hindus, the inhabitants of Iran and of Persia, the Greeks and the Romans as well as the Teutons and others, all began at an early stage to glorify their heroes, mythical princes and kings, founders of religions, dynasties, empires or cities, in brief their national heroes in a number of poetic tales and legends. (1)

Epic poetry is the earliest form of myth in the written tradition. In the context of Greece, Robinson says, “The earliest literature in Greece
was poetry: for in a ruder age, when there was little or no writing, poetry was a more natural form of composition than prose, as being easier to remember. It was not until the historical times that a real prose literature arose. The earliest known poetry was epic.” (356) The Greco-Roman and the Indian epics are some of the oldest written sources of myth from the West and the East respectively. Poets and writers of later generations have relied on these sources for ideas and themes. Though it is hard to explain the original function of myths in the literary tradition of a land, scholars are able to understand the significance that the myths had for the literary artist and the mythological factors that literature inherited.

In the light of the above discussion regarding the origin and definitions of myth, and its relevance to society and societal traditions, we can say that myths have become the identifying factors of culture and assume a very important place in literature.

Today myth has become an encyclopedic term variously interpreted by various scholars. In conclusion it can be said that myth is an expression of man’s deepest concern about himself and his place in the scheme of the universe, his relationship with man, nature and god. Man’s nature and destiny, which are explored in literature, thus form a structure of ideas, images, beliefs, hopes and fears, love and hate. As a matter of fact, the major function of myth lies in reconciliation of an original event to interpret and explain human nature in the modern context and between the new meaning and the old event, there lies an ontological gap which myth fills with an appropriate symbolic representation. Myths apparently “derive their universal significance from the way in which they try to reconstitute an original event or explain some fact about human nature and its worldly or cosmic context.” (Gould 6) The ancient myths survive in the modern times with all their problematic intensity as they deal with the numinous and sacred. To quote Northrop Frye, “In literary criticism,
myth means ultimately mythos – a structural organizing principle of literary form.” (1971 341) Therefore, the basic contents of the myth lie in the modes that connect the ‘archetypes’ or the ‘Primordial images’ or the Collective Unconscious’ with human experience. In other words, myths interpret man’s place in the universe. They are like mirrors that reflect man’s inner self; they explore the depths of the Unconscious. No doubt, they are the products of creative fantasy, but, at the same time, they also stimulate creative fantasy. Myths always interpret human life, and in the contemporary context, they interpret the modern sensibility or the modern consciousness. The modern man perceives truth of his own self in the light of myths. It is a fact that literary work cannot be judged only on the basis of the use of myth. But to some extent, archetypal criticism can be very helpful in giving new insights into literature and into the human condition.

In its contemporary and novel perspective the relevance of myth is based on two parallel planes. One is the psychological/sociological perspective, which collectively indicates the multi-dimensional prevalence of myth. And the other is the essence of the myth which is deeply rooted in the subconscious of the race. If a writer gives expression to the in-built urges and beliefs of people clothing the myth in a novel perspective without damaging its essence, he succeeds in transforming the myth to the tick of the contemporary times. Just like that of the primitive society, the collective unconscious of the present times not only transforms the myths but gives them a novel orientation, helping the myths fit into new shape. Myth is a key to the unity and identity of human condition. The modern man rediscovers a new meaning and pattern in life in the light of his experiencing the sundering of emotion and reason during the past centuries. In this respect, what Carl Jung remarks, is quite relevant and worth quoting:
Myths…have a vital meaning. Not merely do they represent, they are the psychic life of the primitive tribe, which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has his soul. A tribe’s mythology is its living religion whose loss is always and everywhere, even among the civilized, a moral catastrophe. (1965 645)

The significance of myths in the study of literature could be realized by the fact that the writers weave their material out of the fabric of myths and legends. One of the important factors is that myths and legends “affect eternity”, and owing to their quality of timelessness, the writers draw on myths quite frequently. Another reason, which Northrop Frye refers to, is that myths, along with folktales and legends, provide abstract patterns. Writers are interested in them to bring out the similarity between the life style of our ancestors and that of ours. Richard Chase has laid stress on the literary nature of all myths. “Writers”, according to Chase, “are attracted to myth primarily because it is literature itself.” (vi)

Now having discussed the nature and function of myth and its relevance to the contemporary life, let us find out how Indian mythologies are appropriated in literature to link the past with the present. Indian myths from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas are numerously exploited in the literary works produced in Sanskrit, regional languages and English by Indian writers. In the realm of Indian literature in English several poets, novelists and playwrights have exploited myths, legends and history in their works. They have tried to search and nourish their roots in their own Indian past, discover the mythical components that facilitate communication in the realm of timelessness and connect it with the experience of the immediate present. Even today people in India listen to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the other classical texts.
with great interest. These texts exert a rich influence on the Indian mind. In this context, Jawaharlal Nehru firmly believes: “I do not know of any books anywhere which have exercised such a continuous and pervasive influence on the mass mind as these two… (the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*). Dating back to a remote antiquity, they are still a living force in the life of the Indian people.” (99)

Most of the Indian playwrights writing in English like Girish Karnad have tried hard to explore deep into the realm of our past experience and by connecting it with the present one; they have succeeded in making the contemporary reality clearer and more meaningful. Meenakshi Mukherjee pertinently underscores how the Indian epics represent the collective unconscious of the entire nation. She comments, “If a world-view is required to make literature meaningful in terms of shared human experience, then the Indian epics offer a widely accepted basis of such a common background which permeates the collective conscious of the whole nation.” (M. Mukherjee 131) In the field of fiction, notable names among the Indian English novelists who have made significant use of myth are Sudhin N. Ghose, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, B.Rajan etc. For them, myths are reflective of Indian cultural tradition. The use of myth is discernible in Indian English novel on two planes - the digressional and the structural. For instance, Sudhir N. Ghose and Raja Rao have used myth in a digressional manner in their novels. Mulk Raj Anand makes the structural use of myth in his novels. Especially; the novels of Sudhin N. Ghose and Raja Rao are replete with myths, legends and folklore. For them, the thread that divides the mythical time from the historical time is very subtle. R.K. Narayan speaks of the "inexhaustible vitality" (15) of our classical mythology. Sudhin N. Ghose holds that the mind of any period is mirrored in the mythology of those people. In his novel *Cradle of the Clouds*, the Panditji
categorically affirms that "Myths tell us more than bare facts. Men would die for their favourite myths, but not for bare facts and imposing statistics." (90) In the domain of poetry, a host of poets like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri. Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Michael Madhusudan Dutt have very skilfully exploited myths and legends in their poetry.

Indian dramatists also have made use of Myths with a purpose to critique the socio-ethical problems. Playwrights like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri. Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Asif Currimbhoy, Chandrashekar Kambhar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Rakesh Mohan have made abundant use of myths and legends in their plays. Nand Kumar says that:

In their works myth has been incorporated in various ways- as a background, as theme, as a story, as a character, as a moral symbol or as an instrument of projecting our glorious past before the people of the West. ...Their sources and approaches may be different but all of them aim at solving material and moral problems through myths, acquainting the West with our rich cultural heritage and traditions, and popularizing Indian drama in India as well as abroad (208)

Tagore makes a symbolic use of myths in his plays. Sri Aurobindo exploits myths very effectively for propagating his philosophical and religious views. T.P. Kailasam's entire dramatic works are based on the lives and adventures of the mythical heroes who appear to be the symbols of moral values. Taking up a source material from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata Kailasam constructs a play on a particular myth and "ennobles the character to whom he feels justice has not been done in the original epic. Ekalavya, Karna and Keechaka are such characters that
have been delineated with a difference. However, their mythical authenticity and significance are fully maintained." (Nand Kumar 211)

In the post-Independence period playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Rakesh Mohan and Mahesh Dattani have made bold innovations and experiments. It is observed that dramas written in regional Indian languages and their English translations have achieved a notable growth in the recent decades. Among the regional playwrights, Girish Karnad is the one who himself has translated his plays into English. Bijay Kumar Das’ observation in this context needs to be mentioned here. He states: "Vijay Tendulkar, Manoranjan Das, Badal Sircar and a host of others have appeared in English translations. So also Girish Karnad. But Girish Karnad transcreated his plays into English. He qualifies to be called as Indian English dramatist." (31)

Karnad is one of the celebrated playwrights of the contemporary Indian stage. He is greatly appreciated for his technical experiments as well as displaying a wide range of themes and subjects. With his artistic skill, he assimilates myth and reality, past and present and makes use of legendary and historical figures. In doing so he carries his message of restructuring the present society.

