CHAPTER II

THE EARLY PHASE: PLAYS FROM 1961 TO 1971
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1. *YAYATI*:

Today, Indian Writing in English has achieved a respectable status among the world literatures in English. Though initially influenced by English literature, it has made its mark in all genres of literature – Poetry, Fiction and Drama. A host of energetic and enthusiastic writers are emerging in all genres of literature with fresh and new ideas. However, the Indian English literature alone cannot provide a comprehensive picture of Indian literature. There is, in fact, the need for supplementing Indian English literature with a study of Indian literature in English that is, our regional literature in English translation. These literatures are closely associated with one another.

Having given up its colonial past, Indian Writing in English has emerged as a distinct body of writing, enriching the depth, range and vigour of Indian literature. During the British rule, Western education made its lasting impact on the social set up of India. Novel and Poetry in English emerged as the distinctive genres of literature. But till the 1970s, Indian English drama found itself in a deplorable situation. During the 1970s, there had been a change in the dramatic scene with the arrival of playwrights like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar who infused new life into the drama with contemporary themes and bold experimentation. Indian English drama during the 1970s was significantly influenced by the west. Several playwrights writing during this period show their indebtedness to Sartre, Camus, Pinter, Beckett, Ionesco, Pirandello and Brecht. Indian playwrights like Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, P. Lankesh, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Chandrashekhar Patil,
being aware of the western norms as also of the Indian tradition have enriched the contemporary drama immensely.

Girish Karnad is one of the three eminent writers of the contemporary Indian drama, the other two being Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar. The outstanding feature of Karnad’s writing is the use of myth, folktale, legend and history. He attempts to interpret the past relating it to the present and examines the present in the light of the past.

Karnad, who belongs to the rich tradition of Kannada literature, is one of the most celebrated playwrights today. Besides being a successful playwright, he is a highly talented actor, director, and film-maker. He has won several national and international awards for his valuable contribution to literature, culture, and arts.

His significant plays include *Yayati, Hayavadana, Tughlaq, Tale-Danda, Bali-the Sacrifice, Naga-Mandala* and *The Fire and the Rain*. In these plays Karnad has exploited mythical themes and has reinterpreted them in the modern context. His style of writing unites the elements of traditional Indian theatre such as Company Natak and Yakshagana with modern sensibility and attempts to portray contemporary socio-political realities.

Karnad uses myths and legends to throw light on the various socio-political and psychological problems. For instance, his first play *Yayati* deals with the theme of responsibility. *Hayavadana* depicts the problem of identity and search for completeness. *Tughlaq* also deals with the quest of identity. In his first three plays *Yayati, Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*, the existential philosophy seems to be predominant theme. And almost all his plays deal with problems confronted by a modern Indian woman in the patriarchal society.

Before examining his first play *Yayati* from mythical point of view, it is necessary to clarify one basic question frequently raised by the
critics. Instead of writing plays with original plots based on contemporary issues, why has Karnad resorted to myths, legends, folktales and historical plots for his plays; and in doing so what kind of message he likes to convey? In order to seek a pertinent answer to this question, we have to take into account the childhood experiences and the surrounding ambience which made everlasting impression on his mental horizon. P. Dhanavel also rightly observes “To answer these questions satisfactorily, it is worthwhile to see beforehand the playwright’s personal, familial, educational, social, political and historical background.” (2000 13) It is to be noted that he has been brought up in the environment of the folk theatre tradition and in the cultural ambience of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas. In his discussion with Ananth Murthy, Karnad unhesitatingly states 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.” (Anantha Murthy, 1995 137)

The present study attempts to examine critically Karnad’s use of myth and history in his plays. By exploiting myths and legends, he tries to show how they are quite relevant in portraying a modern man’s dilemma. In other words, 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 manifestation of human passions like love, hatred, anger, sex, lust, sacrifice, treachery, evil etc. As a matter of fact, myths and legends and history are the endless source of inspiration and motivation for the creative writers. Therefore, “Karnad has found myths a powerful vehicle to carry out 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) It is really thrilling and interesting to look at the past while you are in the present.

Karnad’s first play *Yayati* (1961) originally written in Kannada is based on a tale found in the Mahabharata. It is, to use Ananth Murthy’s phrase “a self-consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility.” (1994 143) It reinterprets an ancient myth from the modern context. For the first time English translation of Kannada *Yayati* was produced by Priya Adarker as early as the mid-sixties. And the revised version of English rendering was produced by the playwright himself in 2008 published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi. This play was quite successful on the stage when it was produced in Kannada. It brought him the Mysore State Award in 1962, Government of Mysore Rajyotsva Award in 1970 and Sangeet Natak Akademy in 1971.

In the ancient myth, King Yayati is cursed to old age in the prime of life for his obsession to sensual love and tries to evade the calamity by demanding that his son, Puru lend him his youth in exchange for the old age. “This unusual myth about a parent’s aggression against his offspring has inspired some of India’s most eminent writers to explore it in fiction, poetry and drama.” (Karnad, 2008 coverpage) But before analyzing Karnad’s *Yayati* from the mythical point of view, it would be appropriate at this juncture to know the ancient story of Yayati found in the Adiparva of Mahabharata.

There has always been a fight between the two factions – Gods and Demons (Asuras). Vrishaparava is a king of Asuras. Shukracharya, who knows the art of bestowing immortality to the dead, is the royal priest of Asuras. And Angiras is the preceptor of Gods but he does not have the skill of reviving the dead. Kacha, the younger son of Brahaspati is sent as a disciple to Shukracharya to obtain the Sanjeevani Vidya from him by
winning the heart of Devayani, a beautiful daughter of Shukracharya. The Demons kill Kacha twice but he is brought back to life by Shukracharya at the insistence of his dear daughter, Devayani. However, Kacha is killed the third time and is destroyed by fire and the ashes of which are mixed into the wine which is served to Shukracharya. Once again, at the importunate request of Devayani, Shukracharya brings him back to life. This time Kacha comes out tearing off Shukracharya’s stomach. And in return by learning Sanjeevani Vidya he revives Shukracharya. Now Devayani pleads Kacha to marry her but he refuses to do so by informing her that he is now brother to her since he has come out of her father’s stomach. At this Devayani becomes furious and curses him that he will not be able to operate Sanjeevani Vidya. He, too, curses her saying she cannot marry a Brahmin and goes to the heaven.

Once, Devayani and Sharmishtha, being intimate friends go together to the river for swimming. Lord Indra, in the incarnation of the wind exchanges their attires. And by mistake Sharmishtha wears Devayani’s blouse. Now Devayani becomes very furious and reprimands her for getting into a piece of Arya attire. Sharmishtha also loses her temper and calls her a beggar’s daughter and by dragging her to a well nearby, pushes her in. Yayati who happens to pass by rescues Devayani at her request by holding her right hand. Devayani expresses her wish that Yayati should marry her. However, the previous custom of the day forbids a Kshatriya to marry a Brahmin girl. So Yayati refuses stating the Pratiloma rule as the obstacle for their marriage. Seething with rage, Devayani complains to her father about Sharmishtha. Shukracharya informs the king, Vrishaparva that he’ll leave the kingdom if his daughter is not appeased. Devayani sets her condition for revenge by saying that Sharmistha has to be her servant (dasi) and serve her in the house she’d occupy after her marriage. Sharmishtha agrees to save her father’s
honour. Yayati later on marries Devayani after Shukracharya agrees to make an exception to the Pratiloma rule. Shukracharya, however, warns Yayati that he should not let Sharmishtha share his bed.

In the meantime, Sharmishtha is attracted to Yayati and asks him to marry her. Yayati falls a prey to Sharmishtha’s alluring beauty and marries her in secret. She has three sons from Yayati: Druhyu, Anu and Puru and Devayani has two sons: Yadu and Turvasu. Devayani very soon discovers the secret and complains bitterly to her father. Being enraged, Shukracharya curses him with old age. Yayati is a man of amorous disposition and his infidelity to Devayani brings upon him the curse of old age and infirmity. This is, in fact, a very crucial juncture of Yayati’s story. As he is a sensual king, he believes in enjoying all pleasures that life affords a king. Now this curse leaves him distraught. At the request, Shukracharya redeems the curse by telling him that if anybody is willing to exchange his old age, his youth will continue as before. When Yayati pleads all his five sons one by one to give their youth to him to enjoy worldly pleasures, all the sons except Puru reject his demand. Puru gives his consent to bear the old age. Regaining his youth, Yayati Pursues pleasures with a renewed zeal and zest and the more he indulges, the thirstier he grows. Finally, it dawns upon him that sensual desire is never quenched by indulgence. He takes back his old age and returns the youth to Puru and crowns him as a king. However, the remarkable thing is that what happens to Devayani and Sharmishtha in the end is not known as the story takes place in the patriarchal society.

The Yayati-myth is narrated in various ways in the Padma Purana, the Bhagavata Purana and the Harivansha Purana. Let us take a quick look at the myth attempted by other creative writers of India. Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote his play Sermista in 1859. Rabindranath Tagore wrote his famous play Kacha and Devayani (1924) on this theme. In
Marathi, Vishnudas Bhave wrote *Akhyan Kacha-Devayani* (1985), K.P. Khadilkar wrote *Vidhyaharan* (1913). In addition, some of the worth mentioning plays based on this mythology are Dixit’s *Devayani* (1913) and Mama Varerkar’s *Sanjeevani* (1960). However, their characters are confined to mythology alone and they do not emerge as real characters. K.P. Khadilkar’s *Vidhyaharan* focuses only on the unfulfilled love between Kacha and Devayani. In this play, the characters of Yayati and Sharmishtha are not given much scope and the play ends with Kacha ascending to the heaven. Therefore, this play can be termed as mythological and not as myth-based play. In his another play *Kichakvadha* (1907), Khadilkar attempts to bring in political metaphor. V.S. Khandekar, the noted Marathi novelist also used the Yayati-myth in his novel *Yayati* (1959). Here, Khandekar makes Yayati a representative of common man in the modern world who in spite of getting worldly pleasures remains restless and discontented. While mythical Yayati was engrossed in sensual pleasures, Khandekar’s Yayati runs after all kinds of material pleasures. Thus Khandekar’s Yayati represents a modern man. V.V. Shirawadkar, another eminent playwright in Marathi, wrote a play, *Yayati and Devayani* (1966) which deals with the marriage of Yayati and Devayani. He lays stress on love, soul and body but the most complicated part of Yayati-myth is deleted. This play ends with curse of old age to Yayati. In short, Shirawadkar’s play highlights the idea that not suffering but ego that is lonely. It doesn’t say anything about Yayati’s indulgence in sensual pleasures; nor again does it say anything about his moral transgression and his wish to exchange his senility with his youngest son, Puru. And this is exactly where Karnad’s play begins. In this context C.H.P.R. rightly observes: “Mr. Girish Karnad seems to have begun where playwrights generally end. *Yayati* announces the rise of a new star on the Kannada literary horizon . . . *Yayati* ranks among the best in
Karnad’s Yayati is a serious play which makes us think seriously on the tragic plight of Chitralekha. He attempts to interpret the Yayati-myth on the theme of responsibility and invents some new relationship applicable to modern sensibilities.

Karnad restructures the story as an ironic drama of discontent, futility, and death. Yayati is a self-centered epicurean who invites the curse because he cannot overcome his desire for Sharmishtha although Devayani has warned him about the destructive consequences of his choice. (VI.1, 2005 xvi)

Karnad’s play *Yayati* (1961) begins with the conversation between Devayani and Swarnalata in which Swarnalata complains about Sharmishtha’s spiteful remarks. Both Devayani and Sharmishtha reveal their hostility by exchanging hot words to each other. Yayati tries to pacify Devayani. He asks Sharmishtha about the cause of her quarrel with Devayani who projects a different image of Devayani. Yayati, mesmerized by Sharmishtha’s bewitching beauty and sharp intelligence, shares her bed. Very soon Devayani comes to know about their intimate association and constantly insists Yayati to expel her from the palace. However, her request goes unheeded. Devayani loses her temper and tears the marriage thread from around her neck and throws it on the floor and snatches out other pieces of ornaments she is wearing and flings them down. She even refuses to welcome the newly wedded Puru and his wife, Chitralekha. She is so involved in her own problem that she doesn’t even think of their happiness. Like Yayati, Devayani also shuns her responsibility. Puru and Yayati meet each other. Puru seems to be sad and lonely. He has no interest in his glorious ancestry and its glorious ideals. In the play though Puru is not the son of Sharmishtha, Karnad takes care to mention that Puru’s mother had come from rakshasa family. Later on
Sharmishtha comes in and informs Yayati about Devayani’s meeting with her father and the curse given by Shukracharya that Yayati will become decrepit by nightfall. It is interesting to note that Puru calls Sharmishtha as mother who herself is a rakshasa woman. She requests him to consult Shukracharya to withdraw the curse. In the meanwhile she appeals to Yayati to accept the curse and renounce the worldly pleasure. But Yayati doesn’t agree. Both of them wait for Puru’s arrival. Puru comes back and states what Shukracharya has said. If Yayati could find a younger person to take on his old age, he would get back his youth. No one is ready to accept Yayati’s old age except Puru.

In Act IV we find Chitralekha waiting for Puru. She finds out the beads of Mangalsutra (pendant) that Devayani had flung. Swarnalata informs her that Puru has agreed to take on his father’s old age. At first Chitralekha seems to be calm and quiet and appreciates her husband’s decision and wishes to perform the arati. But the moment she looks at his withered face, she screams out and asks him to get out. She can’t bear to look at his horrifying face. Swarnalata tries to pacify her and tells her the pathetic story of her past. She gives her a vial of poison. When Yayati comes in, Chitralekha, using venomous words, holds him responsible for her tragic plight. Yayati consoles her by saying that he’ll return her husband’s youth in a few years. However, Chitralekha says that since he has taken Puru’s youth, he should accept her now. But Yayati refuses to do so. Thereafter Chitralekha takes recourse to poison. Swarnalata becomes insane as she is greatly shocked at the sudden death of Chitralekha. Finally Yayati repents and calls Puru. While speaking to Yayati, Puru slowly regains his youth and Yayati takes back the curse of old age. In the end renouncing all worldly pleasures, Yayati retires to the forest for performing penance. Lastly Puru asks: “What does all this mean, O God? What does it mean?” (Karnad 69)
As a gifted playwright like Shakespeare, he discovers source materials from the myths and legends and employs them creatively in his plays and thus he links the past with the present. In fact, Karand’s interest does not lie in recreating ancient myths but in re-interpreting them to suit his artistic purpose. This myth of Yayati offers him with many possibilities of interpretation. In other words he exploits myths and legends to discuss many vital issues existing in the modern society, such as existentialism, problems of patriarchy, man-woman relationship, caste-system, alienation and so on. And yet there are many spaces in the plays to be explored. He is an excellent genius who interfuses facts and fiction without being noticed. Therefore many critics have eulogized him for his artistic ability. P. Dhanavel rightly comments:

Both theatre and drama critics have heaped praises on Karnad while appreciating many aspects of his plays: plot construction, characterization, song, spectacle, symbolism, use of myths and folktales, reinterpretation of history, highlight on contemporary social and psychological problems, especially those of women and children, sources and influences, technical innovations and so forth. (2000 11)

At the outset, Karnad has employed myth in *Yayati* to focus on the existential situation of the protagonist, Yayati. It deals with the theme of responsibility. Yayati, the king of Hastinapur tries to neglect his responsibility. Fully engrossed in sensual pleasures, Yayati fails to understand his duties as a king and a father. He always tries to find new ways and means to quench his insatiable thirst for sensual pleasures. Similarly in the contemporary society a common man is also found busy with material and carnal pleasures. Satish Kumar is right when he says that:
Like Yayati of Mahabharata, the common man of today is groping in the darkness of material and sensual pleasures. He finds himself in a world in which the old spiritual values have been entirely swept away and new spiritual ones are yet to be discovered. Blind pursuit of pleasure has become the \textit{sumum bonum}, the supreme religion in his life. (12)

With his genuine artistic touch Karnad refashions the mythic theme to make a contemporary statement:

In fact, Karnad has given a twist to the story, for he places individual in the centre as a representative of whole mankind, whose desires are never dead. A modern man awaits to strike when the iron is hot. Yayati, being a human being is no exception. Karnad shows that each man is what he aspires to be or makes himself. (Gupta and Sharma 34)

Greatly influenced by Sartre and Camus, Karnad projects Yayati, the ancient king as a selfish father demanding his son’s youth in exchange for his decrepitude and this selfishness of Yayati becomes conspicuous at the introduction of Chitralekha as Puru’s wife. In his interview with Tutun Mukherjee, Karnad talks about his invention of a new character, Chitralekha, “…I was intrigued by the idea that if Puru had a wife, how would she react? So I introduced Chitralekha. Every character in the play tries to evade the consequences of their actions except Sharmishtha and Chitralekha.” (T. Mukherjee 31) Freedom, choice and responsibility which characterize existentialism are reinforced in \textit{Yayati}. Karnad is basically a humanist so this humanistic vision of Karnad seems to be central to his plays. Existentialism in other words is humanism.

