CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Drama serves varied functions - providing for instruction, entertainment, enlightenment, happiness, peace and moral upliftment. It teaches one’s duty and relieves one’s sorrow. There is no maxim, no learning, no art or craft that is not found in drama. For it is the joys and sorrows of human nature expressed through gestures and other techniques. (Karnad The Fire and the Rain 71)

Indian English theatre has a long and rich tradition. It is basically dance oriented. Themes have been very often borrowed from classics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. The Western theatre on the other hand relies mainly upon the plot and the story knot. Because of the British impact both before and after independence Indian English theatre has failed to establish itself as a genre. Producers preferred to stage a Shakespearean play or a Shavian play, depending on the quality of the audience. Not many attempts were made to have a blend of Eastern themes and Western techniques. Among the writers who tried this Girish Karnad has a significant role to play. Though Kipling echoes the views of the majority of the people in his poem "The Ballad of East and West" that "Oh East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", in
Karnad's plays the East and the West do meet. (Dictionary of Quotations 191) He powerfully makes use of the Indian themes using Western techniques. Hence Karnad has a seminal role to play in the development of Indian English theatre.

Indian drama encompasses a field of the widest scope. It could be examined under three sub-headings: Sanskrit drama, folk drama and dance drama. The classical drama of India is written in the Sanskrit language, of course with few exceptions. The origin of Indian drama is a matter of conjecture. Reference to plays and actors are found in the epics the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and in some of the most ancient Sanskrit texts. Dancing, miming and singing surpassed the verbal elements. There were two types of plays: the Nataka and the Prakarana. Most of the plays were court dramas. The dramatists favoured a classical idiom. A play employed both Sanskrit and Prakrits. Natyasastra by Bharata is the most thorough and exhaustive examination of the principles of drama in existence. Bharata is virtually the lord and god of drama. No sentence of a play is to be written without reference to this supreme authority. Drama is conceived in the Natyasastra as the apex of all art forms. The work contains a general theory of aesthetics. From the earliest times in India, dance and drama have been in the closest relationship. Bharata describes drama as fifth Veda. It is a sacred art, which appeals to all classes, both literate and illiterate. Drama is founded upon nine rasas or sentiments. These nine rasas lead to nine bhavas. But in fact this
The general doctrine of drama is closer to the Western theories of music and musical experience. Sanskrit plays are to be viewed as a movement in a similar Western musical form. The word *rasa* suggests pleasure. The ultimate consummation is the aesthetic experience. This system of aesthetics is basically attractive to modern thinking. It appears pedantic to the impatient Western readers.

India has a long and remarkable tradition of folk drama. Only a small proportion of such folk drama has found its way into print. As a rule there is no known author. The folk drama derives from Indian social and cultural conditions. This folk drama has been known only through oral tradition. Frequently the plays employ a chorus. They preserve the convention of the *Sutradhara* or narrator. He introduces the play and as his name suggests, holds the thread of its narrative in his hand. The style of acting in these plays, a synthesis of mime and speech, the imaginative costumes and the traditional and the mythological subject matter relate them to poetic drama of India's classical age. The popular stage in India has also been devoted to propaganda plays. Such works carried considerable weight in the long bitter agitation for freedom. The lavish spectacle also delighted the audience. Indian folk drama often flourished as a poetic creation midway between religion and entertainment. As in the case of its folk drama, India has produced a unique dance drama. The philosophy of dance of the East differs from that of the West. In Western dance the story does
not matter. But in Indian dance the myth or the story is of great importance. Indian dance is still a form of worship. The Indian dance can never be abstract.

The death of Sanskrit drama in about A.D. 1000 was a factor for the rise of both folk and dance drama. The love of Indians for performing arts was ratified in the two sources - the folk and dance-drama. The dance became a sign language, a form of silent speech. One who is foreign to the tradition may not be able to understand it. But the Indian audience grasped the dancer's gesture as clearly as the poet's word. The dance was approximated to poetry and hence it has become spoken drama. Moreover Indian dances narrated events related to an epic or a narrative poem known to the spectators from their childhood. In some instances a reciter told the story while the dancer performed it in their own medium. The ratio between spoken drama and dance drama was one-to-one. India produced and still produces the world's most spontaneous dramatic dance. The dance is the supreme art of India.