Every creative writer has a natural association with his cultural myths and legends. Karnad is no exception to this. He never retells the old myths and legends as they are. He adds a new dimension to the original myth. His way of perceiving the past and present is a unique one. To him, literature is an important part of historical process. This process is not stable one but it is always in a flux. In this sense, Karnad seems to be very close to T.S. Eliot who advocates adherence to history and tradition. Karnad tries to challenge those ethical questions for which no ready-made answers are available, neither in the past nor in the present.
He revises and changes myths and history to suit his dramatic productions.

For the convenience of the study undertaken, his dramatic output can be divided into two broad categories - myth-plays and history plays. In a very masterly manner, he makes use of myth, legend and folktale in the plays like Yayati, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, Bali-The Sacrifice and The Fire and the Rain. And there is a predominance of history in Tughlaq, Tale-Danda and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan which are termed as historical plays. Besides these plays, he has written two monologues - Flowers and Broken Images (2004). And his latest playlet is Wedding Album (2008).

He has been brought up in the environment of the folk theatre tradition and in a cultural atmosphere of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. By exploiting myths and legends, Karnad tries to show how they are relevant to the modern times in presenting a modern man's dilemma. In fact, myths and history are the endless sources of inspiration and motivation for the creative writers. Therefore, "Karnad has found myths as a powerful vehicle to carry the complex ideas of the modern times. The use of myths enables him to link the continuity of emotions from the beginning of the civilization to the present age." (Verma and Swarnakar 51) To put it in other words, he tries to interpret the past relating it to the present and examine the present in the light of the past. In this regard, Karnad himself comments, "But in India, as has often been pointed out, the past is never totally lost; it coexists with the present as a parallel flow." (1997 12) It is really thrilling and interesting to look at the past while you are in the present.

His first play Yayati emphasizes the theme of responsibility. It throws light on the present state of the modern man who is engrossed in the material pleasures by dramatizing the life and character of the
mythical king Yayati in the *Mahabharata*. Nand Kumar briefly sums up its theme; "Through this play, Karnad glorifies the existentialist philosophy related to the performance of duty and acceptance of responsibilities." (208) As a reinterpretation of ancient myth, *Yayati* is a great achievement.

His play *Hayavadana* is a successful experiment in the use of folk motifs. In this play Karnad has used the ancient myth of transposed heads to depict the theme of search for identity. The main plot in *Hayavadana* is derived from the *Kathasaritasagara*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit and its adaptation in Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*. The play also depicts a search for completeness and human relationship. On the surface level; it is the tale of three lovers, Devadatta-Padmini-Kapila. Padmini marries Devadatta but is gradually attracted by Kapila's strong body. Their relations get tangled. The friends kill themselves. Padmini, of course, with the boon of the Goddess Kali, transposes the heads, giving Devadatta, Kapila's body and vice-versa. The wrong transposition of heads creates a complicated problem of human relationship and that of identity. Thus the myth of transposed heads portrays the human predicament in a contemporary social situation. The play deals with different themes. Commenting on various themes of the play, P.Dhanavel aptly remarks, "The themes of identity, incompleteness, love, mind-body dichotomy, social system and social norms, poetic influence, elements of performance have all been brought together by the dramatist." (2008 170) In the end the perennial problems of identity and search for completeness remain a riddle.

The plot of *Bali: The Sacrifice* is taken from the thirteenth century Kannada epic, *Yashodhara Charite* by Janna, which in turn refers back through an eleventh century Sanskrit epic by Vadiraja to the ninth century epic, *Yashastilaka* by Somadeva Suri. The story of the play revolves
around the Jain myth of cock of Dough. It focuses on the rift between the two ideologies - violence and non-violence.

It brings out the traditional mindset of Indian people who believe in rites and rituals and superstitious beliefs. "The dramatist not only presents the cracks in religion but also wants readers to realize the futility of observing certain rites merely for the continuance of an old practice set perhaps in ignorance." (Mishra 92)

The King, in the play, is a follower of Shakti-cult which permits animal sacrifice. But when the king falls in love with a Jain girl, he converts himself into Jainism which prohibits violence of any kind. Later on, his queen takes a false step and betrays her marriage vows. Therefore, the king's mother asks him to sacrifice one hundred sheep. Now, being the follower of Jainism, the King refuses to do so. Finally, as a compromise, he agrees to sacrifice a batter-cock. The King compels his wife to satisfy him in the presence of Mahout and in the temple. It is outright violence against his wife's psyche and the body. Thematically the play can be interpreted in a numerous ways. Sumita Roy rightly sums up the different themes of the play. She explains that:

The play subsumes one dominant ideology - that of non-violence, but the play abounds in numerous other beliefs, principles and firmly rooted mental blocks whose ramifications are explored with admirable dexterity by the dramatist. Paradoxical implications of concepts such as religion and spirituality, faith and belief, aesthetic and functional attitudes, ritualistic performances and acts and conviction, to name a few, all fit into the frame of ideological gaps and spaces which are available for negotiation. How this is achieved is the crux of the play. (284)
In *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad has used an Indian folktale and the form of storytelling in a very fascinating way. It is a folk play like *Hayavadana* based on the two oral tales from Karnataka, which he first heard from A.K. Ramanujan, a noted poet in Indian Writing in English. The central issue of the play is Rani’s fidelity to her husband, Appanna who exercises complete supremacy over his wife. But the shocking thing is that he himself is dishonest to her and spends his nights in the arms of another woman. In order to win the heart of her husband she becomes ready to try the love potion given to her by Kurudavva. The red colour of potion makes her panic and in a moment of bewilderment she throws it upon the anthill. Naga drinks it and immediately falls in love with Rani. Now Naga takes the form of her husband and makes love to her. Appanna accuses her of infidelity when he discovers her pregnancy. Naga suggests a solution. She successfully goes through a snake-ordeal and wins the respect of the entire village. Basically this play deals with the problem of the unequal power relationship between husband and wife in the Indian family. So the play raises the problem of a woman in a patriarchal society. In this regard, in their perceptive analysis Anupam Bansal and Satish Kumar appropriately remark that

the play questions the authenticity of traditional values and conventions and in their place presents a new interpretation and vision which harmonizes with changing social reality. In it Karnad exposes male chauvinism, the exploitation and operation of women and injustice done to them in patriarchal society. The playwright suggests that social transformation cannot be materialized without the empowerment of women.

(158)

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad exploits the myth of Yavakri taken from the Vana parva of *the Mahabharata*. It is a highly complex
play and deserves special mention when we talk of regeneration of classical myths in the contemporary English drama. The play reveals the conflict between the Brahmin traditional community and the benevolent tribal community. In other words, the play depicts the contrasting picture of two cultures, two ways of life – the brahminical and the tribal. The former is rigid and ritualistic whereas the latter is community oriented and life giving. The title of the play is used suggestively. The Brahminic culture is Fire which destroys everything and the tribal culture is Rain which gives and sustains life. Commenting on the significance of the title of this play, Ranjana Chanana says that:

Yavakri myth in *The Fire and the Rain* suggests more meanings which are above the connotative and denotative meanings. It mirrors the deeper structure of human behaviour and leaves the psychological effects of the myth on the social consciousness of human beings. (83)

Thus, with the help of the myth of Yavakri and the myth of Indra, Karnad throws light on the universal themes of love, jealousy, revenge, violence, futility of knowledge, weakness of human nature and loneliness. By exploiting myths legends and folktales, the playwright tries to show how they are quite relevant in portraying a modern man’s dilemma. The use of myths and legends provides him ample scope to take up significant issues like existentialism, problems of identity, patriarchy, man-woman relationship, problem of caste-system, pervasive sense of alienation and manifestations of human passions like love, hatred, anger, sex, sacrifice, treachery etc.

It might be interesting to observe here that by interweaving myths in his plays, Karnad attempts to create an impression that all human feeling is the same feeling, all human experience is the same experience and all human suffering is the same suffering. Cosmic truth, no doubt, is
in the state of flux but all observations and experiences cohere into the same archetypal pattern. Therefore, his concept of myth seems to be very close to that of Carl Jung, Frye, Malinowski. Karnad himself agrees that “Myths express certain archetypal social relationships, these relationships could be a Father and son, Husband and wife or of brothers… Secondly, myths have the power to affect us even without our being aware of it.” (qtd.in Ramachandran, 1999 23)

III

INTERFACING OF MYTH AND HISTORY:

After the brief discussion of Karnad’s mythical plays, let us turn our attention to his historical plays. It might be again interesting to know how he treats history as myth and with the help of his fertile imagination how he presents the contemporary reality by using historical material. History and myth, as it were, become inseparable parts in the depiction of contemporary reality. In this connection Dixit rightly puts it: “Girish Karnad treats history as myth and rather than writing a strictly factual historical play he gives it symbolical reshaping to reinforce the contemporary issues.” (86)

But before we discuss, in brief, Karnad’s historical plays, it is beneficial to understand various definitions of history, its concept and how the term history has wider implications.