Karnad plainly admits the impact of existentialism on him in his conversation with Rajinder Paul.
I was excited by the story of Yayati, this exchange of ages between the father and the son, which seemed to me terribly powerful and terribly modern. At the same time, I was reading a lot of Sartre and the Existentialists. This consistent harping on responsibility which the existentialists indulge in suddenly seemed to link up with the story of Yayati. (Gupta and Sharma 33)

Karnad clarifies that one particular event that took place in his young age is responsible for the creation of his first play, *Yayati*. After getting a scholarship he went abroad for further study. In those days he was the first person of the family to go abroad. However, his parents were unwilling to send him out thinking that he would settle down there forever. Like Puru there was a problem of choice before him. Amidst this intense emotional turmoil, very surprisingly he found himself writing a play. Thus the Yayati-myth reflected his own puzzled sensibility. He was really surprised to know:

How precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at the moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future – the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues: the myth had nailed me to my past. (Karnad, 1999 23)

As already stated, Karnad has introduced some alterations in the original Yayati-myth. First, he alters Yayati’s character and makes him fit into the framework of existentialism. Besides, he changes Puru’s character and casts him in a similar mould who fluctuates between the desire to reclaim his youth and fulfilling his duty as a son. In the original narrative, Puru has no identity of his own. His role begins with glorious
sacrifice by accepting his father’s old age with respectful dignity. However, Karnad “rejects the traditional glorification of the son’s ‘self-sacrifice’ and against a backdrop of lust, jealousy, and racial tensions, foregrounds the tragic choices with which the young prince and his bride are confronted.” (coverpage) In Karnad’s *Yayati* Puru seems to be in existential situation. He reminds us an alienated hero of existential play. Here, he is defeated without reason. He has no aim and seems to be an outsider.

As a brilliant artist, Karnad shifts the importance in favour of Puru by introducing a new character, Chitralekha – Puru’s wife. As a genuine humanist, he asks his readers though indirectly to think seriously over the predicament of Chitralekha in the play. The portrayal of her character seems to be authentic from the modern point of view. By yoking existential husband and realistic wife together, Karnad tries to bring out the pathetic plight of Chitralekha.

Karnad’s technique of using mythical story to interpret the predicament of a modern man is really worthy of praise. At the very beginning of the play, Sutradhar’s address to the audience is very symbolic which underscores the playwright’s intention behind writing the play. “We turn to ancient lore not because it offers any blinding revelation or hope of consolation, but because it provides fleeting glimpses of the fears and desires sleepless within us. It is good way to get introduced to ourselves.” (Ibid 6) Karnad reveals the impact of Brecht’s theatrical teachings on him especially with regard to his use of indigenous dramatic forms. Epic theatre sets out to make what is shown on stage unsensational. Hence it more than often takes recourse to an old and familiar story rather than a newly invented one. Utilization of an existing tale provides the playwright with several advantages. It gives the dramatist the opportunity to elaborate his thesis, to turn the light as it
were, to focus on a hitherto unnoticed aspect. The dramatist is able to expose outdated notions and in the process create a contemporary consciousness. Karnad recognizes such a principle and uses familiar tales in all his plays.

The play is divided straightway into four acts with no scenes. There are six characters, and of them four women and two men. The story revolves around Yayati, Devayani, Sharmishtha and Puru; Chitralekha and Swarnalata are well connected to the main characters. Every act in the play develops the main theme of responsibility in an effective manner.

The existential version of reality and the reality of man-woman relationship” is very effectively portrayed in the play. (Manoj Pandey 48) Yayati’s premature old age poses the problem of existence. When Yayati is cursed to old age, he seems to be in the existential situation. His love for life is clearly implied when he says; “I don’t want solitude. I can’t bear it. I want my people around me. Queens, ministers, armies, enemies…. I love them all…. I have to be young. I must have my youth. (43)

After the fall of the curse, he seems to be under tension. So he expresses his restlessness and perplexity in these words: “Old age! Decrepitude! By nightfall! And then? Then what? Sharmishtha. You she-devil! You are the cause of all this. You are responsible. You trapped me with your wiles.” (42) It is noted here that Yayati tries to avoid his responsibility and holds Sharmishtha responsible for his decrepitude. In fact, it was his choice to indulge in worldly pleasures by marrying Sharmishtha. So he must prepare himself to face the consequences. Along with a sense of freedom, the chooser should become conscious of his responsibility. According to Surendra Verma “choosing is always painful.
It involves besides a sense of freedom, anguish and responsibility that weigh heavily upon the chooser.” (qtd. in Satish Kumar, 1987 49)

Existentialism is an experience based philosophy which influenced all genres of literature all over the world. In fact, it is concerned with the analysis of existence and of the way man finds himself existing in the world. Although the existentialists themselves differ evidently in doctrine and attitude, most of them have agreed that “man is totally free and responsible to himself alone, and that reality is grounded in the existence or the experience of existence”. (Coles Editorial Board, 1991 74)

M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* points out that:

. . . there has been a widespread tendency, especially prominent in the existentialist philosophy of men of letters such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, to view man as an isolated being who is cast ignominiously into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent human truth, value or meaning, and to represent man’s life, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end, as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. (2007 89-90)

Thus Existentialism implies consciousness of the self in the world of lived experience. It also implies problems of selfhood, search for identity, isolation and frustration. M.N. Sinha aptly comments on its influence on literature: “The existentialist authors seem to be in search of new meanings and are in the quest of self-discovery in man’s life and, therefore, display hard realities of life and experience in literature.” (qtd.in Satish Kumar, 1987 48) It is observed that Existentialism has influenced all genres of literature all over the world. Literary practitioners like Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Hemingway, Thomas Hardy of the west and Indian Writers in English like Aurobindo, Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand,
Rushdie, Asif Currimbhoy and Girish Karnad etc. have portrayed various human conditions, life and its situation in their writings.

Sutradhar’s opening statement that the play is not a ‘mythological’ but it is a myth-based itself reveals the theme of the play. And though the characters, the incidents, and circumstances are related to the ancient times, the reality delineated in the play is applicable to contemporary life as well.

When Yayati comes to know about the fall of the curse, he loses his self control and totally fails to handle the situation. He is not ready to accept the responsibility of his own misdeed. On the one hand, Yayati has a strong attraction for life and on the other, a fear of the curse. This restless and existential situation is well expressed by Yayati himself:

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

(43)

Yayati feels that existence is everything. To him temptation of sensual pleasure is too hard to resist. When the preparation is going on in the palace to welcome the newly married couple, Puru and Chitralekha, Yayati is engaged in making love to Sharmishtha. He uses newly prepared bed, which is meant for the new couple, to celebrate his secret wedding with Sharmishtha. The amorous instincts prevent him from thinking of his son’s happiness. When he is informed that the curse will not have its effect on him if a young man agrees to take it upon himself, he is very much delighted without knowing who is going to accept the curse. He says:
That is good news. That is good news indeed. So I don’t have to lose my youth, thank god. What a relief! So you see, Sharmishtha. You were asking me to accept the curse as though that was the end of everything. You wanted me to turn my back on life. But even a dotard like Shukracharya can see reason…. Don’t you feel any happiness, any joy at my escape from the blight? Why are you silent? Am I doing something wrong? (45-46)

When nobody comes forward to accept Yayati’s old age, Puru, the youngest son of Yayati, calmly accepts his father’s curse. Aparna Dharwadker appropriately throws light on Puru’s character:

Puru is a philosophical but self-hating ‘outsider’ who feels unsettled by the questionable legitimacy of his birth, and oppressed by the weight of dynastic tradition. When the curse is pronounced, Puru accepts it because he thinks the sacrifice of his youth would counteract his feelings of unworthiness, and enable him to fulfill his destiny as a Chandravamsha prince. (2005 xvi)

Puru’s character is greatly influenced by the image of a modern western philosophy of existentialism. Puru thinks that life is meaningless so he cannot establish any relation with the surrounding people. Having no faith in tradition, no aim in life, he accepts his father’s curse and that too, without consulting his newly wedded wife. “But the old age brings no knowledge, no self-realization, only the senselessness of a punishment meted out for an act in which he had not even participated.” (Karnad, 1999 23) Karnad’s depiction of domineering father and weak-willed son relates mythical story to contemporary situation of father-son relationship. Aparna Dharwadker also supports the view by stating that:
Karnad’s portrait of an overbearing patriarch and a weak-willed son is a displaced expression of his resentment against the element of emotional blackmail in the family relations and this method of indirect reference to the present characterizes all his myth and history plays. (2005 xvi)

In fact the mythical story of Yayati ends with Puru’s accepting his father’s curse as an obedient son. But the playwright, being an excellent craftsman, heightens the dramatic effect by introducing a remarkable character of Chitralekha. Karnad has portrayed her so realistically that her role becomes inevitable in the play.

Careful reading of *Yayati* enables us to know that myths have various associative layers of meaning. As a skilful artist, the playwright attempts to present the multifarious facets of myth by intermixing past and present. B. Yadava Raju’s observation seems to be pertinent in this regard:

Karnad invests new meaning and significance for contemporary life and reality by exploring the king’s motivations. In the Mahabharata, Yayati understands the nature of desire itself and realizes that fulfilment neither diminishes nor eliminates desire. In the drama, Karnad makes Yayati confront the horrifying consequences of not being able to relinquish desire. (81)

Thus Karnad’s *Yayati* delineates the afflicted consciousness of a disintegrated man like Yayati who tries to find a meaning in existence but ultimately fails in his quest. With the help of Yayati-myth, he lends the existential dimensions to man-woman relationship.

Karnad adds one more dimension to the play by presenting the problem of patriarchy in the Indian society. He draws our attention to the problem of the unequal power relationship especially in the joint family.
The play raises questions about woman’s desire and freedom but does not suggest any radical solution. B.V. Karanth’s comments with regard to the women’s position in the patriarchal social set-up are worth quoting: “In *Yayati* every character seems to carry his/her own complexity. Women in the Mahabharata are always a subversive voice, they are dumb. Women are not permitted to decide for themselves. This thing has been beautifully expressed through the character of Sutradhara. He comes on the stage followed by female Sutradhara with her hands tied with a rope. She does not speak. It is only the male Sutradhara who narrates. A clue has been given about the theme of the play.” (qtd.in Pandey, 2007 44) This is absolutely true in the case of Devayani, Sharmishtha, Chitralekha and Swarnalata.

In the play, Yayati reaffirms the faith in the patriarchy. He does not take into consideration Devayani’s feelings and aspirations. Though he is attracted by the bewitching beauty of Sharmishtha, he looks at her as a woman born in the rakshasa family. Raju rightly observes: “A very significant portion of the play is devoted to the study of the decisions of the patriarchal social set-up that expects women to surrender to the will of male decision makers without protest.” (86)

Yayati tries to console Chitralekha by saying that she should display self-control to face the situation and advises her to accept the transformed Puru. Further he tells her that her sacrifice would be remembered with gratitude and be recorded in golden words in the annals of history. He even advises her to behave in a way befitting the daughter-in-law of the Bharata family. It is really ironic that Yayati who shuns responsibility, advises her about the ‘responsibilities’ and ‘duties’ of a wife. When Chitralekha boldly refuses to accept his suggestion, he exercises his authority as her father-in-law and as a ruler and orders her to follow him:
I hope you realize where you are. This is the palace of the Bharata’s. I can order you – not as your father-in-law but as your ruler to take him in and you will have to obey. But I am not doing that. I request you – I plead with you – not to act in a manner that will bring ignominy on us all. (62)

However Chitralekha refuses to follow Yayati’s advice and rebels against restrictions forced on her. On the contrary she holds Yayati responsible for her plight. As a dauntless woman, she says: “I did not push him to the edge of the pyre, sir. You did. You hold forth on my wifely duties. What about your duty to your son? Did you think twice before foisting your troubles on a pliant son?” (Ibid) But Yayati, who is obsessed with his glorious future, does not have any answer to her questions.

Thus patriarchy foregrounds the fact that women should be trained to repress their desires. Women have no voice in the male-dominated society. In this context, Manoj Pandey’s observation about the patriarchal social system is absolutely right. He writes: “The male has voice, presence and power, whereas the female is silent, absent and powerless.” (50) However, Chitralekha as a representative of modern woman asserts her individuality and fights for her right to love and family happiness. She courageously argues and directly challenges Yayati to accept her as he has taken Puru’s youth:

I did not know Prince Pooru when I married him. I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He doesn’t possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But you do….. You have taken over your son’s youth. It follows that you should accept everything that comes attached to it. (65-66)
So “Chitralekha seems to be in search of a man who would define her and provide her some recognition in a society ruled by males.” (Manoj Pandey 51) Karnad has succeeded in portraying Chitralekha’s character by creating her image as an ‘asking woman.’ To fulfil her desire to have a successor to the Bharata dynasty, she offers herself to Yayati. Getting shocked by her immoral demand, he takes her to task for harbouring such low thoughts in her mind. As her dream is shattered to pieces, she has a feeling of incompleteness and feels a big vacuum within herself. As there is no hope left, she desperately says:

   So, sir, you refuse my youthful husband to me. Nor will you accept my logic. I know. It is part of the sacrifice we all have to make…What else is there for me to do? You have your youth. Prince Pooru has his old age. Where do I fit in?” (66)

When no option left to her, Chitralekha puts an end to her miserable life by drinking poison. As a matter of fact, she loves life immensely. She does not want to die. But when things go beyond her control, she dies out of frustration. Her husband finds no meaning in life. On the contrary Chitralekha has a relevant reason for living. She takes decision, poses a moral problem and fights till the last moment. However, she doesn’t get answer from anybody. Finally unable to fight against patriarchy, she ends her life by committing suicide. Karnad, by his unusual gift of craftsmanship tries to juxtapose two diametrically opposite characters – one, the existential husband, Puru and the other, realistic wife, Chitralekha.

Thus the play depicts Yayati as the champion of patriarchy and his attitude to women. He feels that a woman should not violate the norms determined by patriarchy. With his masculinity and authority, he treats women as dolls who are meant for fulfilling his carnal whims. That is why, after the tragic death of Chitralekha, Sharmishtha accuses Yayati: “.  

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You have destroyed her life. I pleaded with you but you were drunk with your future..... So here is the foundation of your glorious future, your Majesty. A woman dead, another gone mad, and third in danger of her life…” (67-68) Here it is to be noted that nowhere in the play Karnad justifies patriarchy. He does not appreciate the suppressed and subordinated position of woman, on the contrary, he creates her as a complementary to man.