Problems of the dramatic dance were approached from the opposite angle by Rabindranath Tagore. He composed several dance dramas. Tagore became a figure of international importance in drama. As a playwright he possessed much inventiveness and a considerable knowledge of many aspects of theatre in the West. He was a clever artist, drawing his chief inspiration from two stems of Indian theatre: the classical drama in the Sanskrit tongue and the Bengali folk
drama. Like Karnad, Tagore is essentially Indian and his aesthetically important works are written first in his native language. Tagore wrote in Bengali like Karnad in Kannada. Both of them made their own translations into English. They desire to speak first to their own country and then to the world. Both spent many years in Western countries and derived much. Tagore accepted much from the newly revived Irish theatre. Karnad too is influenced by the West in thought and structure for his plays. Tagore himself was both an actor and director like Karnad. They are completely sovereign in their own theatrical world. Balwant Gargi, a popular dramatist and producer says: "he invoked the spirit of Jatra ("folk opera") which had been driven out of Calcutta by the professional stage." (The Reader’s Encyclopedia of World Drama 835). Tagore was not content with a single style. In Tagore, his love for poetry always drew the play away from the dramatic toward pure poetry. But Tagore was faithful to the Asian dramatic traditions. He was also faithful to the moral and spiritual values in Indian civilization. He is convinced that Bharatha was the guru of the Sanskrit stage. Accordingly, the theatre should utilize the collective force of all arts with poetry as head, music, dance, pantomime and spectacle being the other prominent factors. Karnad follows this method and one should approach Karnad's plays with this viewpoint in mind.

The origins of the English theatre in India have been not very happy. It was the British and later the expatriate who lifted the curtain to the world of
British drama. It was fascinating, but was confined to the white race. Even the spectators were white. Vimal Bhagat who gave a new meaning to the English language Theatre scene in Madras says: "People like us who had a mad desire to act could not do so in this city during the fifties and a part of the sixties, because the colour of our skin was not white. They also found fault with our diction." (3) Even the situation at the Bangalore Amateur Dramatic Society was not better. "BADS" nick named was almost British. There were few Indians and they were given back work. There were those who believed that English theatre in India with its colonial heritage continues to be elitist. Others feel that it has every reason to stay as English has virtually become an Indian language. It is not surprising that the English language theatre continues to have Western connotation. Mahesh Dattani of "Bangalore Playpen", a playwright feels that Indian English is still considered alien. Mithran Devanesan of the Madras Theatre Club has the last word on this. "We have got stuck with British English Ancient and Victorian. Theatre cannot be imitative. It has to reflect your background, your life." (1) The English language comes in for sharp criticism from Karnad:

The main problem with the English theatre in India is that it takes resource to a language that is not local. Theatre has to be in one's mother tongue. What happens is that actors invariably come from an English medium background and
thus from a socially narrow segment of society. They belong
to the upper classes. Their range of interest and experience
is bound to be limited.

(The Hindu 25 Nov 1990 1)

Another reason why the English language theatre has not been credible enough
is that Indian actors can not carry it off. Thus the defect will be endless, the
controversy will go on. People doubt about the growth of the English language
theatre in India. There is the question of the survival. People think about its
present and the future. All those who have made this theatre their passion in life
- be they in Bangalore, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras or Delhi feel there is hope.
There is optimism.

The optimism continues with the playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Karnad. They continue to write in their native tongues. An interesting development of the seventies in Bangalore and elsewhere was the business of translating. In the translating business Karnad is steps ahead of others. He translates his own plays. These plays are after Indian subject and situation.

Mohan Rakesh through the plays - Ashadh Ka Ek Din (One Day in Ashadh) Lehron Ke Rajhans (Great Swans of the Waves) Adhe-Adhure (Half Way House) shows his difference from other playwrights. His dialogues have a
smooth flow and a meaningful depth. There is an elemental naturality suitable to
his characters. Another aspect is that he pays much attention to the internal
conflict of his characters. Sircar, the great Bengali playwright uses
contemporary situations and social problems to project the life-in-death attitude
of modern life. The central theme of many of his early plays is a sense of utter
meaninglessness in existence. This meaninglessness in existence leads
to a state of metaphysical anguish. This anguish of the Bengali middle class
psyche makes Sircar carry on his theatrical career. Sircar's plays Evam
Indrajit (And Indrajit) Baki Ithihas (The other side of History) and Sheish Nei
(There is no End) are based on political, social and psychological problems.
Between 1966 and 1967, Sircar was in Nigeria as a town-planner and he wrote
Bagh (Tiger) Jadi Aur Ek bar (If there were Other Changes) and Pralap (Mad
Speech) to try out his central concern, "The responsibility of mankind for the
events of our times." Rehearsals of Revolution, Spartacus, Micchil
(Procession) Bhoma and Basi Khabar (Stale News) are based on the Third
Theatre. There are three strands in Sircar's life and they give a striking texture to
his work. They introduce a new value to Indian theatre. These three strands are
his professional career as an urban planner, plus his training as a civil engineer,
his inner life as a playwright and its outward expression in his role as theatre
director and actor. More than writing, he prefers doing theatre. Credit goes to
Sircar for creating a genuine people's theatre, a theatre supported and created by the people and not merely performed by the people.

Tendulkar stands on a different pedestal from the other contemporary Marathi playwrights. This is because of his innovations of style in presenting a large variety of themes. Most of Tendulkar's full-length plays concentrate on a more or less conventional dramatic form. The plays *Shantata Court Chaloo Aahe* (Silence! The Court is in Session), *Giddh* (Vultures), *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghasiram Kotwal* which made Tendulkar a popular playwright, are considered as representative plays of the Marathi theatre of cruelty. His plays show his concern for modern man's anguish. They also show the playwright's questioning and probing spirit. There is a mixture of the theme of anguish to the theme of violence in his plays. He believes that violence is a basic quality.