History is not only the story of any individual but, in the words of Tej Ram Sharma, it is “the story of mankind in all its aspects, how man thought, lived and acted. Actually speaking history is a record of participation of human will in the affairs of the world.” (1) Sharma further states that “History as a scholarly discipline developed recently and is barely two centuries old, becoming established in West European and North American Universities only in the nineteenth century.” (Ibid 9)
The terms such as poetry, myth, criticism, and philosophy cannot be defined in exact words. Likewise, it is hard to define history in exact words. The term history is taken from the Greek term *historia* the meaning of which is inquiry, interview, interrogation of an eye-witness and also reports on the results of such actions.

Sharma gives some of the definitions of history both from the Indian and Western Scholars to have an idea of their points of views. First of all, Burckhardt defines history as “the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another.” (Ibid 2) And according to Lucien Febvre, “It is the need felt by every human group at each phase of its development to seek out and emphasize those facts, trends of the past that prepare for the present, that enable us to understand and live it.” (Ibid) Allan Nevins relates history with truth when he says, “History is any integrated narrative description or analysis of the past events or facts written in a spirit of critical enquiry for the whole truth.” (Ibid 4) According to Radha Kumud Mookherji, what has happened in the past is the subject of history and in addition, it is valuable for the present and future. She writes:

….It does not deal with the ideals, with what ought to be, but only with what has been, with actualities….But though History deals with the dead past, it is not without its lesson or value for the present and the future which are moulded on the basis of the legacy of the past which history records. History supplies the data and material which are utilized by Social Sciences, like Economics or Politics. (Ibid)

Karl Marks offers completely different meaning of history connecting it with the struggle of a man. He writes” “History does nothing, it possesses no colossal riches, it fights no fights. It is rather man real, living man who acts, possesses and fights…” (Ibid 5) S. Gopal links historical happenings with the present ones. He comments:
The past is not all that has merely happened but what has survived to a later age, and perhaps still influences situation. It is by the incessant, rigorous but not rigid examination of such a past that the historian can best hope to serve not only his subject but also his contemporaries. (Ibid 6)

However, of all the definitions mentioned above Jawaharlal Nehru’s definition of history seems to be appropriate in the context of Karnad’s use of history in his historical plays. Nehru explains, The past becomes something that leads up to the present, the movement of action, the future something that flows from it, and all these are inextricably intertwined and interrelated….past history merged into contemporary history, it became a living reality tied up with sensations of pain and pleasure. It was this attempt to discover the past in its relation to the present that led me twelve years ago to write *Glimpses of World History*, in the form of letters to my daughter. (Ibid 3)

In the Indian language, the similar word for history is *Itihasa* which makes two things clear that first it deals with the past events, second that it is careful about its examination. In the Indian context, the term *itihasa* is also used for myth.

It is *itihasa* as a kind of collective historical conscience that is conveyed through the oral traditions and the performative traditions through which much of the teaching and transmission of cultural values to the subsequent generations takes place. (19)

According to Nietzsche:

History is necessary to the living man in three ways; in relation to his action and struggle, his conservatism and
reverence, his suffering and his desire for deliverance. These three relations answer to the three kinds of history – as far as they can be distinguished – the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical. (qtd.in Mukherjee, 2008 91)

Karnad, in his historical plays, uses history the third way, the critical way that is reinterpreting the historical events in the contemporary context.

Karnad’s treatment of history to understand the present and prepare for the future is as Lukacs puts it:

The realm of history is where past and future, no longer and not yet, come together in a single moment. What we usually call the present in drama is self-appraisal; from the past is born the future, which struggles free of the old and of all that stands in opposition. (qtd.in Mukherjee, 2008 20)

There has been close association between myth and history; both narrate the past events.

History may be as old as man himself. Some important happenings, may be carried as ‘the tales of a grandfather’, some of them in course of time being handed down from generation to generation, may become legendary while others may be organized by some mastermind into an epic which might be associated with a combination of tribes. In some ways the epic seems to have assorted the transition to what we regard as “Genuine” history, stimulating an interest in the past and providing a narrative technique. Thompson calls it the oldest skill of historian’s craft. (Sharma 9)

In short, it can be stated that history is not a closed subject as there is no finality in the narrative and conclusions. In every age new searching add new dimensions to history.
It has been already stated that Karnad treats history as myth. The social reformer Basavanna in *Tale-Danda*, the medieval king Tughlaq in *Tughlaq* and the 18th century king of Mysore, Tipu Sultan in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* are the historical personalities but they have gained a mythological status with the passage of time. These personalities and the historical events come alive and fresh with the artistic touch of Karnad.

As a matter of fact, myth and history are skilfully interfused in literature. It is really surprising to note how gods, great heroes, great personalities are mythicized with the passage of time. In this respect, Nand Kumar says:

Gods and Gandharvas like Shiva, Ganesha, Rama, Bharata, Indra, Krishna, Pururavas and others; heroes like Bhishma, Bhima, Keechaka, Ekalaya, Balarama, Perseus and other warriors, and personalities like Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Meera are not only individuals, they have been archetypes, symbols of certain virtues. This belief of their worshippers and fans and followers makes them all myths. In this way all great gods and human beings have been mythicized. Their mythic personalities have always been found to be more powerful than the historical or biological ones. History relates to the conscious while myth to the unconscious. Great individuals like the Christ, Buddha and Gandhi assimilate both the types in themselves. Therefore, they have dual personalities, one historical, the other mythic. The mythical Christ and Gandhi prove to be more powerful and important to human beings than the historical Christ and Gandhi. Several Indian plays written in English dramatize the life and character of these mythicized gods, heroes and human beings. (6-7)
The point is that Karnad draws all the sources for his dramatic art from the Indian mythology and history. His writing is invariably rooted in the Indian consciousness though to some extent he adopts Western techniques to reinterpret the modern life and times. He uses tradition to question its appropriateness. Hence “the preservation of tradition while breaking away from it is the principle involved in combining myth and history in the recent Indian fiction in English. The underlying principle is that a renewal of literary history demands the removal of the prejudices of “historical objectivism on one hand the” aesthetic of production and representation” on the other in an aesthetic of “reception and influence.” The literary study is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and frees itself from the material of words and brings its own being into a contemporary existence.” (Rao 1)

If we carefully examine the elements of his writing, we observe that Karnad gives importance to the Indian mythology and history to portray the Indian experience and character. The study attempts to underscore the valuable contribution of myths, legends, folktales and history to the enhancement of the plays of Karnad in particular and that of Indian English drama in general. As a gifted playwright like Shakespeare he discovers source materials from myth and history and employs them as metaphors for contemporary situations. Unlike the leading contemporary playwrights Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar, Karnad goes back to the past mythical, historical and oral tales for his themes as well as characters and situations.

In the first part of this section, we have briefly examined his mythical plays – *Yayati, Hayavadana, The Fire and the Rain, Bali: The Sacrifice* and *Naga-Mandala*. Equally important are his historical plays like *Tughlaq, Tale-Danda* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. 
Karnad’s first historical play *Tughlaq* is undoubtedly one of the greatest plays of Karnad which focuses on the dream qualities and tyrannical nature of Tughlaq by giving exposure to his dual personality.

His play *Tale-Danda* is also termed as a historical play as the protagonist Basavanna is taken from history. The events that constitute the framework for the plot of the play are documented as historical events. And yet it is more than a mere historical play. The historical events are closely linked with social reformations. It recreates the twelfth century socio-religious movement of Karnataka. It reveals Basavanna’s crusade against inhuman caste-system upholding the values of work and community living. Basavanna’s sincere attempts to bring equality in all walks of life end in violence. Thus, Karnad exploits history to expose intolerance and violence in the name of religion and throws light on the present social and political crisis.

His play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, like the earlier plays *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda*, is a historical play. It is about the early days of colonialism which centres round Tipu Sultan and his dreams in the last phase of his life. Taking the facts of history, Karnad has vividly dramatized Tipu’s struggle for emancipation. This play, like *Tughlaq*, is full of symbols and images which encompass various mysteries regarding the personality of Tipu Sultan.