Swarnalata episode forms the sub-plot of the play. Her tragic story also highlights the patriarchal norms of the society that expects woman to prove her innocence. If one of the themes of _Yayati_ is fidelity to the spouse, her story becomes very significant. She serves as a maid in the palace. She is Devayani’s servant in the play. The male domination is very effectively illustrated through her pathetic story. She is constrained to tell her husband that she was seduced by the Brahmin teacher just to give a mental peace to her husband. She responds to Chitralekha’s friendship and tells her, the story of her past:

One night as he was moaning in his sleep, I woke him up and admitted that my teacher had seduced me... I described the scene in convincing detail. My husband smiled at me, turned on his side, and for the first time in many years, fell into deep sleep. With that, Swarnalata’s story too ended. But not Swaru’s private hell. He disappeared next morning. I haven’t seen him since… (59-60)

In order to help him to get rid of his mental agony, Swarnalata tells her husband a fictitious story of her past. Generally speaking, Indian woman feels satisfied in the satisfaction of her husband. So Swarnalata seems to be the most sacrificing character in the play. She is portrayed as a devotional and traditional Indian woman.
It is noticed that Karnad’s skill in portraying the mythical characters and introducing new characters is worth praising. Like the characters of a Greek Tragedy, Karnad’s mythic figures have human depth even when they are caught in a predetermined course of action, and he doesn’t hesitate to alter both character and event to create effective drama. (2005 xviii)

Apart from this, the gender and caste/class issues also hold our attention. B. Yadava Raju in his article ‘Race and Gender in Yayati’ brings out another dimension of the play. He writes: “…these concerns of class and gender illumine the characters of the play in fascinating ways and makes us aware of the subliminal tensions of the drama that is enacted.” (80)

Being close friends Devayani and Sharmishtha once go to the river for swimming. By mistake, Sharmishtha wears Devayani’s blouse. At this Devayani becomes furious and humiliates Sharmishtha using venomous words. Sharmishtha also loses her temper and drags her by the hair and pushes her into a dry well. Hence this incident becomes the root cause of their enmity and generates bitterness between them. In order to take revenge, Devayani with her father’s aid forces Sharmishtha to be her slave. Here Devayani wants to prove her superiority over the daughter of the Asura race. This trivial incident of quarrel takes a form of perpetual war of race, caste and class. To make this war conspicuous, Karnad’s play opens to show Devayani married to Yayati and Sharmishtha as her slave. Right from the beginning of the play, the ambience of the palace becomes contaminated by the enmity between two former friends. Their conversations reveal anger and hatred for each other. “By peeling off layers of behavioural traits gradually, Karnad lays bare the class-caste-race conflict in the play.” (Ibid 83)
It is interesting to note how Sharmishtha shows her contempt for Devayani:

... actually, I was discussing that story with one of the concubines the other day. And you know what she said? The King was no doubt in a hurry to have some quick fun and go’, she said. ‘Even with prostitutes picked off the street, the first thing a man does is ask her name.’ And you say with you, the King dispensed with even that formality? You knew what would happen if you didn’t act quickly. I mean, you didn’t want the Kacha experience again! So while he was locked in your embrace, you quickly told him you were Devayani, daughter of et cetera et cetera. (13)

Throughout the play, Devayani – Sharmishtha conflict remains dominant. Devayani doesn’t want Sharmishtha in the palace, and so she asks her to leave the palace at once. However Yayati doesn’t allow her to go. Sharmishtha is well aware of the fact that unjust and cruel treatment is given to her not only because of her gender but also because of her race and culture.

Yayati takes Sharmishtha as his lover but keeps her away from the palace because she belongs to the rakshasa family. Sharmishtha gives her all to Yayati. Though immoral, her love seems to be passionate and genuine. But Yayati treats her with difference. Even he marries Devayani keeping selfish motive in mind. He wants to be immortal. Sharmishtha knows well that Yayati married Devayani because she is the daughter of Shukracharya who will assist him in acquiring the Sanjeevani Vidya. So it can be said that gender, caste/class conflict is discernible in the play. In this regard, Aparna Dharwadker’s observation seems to be pertinent.

But the most memorable feature of Yayati - and a striking accomplishment for a twenty-two year old author - is its quartet of
sentient, articulate, embittered women, all of whom are subject in varying degrees to the whims of men, but succeed in subverting the male world through an assertion of their own rights and privileges. Devayani the Brahmin queen and Sharmishtha the slave-princess are caught in a fierce rivalry that allegorizes the hierarchical divisions of caste while also visiting upon both women the destructive effects of Yayati’s amoral desire. (2005 xvi-xvii)

The conversation that takes place between Puru and Yayati also throws light on his aversion to the Asura race. Puru is very curious to know more about his mother. He learns that his mother was born in the rakshasa family and Yayati disliked her because of her low class and her vengeance for the Aryas. He says: “It was only in her last moments that she told me the truth. She was a rakshasa woman and the Aryas had destroyed her home and hearth. She was bent on vengeance and the inferno she had created was her way of celebrating her success…. ” (40)

The way Yayati treats the women he seduces, shows gender-class-caste consciousness is apparent in his mind.

In short, we can say that Yayati himself is responsible for his degradation. Basically the crisis comes in his life by his refusal to part with Sharmishtha. It is the tragic end of Chitralekha that brings him to his senses and forces him to repent for his moral transgression. He is terribly shocked to see the disastrous effect of his actions and finally he takes back the curse from his son, saying “Take back your youth, Puru. Rule well. Let me go and face my destiny in the wilds.” (69) So the leitmotif of the play is that human beings are merely pawns on the chess-board of life. Very skilfully, Karnad brings in the problem of choice. It is left to the characters to make a choice and participate in the game of life. But once the game begins, the rules of the game take over the performers. “Thus, the episode of Yayati is useful in bringing out the theme of responsibility
in modern context. Paternal loyalty is a fine gesture but it can be ruinous in the nuclear family today, when it is misappropriated.” (Dhanavel, 2000 20)

In this way, by using the Yayati-myth, Karnad has succeeded in dealing with the contemporary issues like existentialism, patriarchy, man-woman relationship, caste class and gender and pervasive sense of alienation and different manifestation of human passions like love, hatred, anger, sex, sacrifice etc. Really speaking, the play succeeds in exploring the complexities of responsibilities and expectations within the Indian family.

A celebrated Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar’s impression of the play is worth mentioning. He writes: “When I first read Yayati, I was amazed. Those characters, those minds, so alive and true!” (coverpage)

2. TUGHLAQ (1964)

For the convenience of the study undertaken, Karnad’s dramatic output can be divided into two broad categories – myth-plays and history-plays. In a very masterly manner, he uses myth, legend and folktale in the plays like Yayati, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala and Bali-The Sacrifice. And there is a predominance of history in Tughlaq, Tale-Danda and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan which are termed as historical plays.

His second play Tughlaq (1964) brought him name and fame as a leading playwright in the post-Independence Indian English drama. It helped establish him a dramatist par excellence. The play is considered to be a landmark in Kannada literature. At the request of Alyque Padamsee, Karnad himself translated it into English in 1970. And this translation was first staged at the Bhulabhai Auditorium, Bombay in August 1970. Karnad has won widespread reputation through its translation into major Indian languages and several European languages. It has been performed
extensively in Europe, North-America and Australia. It has been remarkably successful on the stage because of its dramatic excellence and its appeal to the viewers.

_Tughlaq_ is considered as a classic in Kannada literature. It is very often produced in Kannada, English, Marathi, Hindi and Bengali. This play can be enjoyed and understood at various levels. U.R. Anantha Murthy aptly points out the factors which contributed to the success of the play. He says: “The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle, and uses conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Aazam (the Akara and Makara of Natak performances), to which theatre audiences respond readily.” (1994 143)

It is really interesting to trace the genesis of this play. When Karnad was engaged in writing plays for Manohara Granthamala, he came across a comment by Kirtinath Kurtkoti that there were only costume plays and no historical plays in Kannada which could appeal to modern sensibilities. That was why Karnad positively accepted the challenge and started reading several books on history. The moment he read about Tughlaq’s history, he instantly recognized the dramatic potentiality of the story of Tughlaq’s reign and its relevance to the present situation. So he made up his mind to exploit history as a source to interpret our life and times.

Tughlaq’s rule seems to be the combination of paradoxes such as his idealism, foresightedness, great administrative reforms and violence, ruthlessness, bloodshed and barbarity. It is this paradoxical nature of Tughlaq that attracted Karnad because it “reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country.” (Ibid) While commenting on contemporaneity of _Tughlaq_, Karnad himself writes:
What struck me absolutely about *Tughlaq*’s history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi…and one of the greatest failures also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel. (Ibid 143-144)

When asked by Tutun Mukherjee whether *Tughlaq* was intended as a political critique of the post-Independence decades, Karnad plainly comments on its contemporary relevance.

Well, it was said that once there was a riot and Lohia is supposed to have asked Nehru, “Why is this bothering you?” or some such remark. It was also said that Indira Gandhi found the play commentting upon her father. The play certainly reflects the disillusionment that my generation felt with the new politics of independent India, the realpolitik, the cynicism, and the gradual erosion of ethical norms. It is one of my more successful plays. It is produced all the time. Different generations seem to find in it some understanding of their political, social condition. (36)

*Tughlaq* is translated into English by Karnad himself and published in 1971. It is a historical play concerned with the life and tumultuous reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq for about twenty six years. For the artistic purpose and compactness of dramatic structure, Karnad has selected only five years from 1327 to 1332. The action of the play takes place in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad five years
later. For presenting the complexity of Tughlaq’s character, the playwright chiefly relies on the contemporary historians like Zia-ud-Din Barani’s *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* (1351), Al-Marshi’s *The Maslik-al-absar*, Ibn-i-Battuta’s *Travels* and Badoni’s *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi*. And particularly “Using Barani’s basic narrative, his attitudes, and portions of his text, Karnad arranges the thirteen scenes of *Tughlaq* as a sequence of self-canceling actions that articulate both political and psychological ironies.” (Dharwadker, 2008 98) This play explores the paradoxical nature of Tughlaq whose reign is known as one of the spectacular regimes of history.

*Tughlaq* is not merely a historical play but as P. Bayapa Reddy says:

(It is) a very imaginative reconstruction of some of the most significant events in the life of a great king who is seen not only in India but also in the contemporary world. The theme of the play is from Indian history, yet the treatment of it is not historical but highly political. In this play, politics is ingeniously linked with people, religion and history. (44)

Karnad tries to maintain fidelity to the historical sources which present Tughlaq as a combination of opposites - a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devoted to religion and atheist. Both in history and in the play, Tughlaq is a great learned person, idealist and visionary. While maintaining the historical facts, Karnad artistically reconstructs some of the significant events that took place in the Sultan’s life. And thus he deftly exploits history for raising social, religious and political issues of the age which seem to have direct bearing on the present socio-political and religious situations. To put it in other words, Karnad’s historical consciousness provides a new way of interpreting history by displaying a close nexus between history, religion and politics.
Karnad projects Tughlaq in various roles. Tughlaq stands for administrative reforms, for Hindu-Muslim amity, recognition of merit - despite of caste and creed, restructuring of administrative machinery and reformation of taxation, establishment of a well balanced society in which all shall enjoy freedom, justice, equality and basic human rights. As a man of letters, he tries to implement a new system in his administration. Being a rationalist and philosopher, he completely deviates from the religious doctrines in respect of politics and administration. Therefore, the orthodox Muslim leaders show their vigorous protest against the Sultan for his departure from the holy tenets of religion. They think him a non-believer in Islam as he cancels the jiziya tax. Tughlaq’s tolerance for Hindus is bitterly criticized.

At the very beginning of the play, in scene one, the conversation between an Old Man and a Young Man reveals the tension and dramatic conflict between the two factions- the followers and the opponents of Tughlaq:

Old Man: God, what’s this country coming to!
Young Man: What are you worried about, grand father?
The country’s in perfectly safe hands – safer than any you’ve seen before”. (Karnad 147)

Here the Old Man represents Orthodox Muslims and the Young Man represents a liberal view-point of the Sultan. It is very clear that at the very beginning of the play the conflict is set in between the old and new, orthodox religion and modernity. And as the plot advances, the conflict also mounts up. The orthodox people think that the country is not in safe hands because Tughlaq is liberal to Hindus. The abolition of jiziya tax on Hindus infuriates them. They do not understand Tughlaq’s idealism and reformatory zeal. Therefore they condemn him as an enemy...
of Islam. However, the young people admire and support the secular and liberal policies of the Sultan.

As a matter of fact, Tughlaq seems to be a devout Muslim with strong faith in the holy Koran but his rationalistic and ideal views are beyond the understanding of the orthodox people. He wants to build such a society where people of different communities live in harmony. In order to create a just society he declares that the property of Vishnu Prasad must be given back to him. Vishnu Prasad is a Brahmin of Shiknar whose land has been confiscated illegally by the officers of the state. The Sultan also gives him a grant of five hundred silver dinars and a post in civil service. This event clearly shows his sense of justice and generosity. He honestly assures his people by telling them:

My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the Kazi and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace not just peace but a more purposeful life. (149)

He calls upon his countrymen to extend him their support and cooperation for implementing his plans. Thus the first scene presents him as an idealistic performer who hopes to lead his people into a Utopia. But unfortunately his generous intention is misunderstood by the orthodox Muslims. They think that he is betraying Islam by his ideals and practices. His idea of brotherhood causes great annoyance and irritation to the Mullahs and Mowlvis. The fact is that the Muslim fundamentalists want the Sultan to re-impose the jiziya tax on the Hindus. They call the Hindus Kafirs or infidels. The Old Man says: “Beware of the Hindu who embraces you. Before you know what, he’ll turn Islam into another caste and call the prophet an incarnation of his god…” (148) So the Old Man
makes a sarcastic and ironical comment on the caste system and the belief in incarnation which occupy a significant place in Hinduism. Even the Court Guard insults the Brahmin in whose favour the Kazi has given his judgment. Addressing the Brahmin he says: “Perhaps your Highness will want an escort to see you safely home! Complaining against the Sultan! Bloody Infidel! Get going, I’m already late.” (150) This age-old enmity between the Hindu-Muslim is also seen in the present society. The Hindus are also suspicious of the Sultan’s good intention. Here it is to be noted that in the fourteenth century Hindu and Muslim communities were not on good terms. So it is observed that “in an age of religious fanaticism and hostility between Hindus and Muslims, his (Tughlaq’s) broadminded religious tolerance seems foolish to the Muslims and cunning to the Hindus who suspect his motives.” (Gomez 114) The play highlights the fact that the Hindu-Muslim conflict is not a newly generated issue. On the contrary it has been going on in the society for centuries together. Even today for their vested interests the politicians try to divide the country in the name of religion, caste, or creed.

We can say that the Sultan’s ideals are well ahead of time. So the community which is built upon religious fanaticism cannot appreciate his democratic spirit.

The Sultan introduces several reformative activities for the benefit of his subjects. “But the only character to benefit from this utopian move is a low-caste Muslim washer-man, Aziz, who assumes the identity of a poor Hindu Brahmin to win a false judgment against the Sultan and secure a position at the court.” (Dharwadker, 2008 98) However, the Sultan is not aware of the fact that the opportunists like Aziz in disguise of Vishnu Prasad misappropriate reformative activities which therefore fail to reach the people whom they are meant for. Aazam is a pickpocket who makes money by cheating poor people.
The tragedy of the Sultan is that his people exploit his reforms and remain ungrateful to him and this kind of deception is frequently repeated throughout the play. In this context, Sadhana Agrawal rightly observes: The irony is that the cheats, ruffians, cut throats and murderers always exploit religious sentiments and the idealistic policies of the Government to suit their motives just as a Muslim dhobi who was a cheat, disguised himself as a Brahmin whose claim was considered just by the Kazi. (100)

What Karnad tries to suggest here is that in the present times also we come across the scoundrels like Aziz who misuse the welfare plans announced by the Government, and the needy people are deprived of such benefits.

In the opening scene we find one more announcement of the Sultan. He declares his crucial decision of shifting the capital of his empire from Delhi to Daulatabad. At this, his people are greatly shocked and they react in bewilderment. The Sultan clarifies his intention of changing the capital by stating:

My empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my Kingdom. (149)

The Sultan takes this decision to create an effective administrative centre in Deccan. But his hasty decision generates great discontent against him. It causes untold and unutterable suffering to the people. Karnad skilfully uses historical evidence about the Sultan’s decision to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. According to historical evidences “Tughlaq took the radical decision for changing the capital for
effective administrative control of the south. The Amirs and Sayyids were against the Sultan and by transferring the capital to Daulatabad, Hindu-dominated town; he wanted to weaken their power.” (Satish Kumar 34-35)

Karnad tries to emphasize the failures and the weaknesses of the Sultan. His views are mainly based on the opinions of the historian, Barani. Thus “Karnad ignores Sultan’s generosity. He presents Tughlaq’s act of transferring the capital as the whim of a despot. He describes it as a mass exodus and in this respect he follows contemporary historians who highlight Tughlaq’s inhumanity and callousness.” (Ibid)

The Sultan is accused of killing his father and brother at prayer time. The third man refers to Sheikh Imam-ud-din as the Sultan’s main opponent who has publicly declared in Kanpur that the Sultan is guilty of patricide and fratricide. His step-mother is also of the same opinion. Historical Tughlaq is also said to be guilty of patricide and fratricide. But Ishwari Prasad thinks that:

Karnad does not present Tughlaq as repentant over their murder as he has to highlight his heartlessness and wanton acts of cruelty. Historical records prove that Tughlaq was stung with a deep feeling of remorse over his father’s murder. He atoned for the crime and immediately after his succession to the throne he caused his father’s name be inscribed on the coins. (Ibid 69)

Geeta Kumar rightly says:

Tughlaq is a usurper, having come to the throne after getting his father and brother murdered during prayer time, and has blood on his hands at such a young age. The murky path to political power has been traversed by this power-politicker,
having committed heinous crimes of parricide and fratricide. (93)

In the scene second Tughlaq is seen playing chess which is a symbol of political diplomacy. It denotes the intriguing nature of Tughlaq. Karnad suggests that an expert of chess player, Tughlaq plays with political rivals as pieces on the chess board of politics. Ain-ul-Mulk is appointed Governor of Avadh as he is the childhood friend and chess mate of Tughlaq. Later on Tughlaq becomes suspicious of his achievements and his hold over the people. Therefore he wants to transfer him to the Deccan. But Ain-ul-Mulk does not like the proposal and he revolts against him. Therefore, Tughlaq informs his step-mother that Ain-ul-Mulk is marching on Delhi with an army of thirty thousand soldiers.