To conclude, it can be said that Karnad deftly moulds the socio-political milieu into the artistic form of his plays. His plays serve as a critique on the vices, drawbacks and limitations of contemporary Indian society. In addition, they express his dislike for hypocrisy, barbarism, superficiality, narrow-mindedness, corruption, duplicity, treachery and violence. While depicting the drawbacks and vices of both an individual and society, the playwright’s humanitarian approach and his commitment to human values are clearly perceptible.
In his perceptive analysis, M.K. Choudhury aptly sums up the outstanding contribution of Karnad to the growth of Indian English drama. He comments:

Karnad’s drama offers a spectacular view of the ills of the self-divided orthodox and tradition bound Indian society at different levels – social, political and metaphysical. History and myth become contemporary of the modern times in his celebratory and participatory theatre. He has helped to change the direction of Indian drama from mimicking of the Western dramatic themes and forms to the traditional Indian folk theatre of which myth constitutes the major idiom. Though based on myths and oral tales, his plays are relevant to the contemporary times and expressive of the Indian ethos and psyche. (234)

So, the purpose of this study is to show how myth and history are exploited in the plays of Karnad. The next section III will deal with the making of the playwright, his influences and inspirations.

SECTION III

GIRISH KARNAD: THE PLAYWRIGHT IN THE MAKING

Girish Karnad who was born in Matheran in the vicinity of Mumbai on May 19, 1938 is said to be one of the most celebrated and successful playwrights in the contemporary India. Besides being an internationally acclaimed playwright, he is a highly talented actor, successful director and filmmaker and a man of varied interests. To put it in the words of Jaydipsinh Dodiya:

He is one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts. He is among the foremost media persons of our time. He has directed feature films, documentaries and television
serials in Kannada, Hindi and English. An actor-director, art-critic and filmstar, Karnad is a man of many achievements. He has represented our country in foreign lands as an emissary of Indian art and culture. (2000 40)

His father, Mr. Raghunath Karnad was a doctor by profession. He was very much interested in reading and watching the dramatic performances. His mother was fond of Balgandharva. At times, she used to imitate the acting of Balgandharva. In short, both of them loved watching plays in the theatre. Karnad spent his childhood in a small town called Sirsi in Karnataka. Right from his childhood, he listened to fairy tales and stories from the Puranas. During his childhood, he liked watching a Company Natak and Yakshagana at Sirsi. Karnad himself tells us how these folk performances forged the playwright in him:

> It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, called Natak Mandalis or Natak Companies would come up, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me. (Dharwadker, 1995 360)

In fact, the seeds of his ardent admiration for playwriting were sown during his childhood. Childhood experiences play a dominant role in forming the inner personality of a writer. In other words, it can be said that his association with the natak companies at an early age left an indelible impact on his mental horizon.

During his school days, he was especially fond of farcical plays, and even acted in Kannada plays. In the early days of his youth, he ardently desired to be a poet. So he tried his hand at writing poems in Kannada and English. Karnad graduated from the Karnataka University, Dharwad, in 1958. During his college life, Karnad came in contact with
A.K. Ramanujan, the celebrated Indian poet. He developed his intimacy with Ramanujan who later on taught him the art of literary writing and structure of poetry. Karnad’s literary career was, thus, influenced by A.K. Ramanujan. That is why as a token of love, Karnad has dedicated his play *Naga-Mandala* to Ramanujan.

After graduation, he moved to Mumbai for his postgraduate studies. While in Mumbai, he got an opportunity of watching many English, Marathi and Hindi plays. He was really surprised to see *Miss Julie*, a play by Strindberg directed by Ebrahim Alkazi. At the end of his stay in Mumbai, he received the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship to go abroad for further studies. He studied at Lincoln and Magdalene Colleges in Oxford from 1960 to 1963 where he took interest in literature and culture, playwriting and performing arts. After completing his post-graduation, he came back to India in 1963 and joined Oxford University Press, Chennai where he got an opportunity to read various kinds of writings.

In 1970-72 Karnad obtained the Homi Bhabha Fellowship for his creative work in folk theatre. After leaving his job at Oxford University Press, he got himself busy with drama and films. He served as director of Film and Television Institute of India, Pune during 1974-75. He was awarded Padmashree in 1974 and Padmabhushan in 1992 by the Government of India. He worked as the Chairman of Karnataka Natak Academy during 1976-78. He was a visiting professor at the University of Chicago in 1987-88. And from 1988-1993, he was the Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Academy for Performing Arts), New Delhi. In 1994, he was honoured with the Doctor of Letters by Karnataka University, Dharwad for his valuable contribution to art, culture and literature. He was the President of the Seventieth Marathi Sahitya Sammelan in 1997 at Ahmednagar. He is the latest one among seven
recipients of Jnanpith Award for Kannada, the highest literary honour conferred in India. He received this prestigious award in 1999 for his outstanding contribution as a playwright. He also worked as the Director of The Nehru Centre at the Indian High Commission in London. He is a gifted writer and a man of exceptional intellectual abilities. His perfect and excellent command over English is one of the major factors of his commendable success as a playwright.

Karnad’s dramatic career was greatly influenced by William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Brecht, Anouilh, Jean Paul Sartre, Eugene O’Neill, Louis Pirandello, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett and many others.

Some of the selected plays of Karnad are Yayati (1961), Tughlaq (1964), Hayavadana (1971), Anjumallige (1977), Hittina Hunja (Bali - the Sacrifice) (1980), Naga-Mandala (1988), Tale-Danda (1990), The Fire and the Rain (1995) and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (1997). Besides these plays, he has written two monologues-Flowers and Broken Images. At the beginning of his literary career soon after the completion of Yayati, Karnad wrote a one – act play, Ma Nishada – a radio play. It is much neglected play in the critical discussions and theatrical experiments. Karnad also avoids talking about this play. All his plays that have become successful on the stage are based on the folklore, mythology and history.

He minutely examines the challenges of contemporary life and tries to establish relationship between the past and present. Karnad’s greatness as a playwright has been recognized in the literary circle all over the world. He has bagged many awards and rewards for his multifarious creative abilities.

Karnad’s first play Yayati brought him the Mysore State Award in 1962, Government of Mysore Rajyotsva Award in 1970 and Sangeet Natak Akademy Award in 1971. His second play, Tughlaq also received
Sangeet Natak Akademy Award. He became much-talked-about playwright soon after the publication and successful staging of *Tughlaq*. It has been rendered into Hungarian and German. It was also broadcast by the B.B.C., London in 1979. It was performed in English in London under the direction of Ebrahim Alkazi in 1982. His play *Hayavadana* obtained Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the Best Indian Play of the year 1972. This play was also broadcast by the B.B.C., London in 1993. It was directed by B.V. Karanth in Australia in 1986. It was performed in New York in 1993 under the title *Divided Together*. His play, *Naga-Mandala* received Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the best play in 1989. A German Version of *Naga-Mandala* was performed in 1992. The play was presented at the University Theatre, Chicago by Guthri Theatre, Minneapolis in 1993. His another play *Tale-Danda* won him Karnataka Natak Akademy Award for the best play of the year 1990-91, and Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1994. Karnad was given a great honour as the Best Writer of the year for the Play *Tale-Danda* in 1990 by *Granthloka*, journal of the Book Trade. It also bagged him B.H. Shridhar Award for the best play in 1992.

Apart from his achievements as a successful playwright, he has revealed his multi-faceted creativity through his close association with the world of television and film industry. He has shown his talent as a screenplay writer of several successful Kannada films like *Samskara, Vansh-Vriksha, Kaadu, Ondanandu Kaaladalli* and *Cheluvi* and also as a famous writer of T.V. serials and dialogues. He has featured in many Hindi and Kannada movies and received critical appreciation.

He has played the role of *sutradhar* (narrator) for several stories in the popular audiobook series for kids “Karadi Tales.” He has also been
the voice of APJ Abdul Kalam, the former President of India in the audiobook of Kalam’s autobiography *The Wings of Fire*.

He has received wide recognition for his outstanding contribution to the world of movies. He won the President’s Gold Medal for script, dialogue writing and lead role in *Samskara* (Kannada). It also brought him the Best Indian Film Award in 1970. He received The National Award for excellence in direction, script writing and acting in *Vansh-Vriksha* (Kannada) which was shared with B.V. Karanth in 1972. His movie *Kaadu* (Kannada) bagged the President’s Silver Medal for the second best Indian film in 1974. It represented at the International Film Festival, New Delhi in 1975. The same movie was selected for the Festival of Indian Films at the National Film Theatre, London and for the Sidney Film Festival in 1975. His Hindi film *Godhuli* received the Film Fare Award for the best script and direction in 1978. His performances as Director of Kannada films *Kaadu* (1973) and *Ondanandu Kaaladalli* (1978) and Hindi film *Utsava* (1984) have been greatly appreciated. His leading roles in Hindi art films like *Mahatma* (1976) and *Swami* (1978) are also highly appreciated. Even he played the main roles in *Oedipus Rex* and *Jokumaraswamy* directed by B.V. Karanth for the Open Air Festival in Bangalore in 1972. Apart from the films mentioned above, he performed roles in many Hindi feature films, television films and serials of Mrinal Sen, Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal and many others. He was a member at the jury of the International Film Festival, New Delhi and also at the Festival of India in Britain and London. He represented India at the Montreal Film Festival.