Now the power – politics works in a fascinating way when Tughlaq invites Sheikh Imam-ud-din, his worst critic, to address a public meeting in the yard in front of the big mosque. The Sheikh is a staunch follower of Islam and he vigorously opposes the ideal and radical policies of Tughlaq. Najib, who is an evil genius of the Sultan, tells him that the Sheikh has a remarkable resemblance to him. Tughlaq is clever enough to know that there is a golden opportunity for him to turn the tables on his worst critic. When no body turns up for the meeting, he proposes to invite the courtiers. The Sheikh dauntlessly says: “What’s the point in my addressing a gang of bootlickers? I want to speak to the people who are willing to act, who are willing to do something for Islam and the country. If no one comes today, well, no matter. I’ll go to the market-place tomorrow and speak there.” (163)

The Sheikh straightway accuses Tughlaq for his deviation from the holy tenets of Koran. He reprimands him “But if one fails to understand what the Koran says one must ask the Sayyids and the Ulema. Instead you have put the best of them behind the bars in the name of justice.”
(Ibid 164) Being very bitter and sarcastic, he further warns him: “Beware, Sultan, you are trying to become another God. It’s a sin worse than parricide.” (Ibid) When nobody turns up for the meeting, the Sheikh comes to know that he is trapped. Very cunningly Tughlaq calls upon him in the name of Islam to go as a royal envoy to rebellious Ain-ul-Mulk to dissuade him from the folly. And finally he succeeds in destroying the Sheikh treacherously. P. Bayapa Reddy sums up the tragic end of the Sheikh.

In this powerful play, politics is deftly linked with religion. In scene iii, one finds the Revered Sheikh Imam, aligning himself with politics. He accepts the plea of the Sultan to serve as his envoy and dissuade Ain-ul-Mulk of Avadh from the folly of turning against the Sultan. A platoon of heavily armed soldiers follows him while he is doing the job of an emissary. The Sultan has managed to kill Imam in such a way that nobody would suspect him. Here the religious leader becomes a prey to the dirty political game of Tughlaq. (45)

From the artistic view point Karnad makes some changes in the historical facts. Satish Kumar rightly comments about the changes made in the event mentioned above.

In order to stress the inhumanity of Tughlag, Karnad greatly alters the historical facts of Ain-ul-Mulk’s rebellion. According to history Ain-ul-Mulk was defeated and after a few days of indignities, he was released and was appointed the superintendent of a royal garden. But in Tughlaq Ain-ul-Mulk’s governorship is restored to him. The ghastly murder of the Sheikh is also a deviation from history. (36)

The psychological change in the Sultan is worth noting. Here we come to know how his idealism gradually changes to cruelty and how dualism and intriguing nature become dominant factors. But “before
Sheikh Imam-ud-din,” as P.Ramamoorthy rightly points out, “he (Tughlaq) plays the role of a true ruler interested in establishing a new world.” (157) Henceforward the violence he perpetrates is really mind-blowing. When he tries to implement his ideas for the welfare of his people, they seem to be indifferent to him. Consequently the Sultan becomes frustrated. And out of frustration, to retain power, he adopts violent means and goes on killing his opponents one by one.

His ways of dealing with his opponents reveal his dual policy and machinations. His comment after the death of the Sheikh is the best example of a crafty and cunning politician. He says: “Delhi will observe a day of mourning tomorrow for Sheikh Imam-ud-din. And there will be no festivities to celebrate the victory. When men like him die, it’s sin to be alive.” (171) And Ratansingh’s speech also throws light on deceitful and paradoxical nature of the Sultan. While speaking to Shiab-ud-din he says: “I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.” (172) Here, Karnad wants to suggest that the modern political world is also full of cunning and selfish politicians like the Sultan who can go to any length to retain power in order to maintain their false political image.

While examining the use of history in Tughlaq, we come to know how history is deftly linked with religion and politics. In reality, it can be said that ever since the rise of civilization, there has been a close nexus between history, religion and politics. It is difficult to separate them from one another. Satish Kumar’s view in this regard seems to be appropriate. “Girish Karnad’s play Tughlaq is relevant to modern India which has been passing through a crucial stage due to conflict between religion and politics. To ambitious and intriguing politicians, religion has been a means to achieve political end.” (92)
Soon after the death of the Sheikh, the fundamentalists react violently against the Sultan. They think that the tragic end of Imam-ud-din is a severe blow to Islam. Therefore, in a house of Delhi, Amirs, Sayyids, Shihab-ud-din and Ratansingh come together for the secret meeting against the Sultan. They make a secret plan to assassinate him at prayer time. In the meeting, all of them show their strong resentment at high taxation and the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Ratansingh, a Hindu soldier, persuades Shihab-ud-din, a trusted friend of the Sultan to support his devilish plot. Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddararfim, a holy man, also implores Shihab to lead the conspiracy in the name of Islam. Actually Shams-ud-din has no desire to involve himself in the treacherous game of politicians. When the Sultan’s tyranny becomes intolerable, he decides to support them. So he says: “While tyranny crushes the faithful into dust, how can I continue to hide in my hole. Haven’t you heard what’s happening to the leaders of Islam today? Sheikh Haidari is in prison. Sheikh Hood in exile.” (175)

After much persuasion Shihab-ud-din’s unflinching loyalty is shaken. The religious saints turn out to be the killers. Ratansingh comes out with his perfect plan to kill the Sultan at prayer time on next Tuesday when the Amirs will be consulting the Sultan for Durbar-i-Khas. He further informs them that the muezzin’s call to prayer will be the signal of attack. Thus the religious prayer plays a vital role in the power-politics. All of them know well that the Sultan is very particular about prayer. Therefore, it is resolved to put an end to his tyranny at prayer time only. In this way prayer has been used as leitmotiv in the play to depict the paradoxical nature of the Sultan and his opponents.

When the Amirs and Sayyids express their hesitation to kill a Muslim during prayer time, Ratansingh very sarcastically and ironically asks them: “Where’s your Holy Koran? The tyrant doesn’t deserve to be
considered among the faithful. And then, he killed his own father during the prayer time, after all.” (178) Shams-ud-din also shows his disliking for polluting the prayer time “with the blood of a Mussulman.” (Ibid) At this Shihab-ud-din pungently remarks: “Does your Islam work only at prayer? You have persuaded me to do what I had sworn never to do. I’m sure the Lord will not mind an interrupted prayer.” (178-179) Finally, Shihab-ud-din, who has high opinion about Tughlaq, determines to associate with the rebels. In this way, the treacherous killing of Imam-ud-din becomes the chief cause of the conspiracy. S.T. Kharat also rightly states:

The deceitful killing of the saint creates a strong resentment amongst the religious people and they hatch a conspiracy to kill the Sultan at prayer. Ratansingh is a mastermind who persuades Shihab-ud-din, a trusted friend of the Sultan, to the deadly plot. (41)

Scene six is the most climatic one where the rebels consult the Sultan for the Durbar-i-Khas. Many important issues are discussed. Shihab-ud-din requests the Sultan not to shift the capital to Dauatabad as people are unhappy over this decision. At this he says that he has already informed the people about the causes for shifting the capital. He further makes an announcement about his introduction of copper currency which will have the same value as a silver coin. He justifies his decision by telling them about the use of paper currency in China. In the presence of all the religious leaders, he expresses his hopes of building a new future for India.

I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don’t understand me, ask me to explain myself and I’ll do it. If you don’t understand my
explanations, bear with me in patience until I can show you the results. But please don’t let me down. I beg you. (182)

All of them are surprised to see the Sultan kneeling before them. The Sultan asks them to take an oath on the Koran to support him in his measures. At this the muezzin’s call is heard for a prayer. When everyone is busy with praying, a commotion is heard off-stage. As per the plan, Shihab-ud-din and the Amirs pulling out their daggers step towards the Sultan. Suddenly from behind the curtain about twenty Hindu soldiers rush in with spears and surround the Amirs. The rebels are taken aback and they stand in total panic and slowly throw down their daggers. And except Shihab-ud-din, all of them are taken away.

The entire episode exposes the dualism and hypocrisy of the rebels. Even in this commotion, the Sultan goes on praying unaffected. After completing his prayer he informs Shihab-ud-din about Ratansingh’s secret letter disclosing the conspiracy. The Sultan is greatly distressed at the treachery of Shihab whom he trusted as a friend. Unable to control the rage, he stabs him mercilessly. And then almost frenzied, goes on stabbing him. He expresses his profound anguish by asking Barani: “Why must this happen, Barani? Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors? Will my reign be nothing more than a tortured scream which will stab the night and melt away in the silence?” (185) The plan to assassinate the Sultan is the climax in the play. Here afterwards, he becomes very violent and malicious.

Then he callously orders Najib that everyone involved in the conspiracy to be caught and beheaded. After regaining self-control, very cunningly and diplomatically he asks Najib:

Make a public announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and that the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by
Shihab-ud-din who died a martyr’s death defending him. The funeral will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair. Invite his father to it and see that he is treated with the respect due to the father of a loyal nobleman.” To this Barani exclaims “Oh God! Aren’t even the dead free from your politics? (Ibid)

Here, Karnad as a skilful playwright emphasizes the psychological study of Tughalq’s character. He shows the gradual changes that take place in Tughlaq. It is remarkable to note how Tughlaq’s idealism receives a severe set back. He now turns out to be a shrewd politician, a heartless and brutal killer and a crafty ruler who exploits religion to retain power. S.T. Kharat sums up the repercussions of the conspiracy in appropriate words:

The entire conspiracy exposes the hypocrisy of the chieftains. The Sultan frantically bans prayer. The prayer is also desecrated by both the Sultan and the conspirators. Inordinate ambition of power and wealth contaminate and pollute prayer and religion. (41-42)

Thus prayer has got a symbolic significance in the play. It is used as leitmotiv in the play. It is very ironic and unfortunate that the prayer which should be used for worshipping God and getting mental peace has been used here for destructive purpose. The Sultan kills his father and brother at prayer time. His opponents also use it for killing the Sultan. In this regard Satish Kumar writes: “In the beginning Tughlaq is very particular about the prayer. Everyone has to pray five times a day because that is the law. When he is at the height of frustration, he bans prayer in his kingdom and when it is reintroduced after an interval of five years on the arrival of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid he sleeps soundly.” (2004 156) It is important to see how religious prayer is exploited both by the Sultan and
his enemies in the game of power-politics. Ananth Murthy also rightly points out that:

Although the theme of the play is from history, Karnad’s treatment of theme is not historical. Take, for instance, the use Karnad makes of the leitmotiv of the play, ‘prayer’, in the scene where the Muslim chieftains along with Sheikh Shams-ud-din, a pacifist priest, conspire to murder Tughlaq while at prayer. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer, which is most dear to Tughlaq, is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. The whole episode is ironic. (1994 144)

It is very often said that life is full of opposites and contradictions. And history depicts this bitter reality through the actions of Tughlaq. Therefore, closely following history Karnad also throws light on the opposite and paradoxical nature of Tughlaq. The real dramatic beauty of the play arises from these opposites. The remark of Anantha Murthy in this context is absolutely right. He says:

Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealist, yet, in the pursuit of the ideal, they perpetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real; the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue.”

(Ibid)

When the Sultan comes to know that his people are not co-operative with him and are against the decisions taken in the interest of his kingdom, he becomes spiteful and revengeful. As we have already seen, the conflict between the Sultan and the fundamentalists begins right from the inception of the play. Each and every decision by the Sultan is turned down. They do not like the Sultan’s act of abolishing jiziya tax and
nor do they like his decision of shifting of the capital. Hence from the psychological point of view, it is important to know how the Sultan, who was generous and liberal in his attitude and affectionately invited his people to the new capital city, makes the shifting obligatory. He thoughtlessly orders Najib:

I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was so soft, I can see that now. They’ll only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard will satisfy me now. (185-186)

Since the murder attempt is made on his life at prayer time, he prohibits prayer by declaring that “there will be no more praying in the kingdom. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished.” (186) Tughlaq alienates himself from the people by banning prayer. Sheik Imam-ud-din accuses him of becoming another God. So the Sultan’s decision of banning prayer is one of the major faults. In doing so he degrades himself in the eyes of his people. M.K. Naik aptly says:

The tyrant has obviously failed to realize the fatal implications of his decree. It not only wounds severely the religious susceptibilities of his subjects, making his alienation from them complete and irrevocable, but it has now also made him guilty of blasphemy, of a kind of revolt against God himself. (1987 144)

The upper class people and the religious priests of Delhi strongly dislike the Sultan’s decision of moving the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad because they think that by changing the capital, Tughlaq wants to weaken their power and to bring the rebellions in the south
under control. He orders that every citizen of Delhi must leave for Daulatabad, and those who are reluctant to go, should be severely punished.

Scene Seven takes us to a camp on the Delhi – Daulatabad route. The compulsory shifting inflicts lot of sufferings, destitution, poverty, hunger and starvation on men, women, children, young and old alike. Relief measures provided by Tughlaq are misappropriated by corrupt officers like Aziz. In this scene we find Aziz dressed as a Brahmin and his friend, Aazam in a camp on the Delhi – Daulatabad route. One Hindu woman requests Aziz to allow her to consult the doctor as her child is seriously ill. However, he is callous and merciless to the Hindu woman. He is ready to relieve her if she offers him money. He informs her that, he, too, will have to bribe his senior official. This inhuman act of Aziz shows that corruption is a widespread disease in the government sector.

Aazam who is an assistant of Aziz is a pickpocket by profession. He is apprehensive of his future. He fears that one day he will be caught while stealing money and will be punished for his crime. But Aziz calls him a senseless and coward and tells him how one can become rich by joining politics. Through the character of Aziz, Karnad depicts how selfish opportunists like Aziz misappropriate the funds sanctioned by the government for the welfare of the people. He informs Aazam how one can exploit politics for making one’s own future.

Aziz: you are a hopeless case, you know. Pathetic! You’ve been in Delhi for so many years and you’re as stupid as ever. Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world – politics! My dear fellow, that’s where our future is-politics! It’s a beautiful world-wealth, success, position, power- and yet it’s full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head…. (190)
Aziz’s comment on politics and the so-called leaders is appropriate. Karnad criticizes the present situation in politics where we find many brainless people who do nothing except minting money for themselves. In response to the Sultan’s introduction of copper currency, Aziz informs Aazam that instead of stealing copper coins, they will make counterfeit copper coins.

Scene eight takes place after the lapse of five years later in 1332 A.D. It narrates terrible experience of migration to Daulatabad. The old man recollects the hardships and misfortunes many people underwent while coming from Delhi to Daulatabad. It was a terrible ordeal. He says: “My old father had lived in Delhi all his life. He died of a broken heart. Then my son Ismail. He was six years old – would have been ten now! The fine dust that hung in the air, fine as silk, it covered him like a silken shroud. After him, his mother.” (193) The plan of shifting the capital proves to be a total failure as it lacks public support. S.G. Bhanegaonkar writes:

The capital is shifted at a terrible cost in terms of life and property and without slightest consideration for the rights or the feelings of his people who have so long loved the city. It is true that Muhammad Tughlaq lacks practical judgment and commonsense, but the onus of failure of his ambitious plans lies mainly with his subjects who refuse to see the wisdom in his decisions. (69)

According to Satish Kumar modern historians have tried to prove that Daulatabad plan had been implemented in stages keeping in mind the convenience of the people. All types of travelling facilities were provided to them. The historian Zia-ud-din Barani who strongly opposed the Sultan, also remarks that the Sultan “made liberal gift to the people both at the time of their departure for, and on their arrival at Daulatabad.” (70)
But Karnad does not focus on the magnanimity of the Sultan and portrays his controversial decision of changing the capital as an act of caprice of a despot. Karnad’s *Tughlaq* is based on the contemporary historians who emphatically opposed the Sultan. So, according to Karnad, the shifting of the capital is a mass exodus. The historian, Ibn-i-Battuta also brings out the Sultan’s callous behaviour when he says: “One night the Sultan went up the roof of his palace and looked around. When neither a lamp nor even smoke or light came within his sight, he remarked: “Now my heart is pleased and my soul is at rest.” (Ibid) In fact, there were many reasons why this plan failed. His subjects seem to be reluctant to leave their native land. They even show their unwillingness to live in the place where Hindus are in majority. One thing is certain that the shifting of the capital made them restless and they had to bear untold suffering. Hence “It is a historical fact that no other measure or reform brought so much of unpopularity and infamy to the Sultan as the forced migration of the elite to Daulatabad.” (71)

Karnad also adheres to history in presenting Tughlaq’s policy of copper currency. This is another significant administrative measure. This policy also has not been successful due to the unimaginative and non-cooperation of his officers and people. The introduction of copper currency gives rise to corruption. People take undue advantage of this policy. Every house becomes busy with making counterfeit coins. While speaking to Barani, Tughlaq himself miserably comments on this fact. “Only one industry flourishes in my kingdom, only one – and that’s of making counterfeit copper coins. Every Hindu home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me to close my eyes.” (195) He realizes that his decision of the implementation of copper currency proved to be wrong and impracticable. This decision also has not been properly executed. It shows adverse effect on the economy.
Bhanegaonkar aptly says that the decision of introducing copper currency fails “because no arrangements are made for preventing the circulation of counterfeit coins, private persons begin to manufacture copper currency, the house of every Hindu becomes a mint and very soon the whole economy starts bleeding.” (70)

Karnad’s Tughlaq is aware of the fact that his subjects call him mad Muhammad. He says to Barani “I’m teetering on the brink of madness.” (206) He becomes lonelier and more desolate because of the failure of his vision and welfare plans. That is why he behaves strangely revealing his extreme sense of agitation. Rebellions in various parts of the kingdom have upset his mental peace. The famine in Doab has spread town to town. Corruption goes on increasing. The calamities rush in from all sides. So the Sultan loses his mental poise. Karnad’s reading of existential philosophy, absurd theatre has helped him to depict the various traits of Tughlaq personality. In this scene we come to know shocking news of the murder of Vizier Najib, the Sultan’s political adviser.

Scene nine offers us some dramatic relief. Here we are told about the activities of Aziz and Aazam as robbers. In a hide-out in the hills they rob the travellers of their money. Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of Khalif Abbasid is brought to Aziz when he is on his way to the capital. Aziz kills him and disguises himself as Ghiyas-ud-din. Putting on the holy robes, he goes to Daulatabad where the Sultan warmly welcomes him. Aziz also kills Aazam, his close friend who tries to run away from his company. The Sultan finally recognizes that Aziz is a cheat who has been befooling him and the people with his masquerade. In scene thirteen, he fearlessly tells him that he is a Muslim dhobi and not a descendent of the Khalif. He ironically says: “But surely Your Majesty has never associated greatness with pedigree.” (216) He proudly compares himself with the Sultan and declares that he is his true disciple. “I admit I killed Ghiyas-ud-din and
cheated you. Yet I am Your Majesty’s true disciple. I ask you, Your Majesty, which other man in India has spent five years of his life fitting every act, deed and thought to Your Majesty’s words?” (217) He further tells the Sultan that he has acted according to his order. The Sultan admires his intelligence and instead of punishing him, appoints him an officer in his army in the Deccan. Aziz is ironically contrasted with the Sultan. Thus Aziz and Aazam represent selfish and unprincipled people who exploit the liberal policies of the Sultan.

In scene ten, the Sultan’s step-mother confesses that she is responsible for the murder of Najib. She makes him conscious of his degeneration when she says: “It’s only seven years ago that you came to the throne. How glorious you were then, how idealistic, how full of hopes. Look at your kingdom now. It’s become a kitchen of death.” (204) Very artistically Karnad presents Tughlaq’s past idealism with the present polluted life of degeneration.

She realizes that Tughlaq is madly trying to find out the murderer of Vizier Najib. He suspects the Amirs and Khans. In order to protect them, she plainly admits the crime committed. Her confession elevates her nobility but no one can deny that she is guilty. Her killing of Najib seems to be an attempt to end Tughlaq’s proclivity to treachery, cruelty and bloodshed. Tughlaq loves only three persons in the play Vizier Najib, Barani and his step-mother. But he is greatly hurt by her act of deceitful killing of his trusted friend. Finally after the confirmation of her crime, she is stoned to death. Tughlaq’s killing of his step-mother is a glaring example which shows his lack of judgment, commonsense and humanity.

In the scene eleven we are taken to a plain outside the fort of Daulatabad where crowds of sad and dejected people have gathered. They do not want prayer now, they want some food. Then Aziz disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din and Aazam and their entourage enter and the Sultan steps
down from the fort welcoming His Holiness as the only person who can save him now. All the people are surprised to see the Sultan falling dramatically at the feet of Ghiyas-ud-din (Aziz). And in scene twelve Aazam clearly witnesses the Sultan’s debilitating mental state. He, almost every night, visits the huge piles of counterfeit coins in the garden and steals them. Azam thinks that this is an act of complete madness but according to Aziz it is a case of insomnia. Christine Gomez appropriately states: “But to Tughlaq, it is an expression of his (the Sultan’s) anguish at the trick played on him by life – it had promised him a rose garden and gave him a rubbish dump. Gomez further describes the Sultan’s degeneration in exact words. “He wanted to rule a Utopia but ended up ruling a ‘kitchen of death’ as the ‘lord of skins.’ This contrast between man’s expectation and the harsh reality of existence is indeed the experience of the absurd.” (122)

In the final scene thirteen we find the disastrous end of Tughlaq’s reign. We are informed that Tughlaq is greatly shocked to know the murder of Aazam at the mouth of the secret tunnel from the palace. The famine riots have already spread. Daulatabad appears as devastated place with full of bloodshed. Even Barani wants to leave the place. Aziz, in the disguise of Ghiyas-ud-din goes to the palace to bless the Sultan and the people and to purify Daulatabad. Thus it is only in the last scene that the Sultan sees a parody of himself and his whole career in the unmasking of the scoundrel and cheat, Aziz, the washer man.

This scene reveals the greatest irony of fate and also of situation in which the Sultan realizes the futility of his entire reign. Completely broken in mind and body, he once again, proclaims his decision to move the capital back to Delhi. Finally he gives himself to sleep which had eluded him for the past five years. The state in which the Sultan is presented in the end is very suggestive. He wakes up as if greatly shocked
and looks around “dazed and frightened as though he can’t comprehend where he is.” (221)

The conflict reaches with climax. The Sultan’s wickedness and violence mount up. With every act of violence he becomes more disillusioned and frustrated. The play ends with the Sultan’s total madness. In the end he cannot offer prayer which is very much dear to him. The denouement lacks in tragic intensity and depth. That is why M.K. Naik says: “However, Tughlaq fails to emerge as a tragedy, chiefly because the dramatist seems to deny himself the artist’s privilege to present an integrated vision of a character full of conflicting tendencies.” (1982 262)

All the liberal policies of the Sultan and his sincere attempt to bring Hindu and Muslim together are not successfully materialized. The self-deception of friendship is another of Karnad’s area of thrust. In Tughlaq, the ideal friendship is clearly established as mutable and self-serving. Tughlaq murders his friend for reasons of security. Aziz does the same: the fleeing Aazam is hunted down and killed, solely to guarantee his personal security. The friendship between Ratan Singh and Shihab-ud-din that parades under the cloak of brotherhood is founded on guilt. Even the model friendship of Barani cannot run its prescribed course. Barani’s desertion of Tughlaq, though perfectly justified when measured by moral and ethical standards, breaks the code of friendship – he leaves the sinking ship with a view of self-preservation. Karnad wants to suggest here that in the real world, the survival of ideals and the goal of perfection necessarily remain impossible.

It so happens because Tughlaq expects perfection from the imperfect society. And the ironical fact is that he himself is not perfect and demands perfection from his subjects. J. Krishnamurti is right when he comments: “Society is always in a state of degeneration. There is no
perfect society. The perfect society may exist in theory, but not in actuality…” (qtd.in Singh, 2003 162) Therefore it is fatuous to expect perfection from a person when the very structure of the society is built upon wrong footing. In such a degenerated society one has to face the crisis of human and social values. J. Krishnamurti tells us why such a society suffers from imperfection. He writes:

….from the biggest politician to the village manipulator, from the highest prelate to the local priest, from the greatest social reformer to the worn out social worker, each one is using the country, the poor or the name of God, as a means of fulfilling his ideas, his hopes, his utopias. He is the centre, ‘his’ is the power and glory but always in the name of the people, in the name of the holy, in the name of downtrodden…. (Ibid)

J. Krishnamurti’s remark throws light on the stark reality of life. It brings out hypocrisy and selfishness by revealing how a person in power exploits the society. Karnad has depicted the same situation in Tughlaq. In the play, human values like social, moral, religious and spiritual are thrown away to the winds and the entire social structure is turned upside down. In other words total chaos and disorder is created in the play by the Sultan and his opponents.

The Sultan is an idealist who tries to bring equality, progress and peace in the society. What he gets in the end is nothing but total frustration. Aziz, a washer man, taking many disguises befools the Sultan and overthrows his plan of establishing a bright new world. And the height of shamelessness of Aziz is that he finally requests Tughlaq to appoint him an officer of the state. It is really ironical and sarcastic situation in which the virtuous suffer and corrupt, treacherous and evil
doers are profusely rewarded. It rightly focuses the present situation in the domain of politics and religion.

Though in history Najib seems to be a minor character, he is an important character in *Tughlaq*. His influence on the Sultan can be easily seen in the play. He is a practical minded politician who supports the Sultan in all matters. Najib and Barani are two important advisers of Tughlaq. Najib is the cunning politician and Barani is the scholarly historian. Both of them seem to represent the two opposite selves of Tughlaq. However it is a matter of great irony that Najib “fails to suspect Muhammad’s step-mother and pays the price of death for his connivance of her hatred for him.” (Babu, 1994 138)

In this play Karnad has used an interesting convention i.e. the comic pair the ‘Akara’ and ‘Makara.’ This device is elevated for the comic purpose. Aziz can be recognized as the Akara, while Aazam assumes the role of the Makara. Aziz comments on the ways of the world, shrewdly analyses the political set up and makes plans to further his gain. Careful reading of the play discloses the fact that Aziz represents the cunning and devious side of Tughlaq. Aazam can be considered as the more humane side of Tughlaq albeit without his brilliance. It is significant, therefore, in the context of such an analysis that Aziz kills Aazam who ultimately cannot reconcile to Aziz’s inhumanity. Tughlaq’s better side, too, is obviously suppressed by his arrogant, calculating and callous side. The use of the subplot with these additional characters thus helps Karnad to analyse Tughlaq as a split personality. Karnad does not use these interludes merely to distract the audience, rather they serve to illustrate, explain and present a critique of the main action. The use of such a device in a modern serious play is therefore justified as Karnad raises it above the level of mere convention, making it useful and vital part in the action.
The influence of Bertolt Brecht can be felt in the play. Karnad has used the Brechtian technique in the play. Like Brecht, he also makes a viewer to use his rational faculty and to feel that he is simply watching a show. He doesn’t expect his emotional involvement in the play and his identification with the protagonist.

Brecht has evolved his own theory known as an epic theatre which is in opposition of the Aristotelian theatre where human emotions like pity and fear gain much importance. But, the major purpose of the epic theatre is to “lead the character’s actions as determined not by fate and human nature but by social circumstances, to leave the theatre not emotionally drained but intellectually stimulated and determined to bring about Marxist reforms. (Rai, 2008 19) Brecht’s dramatic concepts – ‘epic theatre’ and ‘alienation’ are completely different from the Aristotelian concept of theatre. R.N. Rai writes about the exact idea of Brechtian dramatic characters. “He (Brecht) prefers to present such characters who are alienated from themselves as well as from one another; their words belie their feelings, their deeds belie their words.” (21) Closely following Brechtian technique, Karnad has created a wonderful character of Tughlaq juxtaposing opposite qualities in him. Talking about the main feature of Brechtian drama R.N. Rai says: “He does not consider drama merely as the source of entertainment but as the means of intellectual stimulation and social transformation.” (26) On the same line it can be said that Karnad also does not like the spectator to get involved in the Sultan’s tragedy. On the contrary, he makes him think why the Sultan has failed to be a successful ruler and makes him to find out possible solutions.

Karnad is widely acclaimed for his technical experiment as well as characterization. Though Karnad takes up a mythical or a historical figure, the 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.

As a playwright, Karnad is an existentialist. His first three plays have an existentialist significance. They deal with the theme of responsibility and the search for identity. *Yayati* is a play on the theme of responsibility. *Tughlaq* is about the search of identity and “philosophical questions on the nature of man.” (1994 144) Similarly his third play *Hayavadana* also deals with the theme of the search for identity and human relationship.

In this play there are many instances where we find Tughlaq in an existential situation. He first of all tries to seek his identity in high ideals and liberal policies. The Sultan finds himself in an existential situation when he is opposed at every step by the orthodox Muslims. He tries his best to bring his ideals into practice. He wants to create an ideal society based on secularism and Hindu-Muslim amity. He intends to attain “greater justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life.” (149) Satish Kumar rightly points out: “What he (the Sultan) intends is to guarantee freedom of choice and meaningful existence to his countrymen. He thus tries to promote the understanding of human existence amidst sufferings and insecurities.” (49) The Sultan goes in for a difficult choice. Surendra Verma perfectly remarks that “Choosing is always painful. It involves besides a sense of freedom, anguish and responsibility that weigh heavily upon the chooser.” (Ibid) The choice that the Sultan makes is in the interest of his people. He determines not to give up his choice though he is vigorously opposed by the narrow minded opponents. He plainly and emphatically explains his stand of existential choice.

I still remember the days when I read the Greeks – Sukrat who took poison so he could give the world the drink of
gods, Aflatoon who condemned poets and write incomparably beautiful poetry himself – and I can still feel the thrill which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sang to them. And my kingdom too is what I am – torn into by visions whose validity I can’t deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha. (165)

Greatly influenced by existential philosophy, Karnad intentionally delineates Tughlaq as an existentialist who has been influenced by Plato, Aristotle, Buddha and Zarathustra who are said to be the pioneers of existentialism.

But Tughlaq’s idealism and magnanimity are misconstrued by the fundamentalists and the Hindus. He is frustrated and disillusioned when he finds all his liberal policies are thwarted by his people. It leads him towards the feeling of alienation.

The Sultan’s alienation is seen at various levels. Firstly he is alienated from the society in which he lives; secondly he is alienated at the interpersonal level keeping himself away from the persons around him. We see him exploiting people for his own purposes, treating them as objects and not as human beings. He cannot have meaningful communication with others. His treatment of Sheikh Imam-ud-din, Shihab-ud-din, Ain-ul-Mulk and Sayyids and Amirs itself reveals his alienated vision. In this context, Christine Gomez rightly says: “Tughlaq sees others through an alienated vision – not as persons but as pawns in a political game of chess, objects to be used and discarded.” (115)
Further to fulfil his ideals and policies Tughlaq performs some deliberate acts of his own choice – patricide and fratricide, the hasty decision of shifting of the capital, thoughtless murders of his opponents and finally the use of religion as a political game. His obstinate acts may be regarded as existentialist decisions due to their emotional intensity. All these decisions result in self deception, feeling of guilt, alienation, aguish, anxiety, dread and despair. His flowing speech has an existential significance:

God, God in Heaven, please help me. Please don’t let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don’t know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started in Your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of You. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud? (205)

Thus the Sultan represents alienated humanity in predicament of near despair. Satish Kumar perfectly states the existential problem in the play.