Such a long and colourful journey of Girish Karnad as a playwright, director, actor and filmmaker culminated in winning the most prestigious Jnanpith Award in 1999. He has thus enriched the Indian cultural scene by his valuable contribution to art, literature, theatre and
the film world. While interviewed by Aparna Dharwadker, he plainly admitted that of all these fields mentioned above he takes great interest only in playwriting. He states: “I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know I have been an actor, a publisher, and a film-maker. But in none of these I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting.” (1995 362)

A Drama is not a self contained art like novel, epic and short story. As a rule, drama cannot remain in isolation from the stage. It is, in fact, designed for representation on the stage. As drama is a composite art, a whole team is required to give drama the real meaning on the stage. He knows well that the real success of a play can be seen only on the stage. So “Karnad is a playwright whose work reveals a determined and self-conscious effort towards a new Indian drama.” (Dharwadker, 2005 viii)

He has imparted real dramatic spirit to the technique of Indian English drama. His dramatic art is a combination of the rich indigenous folk tradition and the new techniques of western theatre. Karnad is a progressive playwright. He is a pioneer in new drama and all his plays are worthy to be staged. His predecessors believed that playwriting was “a mere literary exercise, with no contact whatever with the living stage.” (Kurtkoti 69) Kailasam and Adya Rangacharya rejected this trend but they could not create an enduring substitute for it. The new dramatic movement has given a new life to Kannada drama and consequently to Indian English drama at large. In this context, Kirtinath Kurtkoti aptly remarks:

With this new theatre going around them, new playwrights like Girish Karnad have been able to bring to drama a first hand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique. (Ibid)
Karnad is aware of the difficulties, hindrances, and obstacles involved in the production of a play. That is why he offers a free hand to artists, directors and the persons concerned with the theatre. It is interesting to note that he has never directed any of his plays. Moreover, he is of the view that once playwriting is over it is as good as finished for him. So he gives full liberty to the director to edit his play without damaging the central parts of the play. It is his firm conviction that each performance is a re-creation and it is the right of every performer to interpret and present it in his own way. If such free-hand is not offered to the performer, then the characters are likely to become the mouthpiece of the playwright. In this regard, while talking to Bhargavi Rao, Karnad explicitly remarks:

... I carry a lot of goodwill with theatre groups and actors. I read out my plays and make a few suitable changes from the feedback I receive. But once I complete the writing, I don’t go back. I leave it to the Director’s creativity. I don’t interfere. (Rao, 2007 1-2)

This is the reason why the theatre goers get different presentations of Karnad’s plays when they are directed by Alyque Padmsee, Ebrahim Alkazi, Satydeo Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, B.V. Karanth and many others.

Karnad very often describes playwriting as the vocation that best expresses his self-perceptions and abilities. While writing a play, he has his audiences in mind. He visualises them in the theatre-hall. He listens to their reactions. The audience in the theatre is a very important factor in any performance. There must be something significant in the performance to satisfy everyone present in the theatre. The success of the performance is based on the reaction and appreciation of the spectators. We know that drama is Pooja (a sacred rite) for Karnad. He rewrites his plays again and again until they become perfect. He reads the script in the company of his
friends and then edits, cuts, changes the dialogues and episodes or adds new characters, episodes and so on. He worked for nearly thirty seven years on his play, *The Fire and the Rain* (1995). That is why he has to his credit ten plays and two monologues so far.

Indian plays in various regional languages have gained rich acclaim and status. Karnad has written some fourteen plays including his two monologues *Flowers* and *Broken Images* and the latest play *Wedding Album* recently written in 2008. Three of his plays *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, Flowers* and *Broken Images* were originally written in English and later on translated into Kannada. As he writes in many languages, he knows the limitations of translation. Karnad thinks that translating a play from Kannada into English requires a great skill and care; it is a sort of transcreation. According to Karnad translation is a search for appropriate cultural equivalents which means that translation can’t be a direct recreation of an original work. However, he undertakes the risk of translating his original Kannada plays into English because he feels that without doing so, no writer can reach a wider living theatre at national and international level. Translation connects the east and west, the north and the south. His perfect and flawless command over English is one of the major causes of his success as a playwright. Apart from the translation of his own plays, he translated Badal Sircar’s Bengali play *Evam Indrajit* into English and Mahesh Elkunchavar’s Marathi one-act play *Vasansi Jeernani* into Kannada.

When we read Karnad’s plays carefully or watch them being presented on stage, one basic question comes up in our mind. Instead of writing plays with original plots based on contemporary reality, why has he resorted to myths, legends and historical plots for his plays? The study makes an attempt to trace Karnad’s sources for his plays. We have already noted that childhood experiences, early impressions play a major
role in forming the inner personality of a writer. This seems to be true in his case. He has been brought up in the environment of the folk theatre tradition and in a cultural atmosphere of the *Mahabharat*, the *Ramayan* and the *Puranas*. In his discussion with Anantha Murthy, Karnad talks about the profound influence of ‘Company drama’ on his writing:

To me even now, drama means only ‘Company drama’ since I have watched only company dramas from childhood days. I have only that image. Even to write a modern play, I need to start from the image of company drama. (1995 137)

To put it in other words, it can be said that since his childhood, Karnad was an ardent admirer of Yakshagana and the theatre in his village which influenced him considerably. It was then that he made up his mind to explore its depth. It is a fact that Indian theatre derives its sources from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*. Even the western Mystery Plays and Miracle Plays are also based on the stories from the Bible. Besides, the Greek myths have also been exploited in most of the western plays. By using myths, history and folk-tales, Karnad makes an attempt to show how they are relevant to the modern times in presenting a modern man’s dilemma.

Karnad is one of the best story tellers. But he never retells the old myths and legends as they are. As India is a rich storehouse of myths and legends, they form an integral part of our existence. Every creative writer has a natural association with his cultural myths and legends. They make an appeal to his imaginative faculty. They get a logical form and sequence, the moment he tries to unfold them.

He revises and changes myths and history to suit his dramatic productions. He connects the past with the present and maintains continuity. He is not interested in presenting social realities as they are, because in his conversation with Bhargavi Rao he says, “I am not a social
reformer. I don’t believe in messages. I am only a playwright and my intention is to share my experience with my audience.” (2) He uses myths and legends to discuss socio-cultural evil practices. Karnad thinks that there is nothing wrong in presenting a particular character or situation in history for the sake of saying something modern. Commenting on the use of myths and legends in Karnad’s plays, D. Maya rightly states:

Karnad shows how myths can be reinterpreted to convey contemporary reality. Issues of present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an integral part of the culture consciousness of the land, with their associative layers of meaning, their timelessness and relevance to contemporary issues. (68)

Myths and legends are employed as metaphors for contemporary situation in Karnad’s plays. He uses them skilfully to throw light on the various socio-cultural and psychological problems. Firstly he brings out different types of problems confronted by a modern Indian woman in the patriarchal society. For instance, Chitralekha in Yayati, Padmini in Hayavadana, Rani in Naga-Mandala, Vishaka and Nittilai in The Fire and the Rain are the characters who stand for modern women. “He uses the sources as tools for addressing his audience on vital issues related to women. He questions the moral code for its gender discriminating nature. He emphasizes a modern woman’s craving for love and recognition.” (Kharat 66) Thus, Karnad shows how a woman’s existence is driven into margin in the male-dominated social set-up.