In Tughlaq Karnad suggests that man’s concern is not the problem of contemplation or sterile abstraction but the problem of action. It is an existentialist problem. Man shall choose, decide and act as a participant in life situations. Such active participation alone can help in solving the riddle of existence and in creating perfect climate for moral upsurge and profound understanding between man and man. (51)

Being an existentialist playwright, Karnad talks about the problem of truth. Satish Kumar aptly sums up the existential philosophy in Tughlaq. He says:

As is the case with much existentialist literature, Girish Karnad’s Tughlaq deals with the problem of truth. Tughlaq
hopes against hope but in the end all his hopes are shattered and he fails to realize the truth of human existentialist truth born of action and experience. Men are weak and limited. Life seems to be meaningless. Human beings should cultivate understanding based on pity and compassion for one another in order to create an ideal existential state. (52)

In fact, Tughlaq’s intention is good one. Inspired by the Greek culture, the Lord Buddha, Zarathustra, he wants to create an ideal state where all will be happy. His thoughts are worth considering. As an ideal ruler, he knows well that a country which relies only on religion will not sustain for long. He understands the need for introducing copper coins; his idealism fails to win the hearts of his people because of lack of credibility and reliability. The very foundation of his empire is based on sinful action. It means that he ascended the throne by doubtful means, that is, killing his father and brother during prayer time. Therefore it becomes difficult for his people to believe in him. There is no coordination between his thought and action. Every one is skeptical of his true intentions. “His cleverness in dealing with his opponents - he is often shown in the play as playing chess - only worsened his credibility. No one would trust him and he could never trust anyone.” (Shinde 49) Consequently the play ends with scenes of total anarchy and misery in the kingdom and finally the Sultan is left alone. We can conclude the discussion by quoting R.V. Shinde. In his perceptive analysis he evaluates Karnad’s great skill in portraying a complex character of Tughlaq:

In its canvas and treatment, *Tughlaq* is both huge and contemporary. It is a tale of the crumbling to ashes of the dreams and aspirations of an over-ambitious, yet considerably virtuous king. Contemporary in the sense that
one can see flashes of Tughlaqi (almost a proverb now in the Hindi) attitude – callous yet well-meaning – in contemporary political structures too. (51)

Complete non-cooperation from his people makes the Sultan devilish and consequently he slips to insanity. From the better experiences of life he learns the fact that one should be self-reliant for the realizations of ones aims and aspirations. Bhanegaonkar appropriately analyses how Tughlaq’s efforts of building a new world end in a failure. He writes:

Young Muhammad’s hard confrontation with the practical, unpleasant realities of human life makes him dangerously bitter, leaves him totally devastated and bewildered, and finally forces him to take refuge in madness. Bitter experiences of life teach Tughlaq an important lesson: man has to rely upon himself for the realization of his well-cherished dreams and any hope for support and encouragement from others leads only to frustrations and disappointments. It is one of the ironies of history that Muhammad Tughlaq’s disintegration takes place at precisely the moment when he was giving expression to his vision of a new world – the world of peace, justice, progress, harmony, and humanity. (70)

To sum up, we can say that Karnad uses a historical theme to bring out vividly the contemporary struggle for power between religion and politics. This is, in fact, seen in all the ages. Therefore, this play has a universal appeal. Jaydipsinh Dodiya aptly remarks:

*Tughlaq* does not reflect the mood of a particular age, but has a universal appeal. The introduction of religion into politics to secure sway over the masses often degenerates
into a dirty game of power politics. And the game is played mostly in the interest of the players that are politicians, whether of Tughlaq’s time or of our own time. (2000 45)

*Tughlaq* can be interpreted in various perspectives. At another level, it offers an ironic commentary on the ideology of secularism and the forces that try to overthrow that ideology.

3) **HAYAVADANA (1971)**

*Hayavadana*, a play in two acts, is Karnad’s third play which was originally written in Kannada in 1970 and later on translated into English by Karnad himself in 1971. The play was an immediate success on the stage and bagged Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya Award for the best play of the year 1972. It also won the Sangeet Natak Award for the best Indian playwright of the year. Initially occurred in Enact in 1971, *Hayavadana* was published by Oxford University Press in 1975 and since then it has been performed in different translations and adaptations around the world with immense success.

This play 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) and places it at a pre-eminent position in the canon of Indian drama. S. Gopalie believes that *Hayavadana* draws to the forefront Karnad, the poet and states that “for sheer poetry of the theatre there is nothing that can challenge comparison with *Hayavadana.*” (8)

The main plot of *Hayavadana* (1971) comes from Thomas Mann’s *The Transposed Heads* (1955) which in turn has its source in the ancient Sanskrit collection of stories *Brihatkathasaritasagara* by Somdeva of eleventh century. Thus, the origin of *Hayavadana* is “inter-generic, a
The Betokens transformed into a novella into a play.” (Mee 149) The Dramatist himself clarifies how the plot of *Hayavadana* began to take shape in his mind.

I remember that the idea of my play *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in my head right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanth (who ultimately produced the play) about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre’s relationship to music. The play is based on a story from a collection of tales called the Kathasaritasagara and the further development of this story by Thomas Mann in *The Transposed Heads.*” (1997 12)

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 demystification of traditional values and concepts and presents multiple view points that promote a dialogue on the basic accepted 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.

The original story basically narrates the same story of the transposed heads with some slight changes in place names and in the cast of characters. It is the story about Prince Dhavala, his wife-Madansundari and her brother, Svetpata and the transposition of their heads. But Karnad has, in a large extent, adopted Thomas Mann’s reworking of the tale in *Transposed Heads.* Mann tactfully avoids the incestuous part of the original story and makes the youths as close friends. He, too, makes certain changes in place names and characters.

Now, before looking into Karnad’s version of the story and its implication in the present context, it is essential to know the story, in
brief, as narrated by Mann in *The Transposed Heads* – Shridaman is a Brahmin by birth whereas Nanda is a cowherd and blacksmith. Both of them are intimate friends. When they travel together, Shridaman comes across a beautiful girl whose name is Sita. As it happens in love at first sight, Shridaman falls in love with Sita and expresses his desire to marry her. At first Nanda laughs at Shridaman’s idea of marrying her. All the same, he consents to act as a mediator. Finally, Sita accepts the proposal and marries Shridaman. After some days, while on their journey through the forest on a cart to the house of Sita’s parents, they miss the way and fail to reach their destination. There is a temple of Kali nearby so they decide to spend the night over there. Shridaman goes into the temple and under some stress and tension chops off his head with a sword nearby and offers it to the Goddess Kali. After a long waiting, Nanda also goes to the same temple in search of his friend. He is greatly shocked to see the dead body of Shridaman. Being terrified of the accusation of killing his friend for the sake of Sita, Nanda also beheads himself. Thereafter, getting tired of waiting for both, Shridaman and Nanda, Sita also reaches the temple and finds that their dead bodies are lying before the Goddess. She also decides to end her life but the goddess appears before her and prevents her from killing herself. She requests the goddess to bring both the deads back to life. Her request is granted with blessing of Kali. Sita, in her ecstatic state, transposes the heads wrongly, giving Shridaman’s head Nanda’s body and vice versa. Now, the question arises who is the rightful husband of Sita? The answer given by King Vikrama in the Vetala story is that as the head governs the body so it is superior to the body. Therefore, the sage Kamdaman gives his decision in favour of Shridaman’s head. Sita is highly delighted because she has got what she strongly desired – Shridaman’s mind and Nanda’s body. However, her happiness proves to be short-lived. As per the ancient dictum that the
head governs the body, Shridaman’s head gradually controls Nanda’s body. Thus the bodies change again and adjust themselves to the heads. Once again Sita gets attracted towards Nanda. She meets him in the forest and they spend the day and the night experiencing the mysteries of erotic pleasure. In the end Shridaman appears on the scene and both decide to fight and die for Sita. Sita, finally performs Sati. She thinks that her sacrifice will improve the social position of her son, Andhak.

So the original Vetala story is concerned with moral problem whereas Mann treats it to show the mechanical conception of life which distinguishes body and soul. Kirtinath Kurtkoti aptly summarizes Mann’s stand in this context. He states: “The Sanskrit tale, told by a ghost to an adventurous king, gains a further mock-heroic dimension in Mann’s version. The original poses a moral problem while Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. The human body, Mann argues, is a fit instrument for the fulfilment of human destiny. Even the transposition of heads will not liberate the protagonists from the psychological limits imposed by nature.” (69) So, Mann uses the original story only to ridicule the superiority of the head over the body. But Karnad goes a step further and tries to depict the age-old problems of human identity and incompleteness.

King Vikram’s solution is acceptable in India as we, Indians believe in idealism. However, Mann emphasizes the philosophical problem of mind – body dualism as he was brought up in materialistic atmosphere in the West. P. Dhanavel brings out the exact distinction between the three versions of the story. He remarks, “While the Indian solution in Vetalapanchavimsati upholds idealism, the German solution in The Transposed Heads champions materialism. Aware of the extreme
nature of these options, Karnad seems to hint at the middle course of humanism in *Hayavadana.*” (2000 37)

Before we deal with what types of folk elements are exploited in *Hayavadana,* it is very significant point to trace out why Karnad goes back to myths and legends to project the dilemma of the modern man. He could have straightway dealt with the contemporary issues instead of using traditional source material in his plays. At this juncture the study takes into account the characteristic feature of Karnad’s playwriting. In the words of P. Dhanavel we can say, “Subtle and constant juxtaposition of the past and present is a common feature of Karnad’s dramatic art.” (2000 106) That is why he resorts to mythical and legendary storylines for his plays. He wants to reveal the archetypal structure of the society. Myths always interpret human life, and in the contemporary context, they interpret the modern sensibility or the modern consciousness. 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.” (Golf 7)

The mythical stories and folktales are applicable to all ages. A modern man has the same inherent structure of mind as his predecessor. Hence the problems which our predecessors had to face recur every time with a slight difference in the form, in the consequent ages. K. Rajendran brings out Karnad’s purpose in using myths and legends in his writing. He says, “Karnad employs myths and legends so that he could interpret
the present in the light of racial memory. Thus, he links the past with the present and establishes continuity…” (76)

Now let us know how Karnad employs elements of folk theatre in the play. In order to emphasize the central theme of the play, that is, the problem of identity and search for incompleteness, the playwright has introduced the subplot of Hayavadana and the play is written in the folk drama tradition. Of the various visible elements of folk theatre in Karnad, prime importance goes to Yakshagana. Though Yakshagana is a broad term used to cover different types of dance dramas performed in different states of South India, its origin can be traced to Tamil Nadu. Yakshagana in its original form, flavour and vitality can be seen in parts of Karnataka. It was Dr. Karanth who developed Yakshagana as an operatic dance drama. Its themes are taken from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The term literally means “Songs of the demi-gods” (12) which is called Yakshagana Bayalata. Bayalata meaning a play performed in open air (bayal-open air, ata-play). Karnad’s exposure to Yakshagana began at an early age when he used to go with the servants to watch Yakshagana performances.

In Hayavadana, he makes extensive use of the motifs and conventions of this form to create a new and rich kind of drama, infusing fresh life into the stagnant Indian dramatic scene. The play includes all the vital features of Yakshagana with modifications to suit the modern stage, subject matter and audience. The play begins with the ritual worship of Ganesha, the ‘mangal-murti.’ The Bhagavata or narrator commentator takes charge of the play, introducing characters and setting the scene. Some of the characters use mask and all action is stylized. Songs are also included to reveal the inner thoughts of character. Mime and dance movements are used to create a dramatic sense. Every Yakshagana play has a battle. Hayavadana does not depict a battle but it
does have a dual between the two friends. Painted curtains are used to set scene and carry the action forward. The Yakshagana front curtain is utilized to introduce characters. Karnad even employs the conventions of the traditional puppet show (the talking dolls) to create a bizarre world where the animate and inanimate converge and multiple view points are presented. The play ends with a valedictory prayer and the customary bow to the audience.

It is observed that Karnad also follows the same story as narrated in *The Transposed Heads*. However, he makes some significant changes in the names of characters and other details and introduces a subplot of Hayavadana to reinforce the human predicament. Shridaman, Nanda and Sita of Mann’s story become Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini respectively. Devadatta is a common name for any stranger. Kapila means ‘the dark one’ and the meaning of Padmini is the lotus pond, the abode of Goddess Lakshmi. In Vatsayana’s *Kamasutra*, Padmini is a name given to a special style of feminine beauty. Now, naturally, the question comes up in our mind - what exactly does Karnad want to achieve by changing the names of the characters and by introducing a subplot of *Hayavadana*? Devadatta, Padmini, and Kapila are not the names confined only to the individuals. They are, in fact, archetypal names and stand for every man/woman. In other words, they are representatives therefore their story could be a story of any person. So “by changing the names Karnad has on the one hand been able to make them generic or representative and this gives them a sense of universality and timelessness.” (Ray, 2003 200) In this context, P. Dhanavel also points out Karnad’s fascination for myths and legends. He writes:

First, Karnad is attracted to the myths, histories and folk stories for personal reasons. This autobiographical dimension is indubitably evident in *Yayati, Tughlaq* and
Hayavadana. Next, he is excited by the universal characteristics of certain recurrent archetypes – problems, characters, situations, themes and so on. Hence, the personal and the social, the past and the present, commingle in Karnad’s plays which will ever remain relevant to mankind. (2000 29)

As is the practice in other dramatic forms in India, every Yakshagana performance too begins with a host of preliminary rites. The play Hayavadana begins with the invocation of Lord Ganesha in the folk drama tradition. A mask of Ganesha is placed on a chair in the centre of the stage. While Pooja is done, the Bhagavata sings the benedictory verse in praise of Ganesha with musical accompaniment:

O Elephant-headed Herambha
Whose flag is victory
and who shines like a thousand suns,
O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi,
Seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake,
O single tusked destroyer of incompleteness,
We pay homage to you and start our play.

Karnad 73)

The song is followed by a prose rendering which explains the benedictory verse:

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

In Karnad this ritual invocation seems rich in connotations most appropriate to the thematic and structural unity of the play. Ganesha is established at the presiding deity not just as per convention, he is, in fact, the embodiment of the very ideal the play chooses to discuss. Ganesha symbolizes the concepts of completeness and incompleteness. There is also the suggestion thrown in at the very beginning that the idea of totality of being is best left to the gods, it is a goal beyond human comprehension and knowledge.

This invocation of Ganesha assumes significance in another aspect too. According to Jacob George, “The figure of Lord Ganesha which represents a perfect blend of three different worlds of experience -- the divine, the human and the animal - becomes central within the frame of the sub-plot too, since it foreshadows the character of Hayavadana.” (216) As Karnad says, “It seemed unfair, however, to challenge the thesis of the riddle by using a god. God, after all, is beyond human logic, indeed beyond human comprehension itself. The dialectic had to grow out of grosser ground and I sensed a third being hovering in the spaces between the divine and the human, a horse - headed man” (1997 14) Thus the ritualistic invocation of Ganesha in Hayavadana goes beyond the fulfilment of a traditional prescription and attains meaning at several levels.

The major plot of the play takes place in the city of Dharmapura which has a grand and heroic atmosphere – an important feature of Yakshagana. The introduction of the lead characters serves to enhance this grandeur. The protagonists are towering figures. The Bhagavata
introduces the story of the two young men living in the city of Dharmapura which is ruled by King Dharmasheela:

One is Devadatta. Comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence, Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahmin, Vidyasagara. Having felled the mightiest pundits of the Kingdom in debates on logic and love, having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit, Devadatta is as it were the apple of every eye in Dharmapura. (73-74)

The initial description of Kapila appears to be stereotyped, but Karnad characteristically goes beyond such static classification. Kapila though lower in social hierarchy is a hero in his own right. As the play progresses Kapila grows in stature, nearly eclipsing Devadatta towards the end.

The other youth is Kapila. He is the only son of the ironsmith, Lohita, who is to the King’s armoury as an axle to the chariotwheel. He is dark and plain to look at, yet in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing, in strength and in physical skills, he has no equal. (Ibid)

Devadatta and Kapila are such an ideal friends that “The world wonders at their friendship. The world sees these two young men wandering down the streets of Dharmapura, hand in hand, and remembers Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshamana, Krishna and Balarama.”(Ibid)

Thus, the lead characters are introduced with the refrain, “Two friends were there – one mind, one heart--” (Ibid) the reiteration of which not only emphasizes the nature of their friendship but paradoxically hints at disaster to follow. The refrain also highlights the nature of the characters. While Devadatta represents the mind or spirit, Kapila
symbolizes the heart or body. As individuals they remain incomplete, but taken together they seem to be the embodiment of completeness.

When the Bhagavata is busy with the introduction of the lead characters of the play, a very strange character appears on the stage having a man’s body but a horse’s head. He is sitting on the floor hiding his head between his knees. The Bhagavata, taking the horse’s head for Hayavadana’s mask, tries to pull it off from his body with the help of one of his actors. Later on they realize that it is not a mask but a real head. Thereafter, Hayavadana tells them he hasn’t taken any objection to their pulling it off because, “All my life I’ve been trying to get rid of this head. I thought – you with all your goodness and punya…if at least you managed to pull if off . . .” (79)

Then he tells them the tragic story of his birth:

My mother was the Princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. When she came of age, her father decided that she should choose her own husband. So princes of every kingdom in the world were invited - and they all came. From China, from Persia, from Africa. But she didn’t like any of them. The last one to come was the Prince of Araby. My mother took one look at that handsome prince sitting on his great white stallion – and she fainted. (79-80)

Thinking the Prince of Araby was her first choice, her father made all arrangements for the wedding. But all of them were greatly amazed to know her firm decision to marry that horse and not the Prince. Hayavadana continues the story:

So ultimately she was married off to the white stallion. She lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she wakes up – and no horse! In its place stood a beautiful Celestial Being, a gandharva. Apparently this Celestial Being had been
cursed by the god Kuvera to be born a horse for some act of misbehaviour. After fifteen years of human love he had become his original self again....Released from his curse, he asked my mother to accompany him to his Heavenly Abode. But she wouldn’t. She said she would come only if he became a horse again. So he cursed her ... He cursed her to become a horse herself. So my mother became horse and ran away happily. My father went back to his Heavenly Abode. Only I--the child of their marriage--was left behind. (80)

Thus Hayavadana pathetically asserts that he has been facing an identity crisis ever since his birth. In the sub-plot Karnad narrates, in the manner of folktale, the mythical story of a gandharva and the shape-shifting to stallion due to a curse. In a very artistic way, Karnad interconnects Hayavadana’s desperate search for completeness with that of the protagonists in the main plot. It is to be noted that the sub-plot of Hayavadana is entirely new creation of Karnad. Commenting on its thematic significance, Mohit Ray aptly remarks:

The story of Hayavadana introduces a sub-plot – an original invention of Karnad – and it is thematically integrated to the main plot, so far as the theme of the identity is concerned. The very fact that the title is derived from the sub-plot or the story of Hayavadana suggests its thematic importance, and it is Hayavadana who raises the identity question more dramatically and more authentically than anybody else in the play. The sub-plot enables Karnad to provide a double perspective to the problem, at the metaphysical level and at the socio-cultural level. Karnad, in other words, handles the moral problem in the main plot and the philosophical problem in the sub-plot. (200-201)
P. Dhanavel’s remarks also underscore the significance of Hayavadana story in the thematic structure of the play. He states: Karnad’s invented Hayavadana story is more enchanting and enlightening than the borrowed story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini because it is Hayavadana who asks more questions and represents everyman’s predicament of imperfect mad dance more dramatically and authentically. (1999 79)

After the introduction of the sub-plot, the Bhagavata once again picks up the thread of the main story. He reveals the love triangle even before the three characters are presented on stage: “Two friends there were – one mind, one heart. They saw a girl and forgot themselves. But they could not understand the song she sang.” (82) We come to know that Devadatta is mesmerized by the bewitching beauty of a girl. He, at once, falls in love with her. So he seems to be lost in her thoughts. Being a bosom friend, Kapila understands the lovelorn plight of his friend, Devadatta and promises him that he’ll definitely trace out her whereabouts. Devadatta, being a poet himself showers praises on her and calls her “The Shyama Nayika – born of Kalidasa’s magic description – as Vatsyayana had dreamt her.” And addressing Kapila he tells him, “in one appearance, she became my guru in the poetry of love.” And further he asks him, “Do you think she would ever assent to becoming my disciple in love itself?” (85) Devadatta seems so restless to get her that he even swears to sacrifice his arms and head. He tells Kapila, “Kapila, with you as my witness I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I’ll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali. I’ll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra . . . . (Ibid) For the sake of his friend, Kapila agrees to act as a mediator. And he goes to Pavana Veethi – the streets of merchants, in search of the girl who has disturbed the mental peace of his friend. After meeting her, Kapila is also attracted by her astounding beauty. Effortlessly words
come out from his mouth, “You’re right, she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati – all rolled into one.” (87) So the name of this fair lady is Padmini. The moment he perceives her he realizes that Padmini is not meant for the gentle soul like Devadatta. He says:

Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I’m feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can’t bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lighting – and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel. But what can one do? You’ll never listen to me. And I can’t withdraw now. I’ll have to talk to her family… (90)

All the same, he acts like a devoted friend and talks to her family and succeeds in getting Padmini married to Devadatta. In this way, Padmini, the daughter of the leading merchant in Dharmapura, becomes a rightful wife of Devadatta, the only son of Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. Even after marriage, the friendship between Devadatta and Kapila continues as before. The people of Dharmapura admire and respect all three looking upon them as Rama-Sita - Lakshamana. However, their trust in friendship is replaced by suspicion. Kapila’s frequent visits upset Devadatta, disturbing his private life. Gradually there develops a close intimacy between Padmini and Kapila. As a result, Davadatta, mentally drifts away from his wife and friend, though he loves both of them.

Padmini’s strong fascination for Kapila is hinted at in the first song of the female chorus. It reveals the inner working of Padmini: “Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?” (82) Further the female chorus sings out to foreground the unconventional image of Padmini: “A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each
arm. I have neither regret nor shame. The blood pours into the earth and a song branches out in the sky.” (Ibid)

With the help of the female chorus, the playwright gives a clear-cut hint as to what type of female character he is depicting to project the age-old aspiration of a human being for search for completeness. Mohit Ray says that:

Karnad might have got the idea of the female chorus from Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* or even from Euripides, but he puts it to a completely different use…. The chorus in *Hayavadana* is not the voice of traditional wisdom as in Greek plays but only an externalization and objectification of the passionate feelings of Padmini and it merges with the protagonist as an integral component of the character. (205)

Day by day, Kapila gets emotionally involved in Padmini’s love as he is highly fascinated by her eloquent beauty. Padmini, too, feels elated in his company whenever he comes to see her husband. Observing their body language, Devadatta’s jealousy grows up. This feeling of jealousy is clearly articulated when he says to himself:

Does she really not see? Or is she deliberately playing this game with him? Kapila was never the sort to blush. But now, he only has to see her and he begins to wag his tail. Sits up on his hind legs as though he were afraid to let her words fall to the ground. And that pleading in his eyes – can’t she really see that? (92)

Their journey to Ujjain is a very significant scene in the play. All of them decide to go to the famous Ujjain fair. But Devadatta has no interest in the fair because he likes to have the day for himself and his wife alone at home. But Kapila brings the cart and very enthusiastic about the journey. When he learns that the proposed trip is called off, Kapila
becomes very nervous and disappointed. One can see this restless in his thoughts. “….Why this emptiness... Kapila, Kapila get a tight hold on yourself. You are slipping, boy, control yourself…” (94) In order to make Devadatta feel better, Padmini at first says that the journey could be put off. However, she changes her mind, all of a sudden, observing Kapila’s nervousness and persuades her husband for the proposed journey to Ujjain. It is to be noted that for Padmini, Kapila who represents the strong body seems to be more attractive than her husband, Devadatta who stands for the intellect. This is, in fact, a turning point in the play. Finally, they proceed on their disastrous journey.

So, their journey to Ujjain begins. Kapila is driving the cart. Padmini’s comments on the skill of Kapila in driving a cart lend a symbolic significance to the cart-driving. She highly applauds him for his art by saying, “How beautifully you drive the cart, Kapila! Your hands don’t even move, but the oxen seem to know where to go.” (95) Devadatta realizes Padmini’s love for Kapila and his agony is intensified when she praises Kapila openly for his excellent skill in driving,

What a terrible road. Nothing but stones and rocks – but one didn’t feel a thing in the cart! You drive it so gently – almost made it float. I remember when Devadatta took me in a cart – that was soon after our marriage – The oxen took every thing except the road. He only had to pull to the right, and off they would rush to the left!... (95-96)

By using the folk device of miming the action of cart driving is shown on the stage. About the implication of cart driving Mohit Ray says: “What is significant is that even this simple act of miming the cart driving assumes symbolic significance when looked at from the Freudian angle.” (206) The implication of sexuality is seen in her comparison of Devadatta and Kapila so far as cart driving is concerned. In this context, Mohit Ray further explains:
Once we break the sealed metaphor it becomes conspicuous that Padmini is comparing, her coital experience with Devadatta which was a failure and unsatisfactory, with her experience with Kapila which was perfect and gave her a sense of fulfilment.” (Ibid)

On their way to Ujjain fair, they take rest for a while in that forest. Padmini vividly describes the charm of Kapila’s body when he climbs a tree to collect the Fortunate Lady’s flower for her. How he climbs – like an ape. Before I could say ‘yes’, he had taken off his shirt, pulled his dhoti up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back – like an ocean with muscles rippling across it – and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless. (96)

Getting totally hypnotized by his strong body, she can’t help saying to herself, “He is like a Celestial Being reborn as a hunter... How his body sways, his limbs curve – it’s a dance almost.” (Ibid) Finally she expresses her inner urge to possess him. Her strong passion for him is expressed in her words, “No woman could resist him.” (Ibid) Noticing Padmini’s strong infatuation for Kapila’s body, Devadatta says to himself, “And why should I blame her? It’s his strong body – his manly muscles….Look, how she’s pouring her soul in his mould.” (Ibid) “Thus through Karnad’s masterly treatment the scene becomes charged with sexuality and modern sensibility.” (207) In this context, Vanashree Tripathi also explains Padmini’s psyche behind the praise for Kapila. She says, “In the cart driving scene her exultation and effusive praise of Kapila resonate with sexual connotations and her spotting a tree -- named Fortunate Lady’s flower force Kapila to climb the tree – anything for love!” (65)
Kapila shows Padmini the place from where the river Bhargavi flows and tells her that the poet Vyasa had a hermitage on its banks and there is a temple of Rudra now. Padmini, now, no longer cares for her husband’s hurt feelings and goes with Kapil to visit the Rudra temple. Padmini’s hidden attraction for Kapila comes to the notice of Devadatta who decides on the extreme step of suicide. So, he goes to the deserted temple of Kali. Recalling his vows to Lord Rudra and Goddess Kali, Devadatta prostrates himself before the goddess and says:

Bhavani, Bhairavi, Kali, Durga, Mahamaya, Mother of all Nature – I had forgotten my promise to you. Forgive me, Mother. You fulfilled the deepest craving of my life – you gave me Padmini – and I forgot my word. Forgive me, for I’m here now to carry out my promise. (98-99)

Finally he cuts off his head. In reality, unable to bear the pangs of jealousy, he takes this extreme step. After coming back from the Temple of Rudra, Padmini and Kapila see no trace of Devadatta near the cart. Leaving Padmini all alone, Kapila rushes to the Kali Temple to search for his friend. He is greatly shocked to see Devadatta lying dead. He holds himself responsible for this. Addressing Devadatta he says, “You spurned me in this world. Accept me as your brother at least in the next. Here, friend, here I come. As always, I follow in you path.” (100) Thus he, too, beheads himself. Kapila, in fact, dies fearing that he will be accused of killing Devadatta for the sake of Padmini.

Being tired of waiting, Padmini also reaches the Kali temple. As there is total darkness, she stumbles over the bodies. Staring at them she lets out a terrified scream. She thinks that people will hold her responsible for their deaths. So being conscious of the social stigma on her, she also decides to put an end to her life.
As she is about to kill herself, the goddess appears on the scene and prevents her from killing herself. Thus, “Padmini’s elegiac mourning and the decision to end her life rouses Kali from her deep sleep and Kali – the *Shatarupa* (of hundred forms), a woman knowing the mind, heart and the ‘art’ of another woman in empathy with Padmini, grants her the lives of her lovers.” (Tripathi 66)

Padmini falls at her feet, Mother Kali grants her supplication and says to her, “Now do as I tell you. Put these heads back properly. Attach them to their bodies and then press that sword on their necks. They’ll come up alive. Is that enough?” (102) Highly delighted, Padmini puts the heads back. However, in her ecstatic state of mind, she transposes the heads giving Devadatta, Kapila’s body and vice-versa. This is, in fact, an absurd situation which creates the problem of Identity. Since the heads are mixed up, there comes a question of authenticity of a husband. It means, who is now Padmini’s rightful/legal husband, the one with the husband’s head or the one with his body?

Now, the basic question is why does Padmini wrongly rejoin the heads? In Freud’s opinion, most of the human actions are motivated by the unconscious mind. Explaining Freud’s theory, Wilfred Guerin says, “Freud provided convincing evidence, through his many carefully recorded case studies that most our actions are motivated by psychological forces which we have very limited control.” (1999 159) Mohit Ray also makes the similar proposition regarding the motivation behind Padmini’s wrong transposition of the heads. He comments:

The mistake in the transposition of the heads of Devadatta and Kapila can be explained in terms of Freudian slip activated by id. In other words, the subconscious desire for Kapila’s body makes Padmini put, albeit unconsciously, the head of Devadatta on Kapila’s body. Furthermore, the
‘mistake’ also absolves her of the responsibility of transgressing the codified morality of her society. (210)

In support of the arguments mentioned above the playwright himself says, “The characters are motivated by their own desires. Each character represents not only a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype.” (Mukherjee 38)

After realizing the exchange of heads, a heated debate takes place between the transposed Devadatta and Kapila as to who would keep Padmini as his wife. Act II begins with the Bhagavata announcing the answer to the question he has raised at the end of the first Act,

What? What indeed is the solution to this problem, which holds the entire future of these three unfortunate beings in a balance? We have to face the problem. But it’s a deep one and the answer must be sought with the greatest caution. Haste would be disastrous. (108)

Finally, the problem is taken to a great rishi who declares that “As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini.” (110)

The Bhagavata links the situation with the past when King Vikrama was asked the same question by the Vetala, and the King had offered a solution in favour of the head. However, the solution offered by the King is incomplete in the present context. That is why the Bhagavata expresses his doubt by asking, “Will this rational, logical answer backed by the sacred Texts appeal to our audience?” (Ibid) It is at this point, the playwright lends the old legend with a new meaning and very artistically connects it to the contemporary concerns.

After obtaining her dream-man Padmini becomes overjoyed as her cherished dream has been materialized. Now she feels fully satisfied to
have “Fabulous body – fabulous brain – fabulous Devadatta.” (113) Kapila feeling disappointed and broken – hearted goes away from them to live in the deep forest. He, even refuses to go to Dharmapura. Devadatta and Padmini merrily return to the city and are engrossed in their nuptial bliss with a renewed zeal and zest. For a year or so, Devadatta performs the physical feats of Kapila and also excels the best of scholars. However, Padmini’s desire of having a complete man forever gets shattered to pieces. Her pleasure proves to be short-lived. Gradually Devadatta loses his interests in sports and swimming. He becomes his original self. Slowly biological transformation takes place in both Devadatta and Kapila. In the forest Kapila toiling hard turns Devadatta’s soft body into a stout and sturdy body of a hunter. Padmini once again becomes restless and miserable. Noticing Devadatta losing his muscles, she voices her inner feelings of frustration and helplessness: “Change! Change! Change! Change! Change! Change! The sand trickles. The water fills the pot. And the moon goes swinging, swinging, swinging, from light to darkness to light.” (119)

Karnad uses dolls as a folk-drama device to strengthen the thematic and technical design of the play. The change in Devadatta is conveyed in physical terms which would not have been possible through the Bhagavata’s narration. It is the dolls who observe the slow process of change in Devadatta’s body.

Doll I: His palms! They were so rough, when he first brought us here. Like a labourer’s. But now they are soft – sickly soft – like a young girl’s.
Doll II: I know. I’ve noticed something too.
Doll I: What?
Doll II: His stomach. It was so tight and muscular. Now……
Doll I: I know. It’s loose . . . .” (116)
So, it becomes clear that it is the mind that shapes the body. Therefore, in spite of their transposed heads, Devadatta and Kapila regain their original bodies.

Karnad uses elements like clowning, fooling, verbal nonsense, dream and fantasy. Such comic and light elements however are given a tragic colouring and used to symbolize the predicament of man. A typical example of clowning can be seen in Hayavadana after the transposition of heads. All three characters engage in verbal nonsense and tomfoolery which symbolizes the calm before the storm and adds an extremely ironic significance to the situation.