In his plays, Karnad attempts to attach a new meaning to the past in the light of the present. He is well aware of the fact that a creative artist
can make his society to know the complex issues of the time. Whenever the issue of contemporaneity is raised, he invariably gives the example of two plays: *Tughlaq* and Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal*. In fact, Karnad didn’t have the Nehru era in mind when he wrote *Tughlaq* and yet it reminds us of Jawaharlal Nehru and his disillusionment after independence. U.R. Anantha Murthy’s remark supports the fact that the play *Tughlaq* is an allegory on the political situation in India in the sixties. He says that it “reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country.” (1994 143) Though the play doesn’t refer directly to the Nehru era, Karnad himself writes about the contemporaneity of *Tughlaq*: “What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq’s history was that it was contemporary…..” (Ibid)

Tendulkar wrote *Ghashiram Kotwal* in 1974 and the Indira Gandhi-Bhindranwala episode occurred in 1983. So the play is well ahead of time and predicted what would happen in Punjab. In this context Karnad writes:

In his *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Tendulkar uses Dashavatara, a traditional semiclassical form, to investigate a contemporary political problem, the emergence of ‘demons’ in public. These demons are initially created by political leaders for the purposes of their own power games, but ultimately go out of control and threaten to destroy their own creators. It is a theme recurrent in Indian mythology: the demon made indestructible by the boon of gods and then turning on the gods themselves. (A decade after the play was written in Punjab, Sant Bhindranwale and Mrs. Indira Gandhi seemed to be re-enacting the theme in real life in horrifying detail.) (1997 15)
After Sanskrit drama there seems to be a wide gap of several years when no outstanding play was written in India. Later on, the theatre, the Indians created, emulated the British theatre of the times as presented by the visiting troupes from England in the cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Karnad considers Dharmavir Bharati’s *Andha Yug* (1954) as the first remarkable Indian play.

Karnad preferred the folk-form since there had been no dramatic structure in Indian tradition to which he could relate himself. That is why he took the help of myth and history to look at the contemporary issues with a new perspective. His handling of myths and legends throws light on the mystery of the process of his artistic creation. He reflects on the myths and legends that come across in his reading of ancient literature and out of it he devises a suitable structure for his plays. Thus his plays attain the excellence of artistry and craftsmanship. While commenting on the use of the techniques of the classical and folk theatre of India, he says: “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 head.” (1997 14) Karnad has used various forms of the folk tradition in his plays like *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* to reinforce the central problem. In this respect he writes: “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.” (Ibid) Like Bertolt Brecht, he makes the audience to respond intellectually rather than emotionally to the action of the play. One important aspect of his writing is that there are no elaborate stage directions in his plays. This gives full freedom to the actors and directors to exploit their creativity.
Karnad is a gifted craftsman. Though he doesn’t observe the structure of three unities, he creates the unity of impression. He invents sub-plots to heighten the dramatic effects of the central plot. It is his characteristic feature to depict contemporary dilemmas by employing myths and legends and history in his plays. Commenting on his distinguishing style of writing, Anupam Shukla and Alka Saxena observe:

He consistently looks into the past in order to examine the present. …He reflects on contemporary dilemmas. Mahash Dattani a young playwright has said about Karnad’s Naga-Mandala that he has a historic vision but a contemporary voice, which makes his play universal. This vision is not restricted to Naga-Mandala alone. It is the hallmark of almost all the plays of Karnad. (48)

Karnad is a highly educated playwright. His education abroad has made him to have an excellent command over the English language. Being a poet, his language has a poetic quality which easily permeates in his writing. He is a poet-playwright like Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Tagore, Dharmaveer Bharati, Nissim Ezekiel, V.V. Shirwadkar and many others. He writes lucid, crisp, precise and simple dialogues. He uses simple, sonorous and appropriate words to convey his thoughts. There are not very lengthy and tiresome dialogues in his plays. He has deep insight into the human mind and very skilfully presents internal conflicts of his characters. He reveals a complex and delicate emotional entanglement in man-man and man-woman relationship.

Karnad’s plays are short, usually in two acts, except Tale-Danda. There is, as he himself accepts, Brechtian influence on writing scene-wise plays like Tughlaq and Tale-Danda. His plays have only limited number of characters; for example, there are three major characters in Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala. Though there are many characters in
Tughlaq and Tale-Danda, they revolve round the major characters only. Thus in Tale-Danda, he attracts our attention to Basavanna and King Bijjala and most prominently to Sovideva, Jagadeva and Damodar Bhatta. In The Fire and the Rain, we remember the chief characters like Yavakri-Vishakha-Paravasu, and Arvasu-Nittilai. And in Bali : The Sacrifice, there are four major characters who hold our attention right from beginning to the end.

Our curiosity is first excited exactly in the middle of his plays. For instance, the intensely curious conspiracy against the Sultan is depicted in Seene VI in Tughlaq. And in Hayavadana changes take place exactly at the end of Act I. In Naga-Mandala, Naga, a lover enters Rani’s life exactly at the end of Act I. In Tale-Danda the complicated inter-caste marriage takes place exactly in the middle of Act I. His plot and structure develop side by side in his mind. His plays hardly exceed ninety pages. The fire and the Rain which contains a Prologue, an Epilogue, and three Acts incorporates only seventy four pages.

Karnad tries to create Indianness in his dramatic works by skilfully using Indian expressions in his plays. He has made abundant use of Arabic and Indian Words for creating the atmosphere of fourteenth century India; for instance, Jiziya, Sultan, Kazi-i-Mumalik, Dhobi, Durbar-i-Khais, Dur-ul-Islam and the Muezzin’s call. In Hayavadana, he has made ample use of Sanskrit and Hindi words as Nata, Riddhi and Siddhi, Vighneshwara, Vakratunda Mahakaya, Punya, Gandharva, Fakirs, Sadhus, Pandits, Kalpa Vriksha, Arti, Mangalmoorthy, Rishi, Pativrata, Punyasthana, Makarndas and Jacarands, Darga of Khwaja, etc. One of the characters called The Bhagavata has used typical Indian expressions: “In her house, the very floor is swept by the Goddess of Wealth. In Devadatta’s house, they’ve the Goddess of learning for a maid.” (1994 19) And in Naga-Mandala, Karnad uses the following Indian expressions
when Appanna exclaims: “I swear to you I am not my father’s son, if I don’t abort that bastard! ….my name is not Appanna.” (2000 33) Such Indian expressions abound in his plays.

To sum up, it can be said that Girish Karnad is one of the celebrated playwrights of the contemporary Indian stage who has earned national and international fame. He is widely acclaimed for his technical experiments and displaying a wide range of themes and subjects as well. He, along with other modern playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Rakesh Mohan has renewed the Indian theatre-tradition.

SECTION IV
RESEARCHER’S PERSPECTIVE:

The present study makes an attempt to critically examine the way Karnad makes use of myth and history in his plays. In other words, the study analyses in what way Karnad deploys some of the unnoticed episodes from myths, legends and folk-tales in his plays and how he exploits history to show its relevance to the contemporary issues.

Section IV of Chapter one deals with the researcher’s perspective. In this section, the scope of the study is defined and in addition Karnad’s dramatic strategies are also taken into account.

I

Karnad’s dramatic creations, so far, include the plays and playlets given as under:

Plays:

One-Act Plays:
Ma Nishada (1964) as Agasayana (1990), Mahabharata (T.V. Script – 2004)

Two Monologues:

Apart from his own dramatic writing, he has translated plays such as Badal Sircar’s Evam Indrajit, Vijay Tendulkar’s Ghashiram Kotwal and Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Wada Triology into English.

His play Ma Nishada published in 1964 is a one-act play. Therefore it is not taken into account in the present study. Similarly his another play Anju Mallige which was published in 1978 and translated into English as Driven Snow (2000) is also not incorporated in the present thesis because it is not a mythical play. It focuses on the émigré experience of Indians in England and on the psychological complications resulting from an incestuous relationship between a brother and a sister. At this juncture it is to be made clear that the present thesis is confined to the study of his eight plays right from Yayati (1961) to The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (1997). It is needless to say that the plays published after 1997 are also not taken into consideration.

II

Before we proceed further, it will be worthwhile at this juncture to make the researcher’s perspective clear. This thesis investigates eight selected plays of Girish Karnad from mythical and historical point of view.

Karnad is one of the major playwrights on the Indian literary horizon with fourteen plays including playlets and two monologues. He
has successfully built on a rich literary platform of universal experiences of the human beings. His works have drawn global critical attention and applause because of his outstanding skill in moulding the socio-political milieu into the artistic form of his plays. His plays serve as a critique on the vices, drawbacks and limitations of contemporary Indian society. Besides, they express his dislike for hypocrisy, barbarism, superficiality, corruption, duplicity, treachery and violence. While depicting the drawbacks and vices of both an individual and society, the playwright’s humanitarian approach and his commitment to human values are clearly perceptible.