Devadatta: Mixed-up head!
Kapila: Heads mixed-up!
Devadatta: Exchanged heads!
Kapila: Heads Exchanged!
All Three: (Together.): What a good mix!
No more tricks!
Is this one that
Or that one this?
Ho! Ho! (104:105)

This respective song haunts the three characters towards the end of the play when all is lost and they are prepared to meet their death.

Padmini who tries to have the best of both the men, finally gets disillusioned. Now she is missing Kapila. She has experienced Kapila’s virility for a year or so. Getting tired of Devadatta, she starts dreaming and fantasizing about Kapila. She recalls with fondness “that unwashed sweaty smell of Kapila.” (113)

One day she forces her husband to go to Ujjain fair to buy dolls for their child and she goes to meet Kapila with her child, asking the villagers, the pilgrims, the hunters, the tribesmen, the way to the forest.
She meets Kapila and shows him the child claiming it was his child, begotten of that body with “the mole on the shoulder” (124) At first, Kapila is upset by Padmini’s arrival and asks her to go away and to live with Devadatta happily. She doesn’t leave the place. She thinks that she must accept Kapila “totally.” She has been quite familiar with Kapila’s body as it was once Devadatta’s body. His body knows her well but his head must know her only then Kapila will attain “completeness.” Therefore, she tells him:

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

Thus she finds immense pleasure with Kapila for about four or five days.

It is interesting to note how Karnad uses myth to throw light on established social code of conduct. In the Indian context it is taken for granted that a woman will keep all love and loyalty for her husband and preserve herself from any kind of outside attraction. However, in the play this conventional concept of a woman is turned upside down. The woman in the original myth is instructed that one particular combination of head and body is her husband and she looks no further – the story ends there. But in the context of the play this type of solution dosen’t works. Therefore Padmini’s unconscious attraction towards Kapila is subtly hinted at in the scene before the cart-ride. This attraction becomes concrete and tangible during the cart-ride and this leads to the further action in the play.
After coming back from Ujjain fair, Devadatta comes to know of Padmini’s meeting Kapila. He gets angry and goes there with sword in one hand and dolls in the other. They talk about their transformation and both of them acknowledge their love for Padmini. But they decide that they can not live together “like the Pandavas and Draupadi.” (129) The only solution to this, according to Kapila is that they must die. Finally they fight and die. The final death – dance, the dual - fought between Devadatta and Kapila is a typical example of the kind of stylization found in Yakshagana. Padmini stands a mute spectator to this deadly fight because she also knows well that they could not live together. Inevitably, she enters the funeral pyre as a Sati.

So, Padmini symbolizes the incompleteness of human desire. She fails in getting reunification of the mind and the body in Devadatta and Kapila. Now she expresses her wish to accomplish her search for completeness through her child. Therefore, she requests the Bhagavata that her son should be brought up as the son of Kapila by the hunters in the forest for five years and then as the son of Devadatta, he should be handed over to Vidyasagara, her father-in-law and revered Brahmin. Thus she wants to provide both physical and mental training for her son so that he may attain perfection in life. Karnad’s characters however accept failure stoically and embrace their fate. When the impossible can not take the shape of reality and opposites can not be reconciled, for Karnad’s character the only alternative is death. For example, Padmini in Hayavadana walks boldly to her fate and emerges thus as a strong character.

The main plot and the sub-plot are skilfully woven together to underscore the central theme of the play. Towards the end of the play, Hayavadana tells the Bhagavata that in the temple of Goddess Kali, he prayed, “Mother make me complete” and even before he could say,
“Make me a complete man” (136) the Goddess granted his request and he was transformed into a complete horse, not a complete being as he still retains the cursed human voice. When Padmini’s son riding on Hayavadana asks him to laugh, he realizes that his laughter has changed into a neigh and he becomes a complete horse. However, his search for completeness ends comically. To use Kirtinath Kurktoti’s words, “The horse man’s search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the Uttamanga, the human head.” (70)

It is Padmini’s child who inter-connects the mainplot with the subplot. As decided, Padmini’s son is brought to the Bhagavata after five years. He, at first, seems to be incomplete child, unable to laugh like a normal child. However, he becomes normal when he laughs in response to Hayavadana’s laughter.

Finally the play comes to an end with the Bhagavata’s prayer. Karnad has made a very effective use of the Bhagavata to introduce the story, to narrate important events which are not enacted on the stage and provide missing links. The Bhagavata is used as an instrument to bring out the inner feelings of characters. The stage presence of the Bhagavata is thus felt throughout the play. He prays to God for the successful completion of the play. Besides fulfilling the traditional function, the prayer foregrounds the main concerns of the play and offers a theoretical framework within which the main premise of the play is set. Karnad thus modifies these customary conventions, giving them greater meaning and significance in a contemporary context. The ‘bharatavakya’ with which every Sanskrit play closes is also included in Hayavadana. The ‘bharatavakya’ traditionally presents a thanksgiving to God for the -- with a touch of humour gently pinching the rulers of our country:
Unfathomable indeed is the mercy of the elephant-headed Ganesha. He fulfils the desires of all – a grandson to a grandfather, a smile to a child, a neigh to a horse. How indeed can one describe his glory in our poor, disabled words?... Grant us, O Lord, good rains, good crop, Prosperity in poetry, science, industry and other affairs. Give the rulers of our country success in all endeavours, and along with it, a little bit of sense. (139)

Karnad has very successfully employed the folk drama form in *Hayavadana* to present the perennial problem of identity and search for completeness. He reveals the impact of Brecht’s theatrical teachings on him especially with regard to his use of indigenous dramatic forms. Karnad comments, “I read the basic Western canon – the Greek plays, Shakespeare, Shaw, O’ Neill, Anouilh, Brecht, Beckett, Sartre, Camus. Brecht’s technique influenced me a great deal in the earlier years.” (Mukherjee 34-35) Karnad’s own theatrical practice does not differ much from Brecht’s. Karnad too is never content with the mere reproduction or representation of events. What he works towards is a re-examination of events, a fresh and contemporary mode of viewing situations. Karnad blends in Brechtian devices most subtly with the folk design of his plays, thus transplanting the audience from the world of illusion to the practical world of reality. While *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* being folk plays make maximum use of Brechtian techniques, the remaining plays too show traces of such an influence.

An old story gives the dramatist the opportunity to elaborate his thesis to focus on a hitherto unnoticed aspect. The dramatist is able to expose outdated notions and in the process create a contemporary consciousness. Karnad recognizes such a principle and uses familiar tales in all his plays. *Hayavadana* most effectively subverts the accepted
notion of the superiority of head over body, brain over brawn, while making a critique of futile and unreasonable human hopes and aspirations.

*Hayavadana* ably illustrates the structure of Epic theatre with its series of episodes that help build a substantial story. Karnad focuses only on core issues and does not follow a conventional pattern. For example, the marriage of Devadatta and Padmini which might be considered an important scene is only narrated briefly. Other episodes are dealt with in depth because they bear greater significance in the scheme of events and throw light on issues of identity and the man-woman relationship. The various episodes are linked by the Bhagavata who gives the narrative a unified texture. The play thus like all epic plays, is able to span over a long period of time.

As a matter of fact, the use of myth to project contemporary concerns can be seen as a twentieth century preoccupation, not just in a drama but also in poetry and prose. The use of myth in literature has become a major trend in the twentieth century literature because “Myth”, in the words of Mark Schorer, “is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life….” (Guerin 159) As Karnad is influenced by Anouilh and Sartre, he has recognized the potential of myth to reflect universal and eternal values while facilitating the creation of a contemporary consciousness through re-interpretation.

Karnad makes selection of myths/ folktales relevant and suitable for his dramatic purpose and strips them off their spatio-temporal bearings. His mythical characters emerge as archetypes, manifestations of general human characteristics, placed in a contemporary context and dealing with contemporary situations. What can thus be observed in Karnad’s plays is a reworking of myths on contemporary lines, the myth serving as a parallel and a contrast not limited to the individual characters but
encompassing entire epochs. Karnad therefore carefully edits out those aspects of myth not conducive to his purpose and makes deviations in detail. Karnad’s mythical and historical plays as well usually end in tragedy though the characters emerge as strong and heroic.

So, Karnad uses myth as a base on which he establishes a framework of ideas. He is not limited by the scope of the known story, rather he extends it. What he aims at is not fidelity to detail, his objective is to present to the audience the premises he derives from the myth. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad builds on the myth to create an entirely new dimension, so convincingly portrayed as to make the audience wonder how they could have ever been satisfied with the ‘message’ in the age-old myth.

In Karnad the characters though ably delineated, emerge as symbolic and representative. They cannot be assigned to any specific time or place; they are universal and eternal. Herein lies the significance of Karnad’s use of myth. Despite the rich heritage of myths and legends at the disposal of Indian playwrights, few dramatists have made meaningful use of the tradition.

Though Karnad’s dramaturgy with its rich and varied tapestry refuses to be assessed by any one dimension, one label remains most suitable – that of an existentialist. His dramatic preoccupation derives inspiration from the European drama tradition. The work of Beckett, Brecht, Camus and Sartre has had a profound influence on him, shaping his theatre into a theatre dealing with the human predicament in opposition with the traditional theatre of character. In such as theatre, the emphasis is not on character development, rather interest is centred on man and his destiny. Character becomes representative of man as a whole rather than an individual. Sartre thinks that this theatre seeks “to explore the state of man in its entirety and to present to the modern man a portrait
of himself, his problems, his hopes, and his struggles.” (324) Karnad’s theatre in its thematic and conceptual content revolves round the condition of man in the modern world. Karnad’s characters though individualized typify some of the basic characteristics inherent in man as a generalized entity. Their struggles and attempts at overcoming them form the focus of Karnad’s attention.

All the plays of Karnad contain multiplicity of interpretations. Various critics and scholars interpret them with their own angles. New approaches produce new meanings, new perspectives reveal new dimensions. In the words of Vanashree Tripathi “Like all cultural texts, Hayavadana is resonant with multi layered social messages.” (59)

The quest for identity or the problem of identity forms a major part of Karnad’s thematic concerns. Hayavadana is concerned entirely with the question of “human identity in a world of tangled relationship.” (Kurtkoti 69) Most of the characters in the play are haunted with the problem of identity. “The astonishing desire of Padmini and Princess of Karnataka along with the mixed identity of Kapila, Hayavadana and Devadatta baffle the audience.” (Jha 71) Padmini’s act of transposition of the heads creates the identity crisis of Devadatta, Kapila and of her own. Her going back to Kapila and the fight between Devadatta and Kapila and her final sacrifice -- all this creates an acute sense of identity crisis in her. It is Hayavadana who desperately struggles to know his ‘society.’ In the post-colonial society the identity crisis has become a major issue. As K. Rajendran observes:

Mann’s version of the tale treats the spirit versus the flesh theme. Karnad handles the tale to relate the problem of identity. After the transposition of the heads, Devadatta and Kapila lose their individual identities. Padmini is torn between the two men. Her son becomes an orphan. He also
becomes an alienated creature without a child’s privilege to laugh. (73)

Another important theme the dramatist emphasizes in the text itself is the problem of incompleteness. The quest for completeness is the age-old theme being explored by several eminent writers in literature. With the emergence of existentialism, the quest for completeness has become a major concern in the post-modern literature. In the words of Krishna Gandhi:

The theme of the play is an old one…man’s yearning for completeness, for perfection. It is this yearning which makes people restless in their ordinary existence, and makes them reach out for extraordinary things….But the ideal of perfection itself is ambiguous. The character of Hayavadana is invented as an example of this ambiguity. (Joshipura, 1999 200)

Karnad has referred to this problem in the play when the Bhagavata blesses Hayavadana by saying “May you become successful in your search for completeness” (82) and when Kapila asks Padmini, “Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness.” (126)

The point of argument is that it is not possible for a man to achieve perfection in life. Padmini, with the transposition of heads, tried to get a complete man. Did she get it? No. It means that man is an imperfect being and the world he lives in is also imperfect. Hence it is absolutely futile to attain perfection in this imperfect world. In this respect, Pranav Joshipura by posing some philosophical questions categorically asserts, “But a couple of questions to a modern man with reference to Hayavadana may be asked: what is a complete human being? What constitutes a modern man? What does a man stand for? Is the head more powerful than the body? The answer may be yes, the head is more
powerful than the body. If one has the head of a horse, one will end up as a horse. Instead of a constant tension between a man and a horse, it is better to be just a horse, perhaps. But at the same time it is also true that no one can be a perfect being. For a human being it is better to live with a constant tension rather than try to resolve it through some impossible desire for perfection. Devadatta’s head on Kapila’s body, therefore, results not in perfection, but in failure.” (Joshipura, 1999 201)

The playwright does not provide any solution to this problem. Readers are left to find out their own solutions. According to P. Dhanavel, we have to accept life as it comes to our lot and we should not try to rise above the psychological limitations imposed by nature. Dhanavel throws light on the imperfection of human beings by stating: Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana*, thus explores the complex psychological dimension of the problem of complex human identity crisis, as different from the moral aspect of the Indian story and the philosophical purport of Mann’s story, in both tangled and untangled relationships. The play reveals the essential ambiguity of human personality which is apparently shaped or shattered by the human environment. Fundamentally incomplete and imperfect, the human beings search and strive for attaining the unattainable ideal of completeness and perfection.” (2003 47)

Thus, with the help of mythical story of a ‘Gandharva’ and the Vetala story, the playwright universalizes the predicament of the lead characters of the play.

The self deception of friendship is another of Karnad’s areas of thrust. In *Hayavadana*, the ideal of friendship collapses the instant a woman enters the picture. The friends part ways and towards the end all that is left is the “burning thirst for blood” (130) What Karnad obviously
indicates is that in a less than ideal world, the survival of ideals and the goal of perfection must necessarily remain impossible.

Karnad’s plays present certain existential themes namely, the impossibility of possession in love, the illusion of friendship, the isolation and alienation of man, the difficulty of communication and the quest for identity and meaning in an uncertain and often incomprehensible world. Man’s inevitable isolation and alienation get highlighted in Hayavadana. Enduring bonds and meaningful relationships are an illusion, such attempts are either predestined to end in failure or else to continue in a spirit of compromise or resignation. The choice of Lord Ganesha as a deity and the story of Hayavadana form a thematic significance of the play. Both of them symbolize alienation since their heads and bodies are incompatible. Devadatta, Padmini and Kapila also suffer from self-alienation. Commenting on the theme of alienation, M.Sarat Babu says:

In the primitive man, the body and the mind are in perfect harmony which Brown calls Dionysian ego. As man has been vainly striving to be above biological principles for ages, he has evolved Apollonian culture which causes alienation. Devadatta and Kapila, like the people of modern society, are victims of self-alienation while Hayavadana, his mother and Padmini’s son attain Dionysian ego (the undifferentiated body-mind) (1999 230)

In Hayavadana, Karnad mocks at the religious beliefs and practices. He boldly questions all the outdated practices and traditional mindset. This is best conveyed in Hayavadana’s visits to different religious places to achieve perfection. As Hayavadana says: “Banaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar – Dargah of Khwaja, Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of Our Virgin Mary – I’ve tried them all. Magicians, mendicants -- saints and sadhus – I’ve covered them all.” (81) Here, Karnad makes fun
of the Indian belief that we can obtain anything if we visit such holy places as mentioned above. Through ironic presentation of Hayavadana’s endeavours to be a complete man, Karnad criticizes the Hindu concept of gods and goddesses. In this context, Mohit Ray rightly puts it: “The demystification and religious beliefs and practices -- which must be seen as a reflection of modern sensibility – is at its highest in Hayavadana.” (113)

So far as the use of myth and folktale is concerned Hayavadana is considered to be the most representative play of Karnad. Being a multi-layered play it can be interpreted by various angles. Commenting on the different facets of the play, Mohit Ray observes:

The simple story of Betal becomes a rich complex story of modern sensibility in which the Lacanian notions of desire and lack, Freudian id, Sartrian existentialism and atheism, Brechtian expressionism and Strindbergian symbolism, Bakhtinian carnivalization and feminism and above all, search for identity and completeness are all fused in a harmonious whole. (114)

At the performance level Hayavadana represents a land mark and a model which reveals the dramatic potential of our native traditions of folk arts and goes a long way in the creation of an essentially Indian aesthetic. In Karnad we find a perfect integration of the two forms, folk and classical which are complementary to each other. A reading of Karnad’s plays thus establishes the fact that India does possess a dramatic tradition which despite its diversity has an essentially unified code.