It is observed that dramas written in regional languages and their English translations have achieved a remarkable growth since 1970. In order to connect the two globes and make the foreign readers familiar with Indian tradition and culture, there is a need for English translation of literature in the Indian languages. R.K. Dhawan’s remark in this regard seems to be pertinent. “The translations have forged a link between the east and the west, north and south, and contributed to the growing richness of contemporary creative consciousness.” (1994 184)

Playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Mahesh Dattani have made bold innovations and experiments. They have used themes related to the present social scenario in order to bring about social change and make people aware of the need to renovate the present social structure and usher in a renewed and better social system. Broadly speaking a number of twentieth century writers have given a new turn to Indian writing and thought. Contemporary Indian writing is rich, complex and stimulating. Hence, R.K. Dhawan aptly states that “Indian writing in English including literature in translation has come of age.” (1999 9)
In the 1970s, there seems to be a change in the dramatic scene with the arrival of playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Badal Sircar who breathe new life into the drama with contemporary themes and bold experimentation. While Tendulkar and Sircar write in their respective mother tongue, Marathi and Bengali, Karnad is a bilingual and writes his plays in Kannada, later translates or transcreates them into English. Undoubtedly, Karnad is one of the leading playwrights who have made substantial contribution to Indian English Drama. He works within a complex framework of myth and history.

The study attempts to explore how the playwright uses myth and history in his plays to throw light on the contemporary issues like existentialism, problem of identity, pervasive sense of alienation, man-woman relationship, problem of caste-system, patriarchy and different manifestation of human passions like love, hatred, anger, sex, lust, sacrifice, treachery, evil, etc.

It is observed that the playwright makes an attempt to establish modern man’s relationship with the past. “Even when Karnad takes up a mythical or a historical figure, that character ceases to be just a historical figure, and expresses the tension of the modern mind. Tughlaq’s anguish, for example, may be interpreted in terms of existential dilemma.” (Haldar 97) Karnad views contemporary issues with a new perspective and enables a reader of his play to explore his cultural roots. As he is greatly influenced by Bertolt Brecht, a noted German playwright, he reveals his modernity in the handling of themes and techniques in his plays.

III

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one deals with Introduction which is further divided into four sections. The first section takes a brief survey of the tradition and achievement of Indian English Drama. The second section briefly considers the concepts of myth and
The origin of myth, myth as an early literary form, its function, its relevance to society and societal traditions regulated by myth are considered here. This section also points out how Karnad rewrites myth to suit his self as well as the sensibilities of his times. The third section highlights the formation of Karnad’s multi-faceted personality and the honours and distinctions that he won for his plays. It also takes a brief survey of how the childhood experiences of Karnad made a lasting impression on his mind and how he was drawn towards Drama and how by exploiting myth and history, he throws light on contemporary reality. The fourth section focuses on *The Researcher’s Perspective*. It defines the scope of the study and in addition Karnad’s dramatic strategies are also taken into account. An attempt is made to study his selected plays keeping in mind the framework of the study given in the fourth section, “The Researcher’s Perspective.”

Chapter two entitled *The Early Phase: Plays from 1961 to 1971* comprises a discussion on the first three plays of Karnad, namely, *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. His first play *Yayati* (1961) based on ancient Indian mythology reinterprets an ancient myth from the Mahabharata in the modern context. This play emphasizes the theme of responsibility. Completely engrossed in the sensual pleasure, Yayati, the King of Hastinapur disregards his responsibilities. Due to his moral violation, he is cursed with old age. Being frustrated at losing his youth, he requests his son Puru to lend his youth in exchange for his old age. He searches for his identity in the material pleasure and doesn’t learn from his errors. It is because of his wrong choice, he suffers in the end. After realizing his folly, he gives Puru’s youth back to him. Thus by using the myth of Yayati, Karnad portrays the present condition of the modern man who is running after the material pleasures. Besides the use of myth and folktale, he has also taken his thematic material from historical characters of the
country. His plays *Tughlaq* (1964) *Tale-Danda* (1990) and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) belong to this genre. The second play *Tughlaq* helped establish him as a dramatist par excellence. The play depicts the historical character of Mohammad Bin Tughlaq who was the fourteenth century emperor known for his craziness. It focuses on the dream qualities and tyrannical nature of Tughlaq by giving exposure to his dual personality. Here, an attempt is made to show how Karnad interprets history in the light of current political situation in India and the modern philosophy of power. In other words, the study intends to know how the playwright uses history to throw light on the contemporary social problems which are similar to those of the historical happenings.

Some of the plays of Karnad are based on folktales. They are *Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala* and *Flowers*. His next play, *Hayavadana* (1971) is a successful experiment in the use of folk motifs. It has been appreciated by many scholars as Karnad’s most important and representative work. P. Dhanavel thinks that “*Hayavadana* is to Indian drama what James Joyce’s Ulysses is to the Western novel.” (2000 122)

The plot of *Hayavadana* comes from Thomas Mann’s *The Transposed Heads* which in turn has its source in the ancient Sanskrit collection of stories *Brihatkathasaritasagara*. While the Sanskrit tale poses a moral riddle, Mann uses it to question the logic that holds the head superior to the body. Karnad builds on Mann’s line to explore the theme of identity in a world of confused relationships. The play aims at a demystification of traditional values and concepts and presents multiple viewpoints that promote a dialogue on the basic tenets of life. This is enhanced by the merging of three levels of experience – the divine, human and animal and the bringing together of the animate and the inanimate on a common plane.
It is noticed that *Hayavadana* incorporates various theatre traditions and more than any other Indian play in English can be called “total theatre.” The play brings out a synthesis of classical Sanskrit drama and the Kannada Yakshagana while also revealing the influence of Western playwright – Brecht and Shakespeare in particular. The use of masks, painted curtains and the dolls add to the spectacle of the play simultaneously distancing the audience and drawing focus on the main issues of the play. Past and present, fiction and reality are uniquely brought together with the help of the subplot which forms an important link in both the dramatic action and thematic scheme. In short, the study explores how Karnad makes use of myth and folktale to depict various themes of contemporary society.

Chapter three entitled ‘The Middle Phase : Plays from 1980 to 1988’ incorporates the next two plays of Karnad. They are *Hittina Hunja* (1980) i.e. – *Bali-The Sacrifice* and *Naga-Mandala* (1988). First, the study analyses *Bali : The Sacrifice* (1980) from the mythical point of view.

The plot of this play is derived from the thirteenth century Kannada epic, *Yashodhara Charite* by Janna, which in turn refers back through an eleventh century Sanskrit epic by Vadiraja to the ninth century epic, *Yashastilaka* by Somadeva Suri. The story of the play focuses on the Jain myth of Cock of Dough. It throws light on the rift between the two ideologies – violence and non-violence and discussion on the dynamics of sex. The message of the play implies that intended violence is no less offensive than actual violence and adultery committed in the mind is equivalent to actual adultery.

The study analyses how the playwright by exploiting the Jain myth portrays the debate on violence and non-violence. Very skilfully this debate is interlinked with man – woman relationship. Further the study
examines how the play exposes meaninglessness and hollowness of courtly life and throws light on the futility of observing superstitious beliefs and outdated practices which bring no solution to the problem presented in the play.

The next play included in Chapter three is Naga-Mandala (1988) in which Karnad exploits folk theatre techniques to present some of the vital problems of contemporary life. Karnad brings fresh breath to Indian English drama by boldly experimenting with folk traditions, Sanskrit drama, Brechtian technique and strategies of avant-garde. Naga-Mandala returns to the rich traditions of folk theatre and exploits the device of the frame story which is made memorable in the Arabian Nights and the ancient Sanskrit Vetalapanchavimsati. The form thus retains the oral traditions from which the theme is derived, namely two Kannada oral folktales which Karnad first heard from A.K. Ramanujan. The first provides a commentary on the nature of oral tale itself, while the second presents the story of Rani, a naïve and simple girl who finds the need to build tales to fill the emptiness of her life. The original story tells of a young man’s difficulty to trust women and experience love. However, Karnad shifts the focus to dwell on the woman’s experience and presents her growth into selfhood and maturity. A particularly female context is created with the identification of the story as woman and the female chorus. A unique feature of the play is the multiple endings provided by the playwright. In short, the study wants to know how thematically the play can be interpreted in numerous ways.


Tale-Danda (1990) was widely acclaimed and very successful play, being performed in various Indian languages. Once again Karnad
selects his theme from history, a movement that took place in Kalyan in the twelfth century. The play reveals the protagonist, Basavanna’s crusade against inhuman caste system, upholding the values of work, community and devotion. In the twelfth century in Karnataka, a man called Basavanna assembled a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers, who opposed idolatry, rejected temple worship, upheld the equality of sexes and condemned the caste system. The movement despite its high ideals ended in violence when theory turned into practice and a Brahmin girl married a ‘low-caste’ boy.

The events that form the framework for the plot of the play are documented as historical events. And yet it is more than a mere historical play. The historical events are closely linked with social reformations. Thus, Karnad exploits history to expose intolerance and violence in the name of religion and throws light on the present social and political crisis.

*Agni Mattu Male* (1995), translated into English as *The Fire and the Rain* (1998) is by far Karnad’s most complex play and deserves special mention when we talk of regeneration of classical myths in the contemporary English drama. The play, which Karnad worked on for thirty seven years, is based on the myth of Yavakrita, taken from the *Mahabharata*. Karnad has included certain modifications and brought in a few additional characters like Nittilai, the tribals and the actors who together with Arvasu make up the subplot. Characters like Vishakha who remain in the periphery in the original myth, acquire a new dimension in Karnad’s tale and are delineated with a human touch. The play-within-the-play is reminiscent of the one in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* but in *The Fire and the Rain*, the impact and consequences are more immediate and radical. The story of Arvasu and Nittilai which begins as a sub-plot grows in significance and towards the climax takes centre stage.
The study attempts to explore how Karnad, by using the myth of Yavakrita and that of Indra, throws light on the contemporary issues like existentialism, problems of identity, patriarchy, man-woman relationship, caste-system etc. The play is open to analysis at different levels. It can also be viewed as a tale on the universal themes of love, treachery, jealousy, violence and loneliness. It can be seen as a criticism of the brahminical mode of life and established institutions of religion which embrace power but lack genuineness of passion and devotion. Further, the study attempts to know how the play *The Fire and the Rain* depicts the contrasting picture of two cultures, two ways of life – the Brahminical and the Tribal. The former is rigid and ritualistic whereas the latter is community oriented and life – giving. The title of the play is used suggestively. The Brahminic culture is Fire which destroys everything and the tribal culture is Rain which gives and sustains life.

The next play of Karnad which is incorporated in Chapter four is *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. It is also a historical play. It is interesting to note that the social reformer, Basavanna in *Tale-Danda*, the medieval king Tughlaq in *Tughlaq* and the eighteenth century king of Mysore, Tipu Sultan in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* are the historical figures but they have gained a mythological status with the passage of time. It is interesting to know how these historical figures and the historical events come alive and fresh with the artistic touch of Karnad. It seems that Karnad treats history as myth.

This play deals with the early days of colonialism which centres round Tipu Sultan and his dreams in the last phase of his life. Using the facts of history, Karnad has vividly dramatized Tipu’s struggle for emancipation. The play uses some of the dreams of the prince who recorded them in a diary. The dreams actually form part of the dramatic action which is a new feature in Karnad’s plays. (The dreams of Rani and
Padmini are related as reveries and songs.) This play like *Tughlaq* is full of symbols and images which encompass various mysteries regarding the personality of Tipu Sultan. In this play:

Karnad’s principal thematic argument is a familiar one: the English succeeded in India not only (or even principally) because of their superior weapons and warfare, but because of their ability to play off members of the native ruling elite against each other. (Dharwadker, 2006 XXV)

The play focuses on Tipu and his dreams. There is a contrast between his dreams and the reality around him. The play reveals the treacherous nature of each character except Tipu. It portrays Tipu as a noble King interested in the welfare of his subjects whereas the British are depicted as a treacherous and cunning. And finally chapter five summarizes all the investigations and conclusions drawn from the study.

Karnad is well-known for his well-made plots, interesting characters, authentic dialogue and visual impact. His plays make good reading, they also make excellent theatre. It is the theatrical quality which marks his importance in the Indian dramatic scene.

When we read Karnad’s plays carefully or watch them being presented on stage, one basic question comes up in our mind. Instead of writing plays with original plots based on contemporary reality, why has he resorted to myths, legends and historical plots for his plays? Some critics also argue that he has not created any successful play with original plot based upon contemporary reality. Here we have to note that childhood experiences and early impressions play a major role in forming the inner personality of a writer. This seems to be true in his case. He has been brought up in the environment of the folk theatre tradition and in a cultural atmosphere of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*. In this regard, Aparna Dharwadker says that “In Western theatre the
mythic-historical impulse has characterized playwriting since the period of the ancient Greeks and continues to inform the modern theatre of Ibsen, Shaw, O’Neill, Miller, Anouilh and Stoppard; indeed, it is recognized as one of the important means by which a culture renews itself.” (1999 86) That is why she defends Karnad stating that he “belongs to the last generation of Indian writers who have encountered the “great” and “little” traditions of myth, poetry, history, legend and folklore at first hand in their earliest childhood, authorial selves shaped by those traditions.” (Ibid)

Srinivas Iyengar also refers to the ‘modern’ approach of Karnad when he says, “… be the theme historical, mythical or legendary … Karnad’s approach is ‘modern’.” (1994 735) Commenting on the matter of plot selection, C.N. Ramachandran, too, defends Karnad and points out that “he follows the dictum of Bharatha that Nataka, the highest form among the ten sub-genres of Drama is always built around a story borrowed from well-known epics or myths.” (22)

It is interesting to note that by interweaving myths in his plays, Karnad attempts to create an impression that all human feeling is the same feeling, all human experience is the same experience and all human suffering is the same suffering. Cosmic truth, no doubt, is in the state of flux but all observations and experiences cohere into the same archetypal pattern. So Karnad aptly says that “Myths express certain archetypal social relationships, these relationships could be a Father and son, Husband and wife or of brothers … secondly, myths have the power to affect us even without our being aware of it.” (qtd. in Ramchandran 23)

IV

The study also takes a note of the dramatic strategies used by the playwright to portray the contemporary reality. Karnad’s mindset and attitude explain his success in producing plays for the stage. He is aware
of the difficulties, hindrances and obstacles involved in the production. Therefore, he offers a free hand to artists, directors and the persons concerned with the theatre. It is his firm conviction that each performance is a re-creation and it is the right of every performer to interpret and present it in his own way.

A close look at Karnad’s theatre shows a variety of influences. He mainly uses a mixture of the Kannada Yakshagana and Indian classical drama in his plays. However, he seems to be influenced by the West, Brecht and Anouilh in particular.

Folk theatre strategies are accommodated into the framework of a Karnad play for various purposes. Firstly it helps create a drama that is essentially Indian – in story, character conception and form. Secondly folk theatre enables a simultaneous presentation of widely different points of view. Expressing his views on the use of the techniques of the classical and folk theatre of India, Karnad says, “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 head.” (1997 14)

The folk form ably exploited by Karnad is the Yakshagana Bayalata of Karnataka. The form is modified by him to suit the modern stage. The two plays that are seen to be influenced by Yakshagana are Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala. Of the two, Hayavadana has all the features of a typical Yakshagana play. Naga-Mandala uses a more modified and considerably simplified form of the art but nevertheless retains the folk atmosphere with songs and dances, colour and spectacle. He also makes use of masks, puppets, folk humour etc. to present different points of view. Tughlaq makes use of the comic pair called the ‘akara’ and ‘makara’ in its subplot.
The classical tradition, largely ignored by contemporary playwrights is seen to have a major influence on Karnad who recognizes the importance of Sanskrit drama in the Indian context. This is a semblance between the classical Sutradhar and the Bhagavata of folk theatre. The prologue and the play-within-the-play are features of Sanskrit drama but the technique of the play-within-the-play has been derived more from western theatre than the Indian model. The use of the ‘aside’ techniques of stylization, mime, music and songs have been made very emphatically in his plays.

The use of myth is an important aspect of Karnad’s dramatic scheme. The influence of the French playwright Jean Anouilh can be noted in Karnad’s manner of reinterpretation of myth to reflect contemporary concerns and anxieties.

Karnad has been labelled an existentialist. Such a guiding viewpoint can be seen to colour all his themes and area of thrust. Though conceptually Karnad derives inspiration from the West, his treatment can be considered essentially Indian. In short, we can say that Karnad’s dramaturgy appears to be mixed with multiple factors drawn from varied sources and traditions. He is widely acclaimed for his technical experiments and displaying a wide range of themes and subjects as well. He, along with other playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh has renewed the Indian theatre-tradition. To sum up Karnad’s contribution to Indian drama, it is better to quote Suresh Awasthi. He says:

"... Karnad followed the Natyashastra tradition rejecting borrowed western methods and conventions. Following the tradition, he chose legendary, folkloric and historical thematic material, and with his ability in crafting his plays, he created a new genre of indigenous drama.” (16)
Keeping this broad frame work in mind, the present study analyses his selected plays in the succeeding chapters and shows how Karnad uses some of the unnoticed episodes from myths, legends and folktales in his plays and how he exploits history to show its relevance to the contemporary issues.