When Sircar and Tendulkar delved deep into the problems of the middle class men Karnad went back to myths and legends and made them a vehicle of a new vision. By using these myths he tried to show the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection.

Karnad has been to the West and has been attracted by the drama of Anouilh, Camus and Sartre in his search for a new form in drama. Yet,
essentially he is in the Kannada tradition. Karnad in his plays tries to evolve a symbolic form out of a tension between the archetypal and mythic experience and a living response to life and its values. Contemporaneity in Karnad’s plays manifests itself through his operative sensibility a new meaning to the past.

Karnad does not take the myth fully. He takes only parts of them that are useful to him. He supplements the rest with his imagination. In *Yayati* he has taken the myth partially. In order to stress the theme of responsibility, he introduced new characters and gave a twist to the story and it creates the expected result. The characters in *Tughlaq* particularly Barani, Najib, Aziz and the Step-mother are seen in a new context. In *Hayavadana* the discussion between Devadatta and Kapila is at variance with the myth. Karnad has read Shakespeare, Brecht, Anouilh, Camus, Sartre and Pinter extensively and is influenced by them. His plays offer interesting studies. There is one drawback in Karnad’s characters. All of them are intelligent. There is hardly any one who is less intelligent. Aziz and Tughlaq appear as one. Individuality is missing. This defect is seen in Devadatta and Kapila also. They are like chess pieces moved to definite purposes by the playwright.

Karnad remains the most important dramatist of the contemporary Kannada stage. He has given the Kannada theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. He has shown the Indian
stage as to what depths the mystical themes could be taken to in order to recreate a contemporary consciousness. His advantages are many – his expert knowledge of contemporary European theatre, his theatrical sensibility and his exposure to the Western dramatic literature – all these sharpened by his thorough knowledge of the stage. He has shown to the Indian theatre community and to the world theatre community that the past and present can coalesce to give the present day existence meaning and to theatre activity a direction.

One finds that today, when the modern Indian playwright wants to express himself, all existing dramatic forms fail him miserably. This necessitates him to begin the search of all traditional theatre forms in his own state or elsewhere. This forces him to examine all the aspects of folk and classical tradition where it was not difficult to find answers to his questions. But the real difficulty was to synthesize them in order to create a new form. What the modern playwright has achieved is a thorough synthesis of all the tradition – classical, folk and contemporary Western, when these are used intelligently. They lead to a new form and as a result a new style of production – leading to the evolution of "Indian" drama.

To his credit, Karnad has written the following plays in Kannada. _Yayati_ (1961) is his first play. It is _Tughlaq_ (1964) which established him as a

However as literature, the researcher feels Karnad's plays have not received as much critical response as they deserve. The critical material available on Karnad's plays is very meagre. No critic has provided a holistic perspective on the plays of Karnad. This thesis attempts to do that in terms of themes and techniques.

One of India's foremost modern playwrights, Karnad is also one of the most renowned media personalities in contemporary India. He is India's leading playwright. He is an adept practitioner of the performing arts also. He has won Jnanpith Award (1999), the country's highest literary recognition for his contribution to modern Indian drama. He is the seventh Kannadiga and the second playwright to win the prestigious award.
Karnad's first play *Yayati* (1961), a retelling of a myth from the *Mahabharatha* won critical acclaim. It won the Mysore State Award in 1962. His second play *Tughlaq* (1964) is perhaps his best known. It established him as one of the foremost playwrights of India. The play deals with the transformation of the medieval ruler Mohammed Bin Tughlaq into a complex and highly dramatic character. In *Tughlaq*, he had hit upon a fantastic character. His next play *Hayavadana* (1971) won the Sahitya Academy Award and the Natya Sang Award. Karnad has drawn the theme from "The Transposed Heads", a story by Thomas Mann. It is one of the first modern Indian plays in which traditional theatre techniques are employed. Karnad used the folk art form *Yakshagana* to examine the modern problem of the body / intellect superiority. The play was directed in German by Vijay Metha as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimer. *Tale-Danda* (1987) and *Naga-Mandala* (1988) received critical acclaim. *Tale-Danda* brought Karnad the "writer of the year" award in 1990 followed by the Karnataka Nataka Academy Award for the best play of 1990-91. It also won him the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1993 and Sahitya Academy (National Academy of the letters) Award in 1994. The play is a brilliant analysis of the ills that plague the Indian society today. It is based on the rise of *Veerasaivism*. The play *Naga-Mandala* is created on a folk tale narrated by A.K. Ramanujan to Karnad. It turns to oral tales. His most recent play *The Fire and the Rain* is based on the myth of Yavakri, that occurs
in Chapters 135-38 of the *Vana Parva* of the Mahabharatha. The play treats the contemporary problematic amoralism as its main theme.

Indian theatre is still amateurish. There are two types of theatre in India. The first type is performed in villages such as Yatras, Mandalis etc. They are evolved through centuries. The plays of the other type are performed in cities. They need to develop more. Modern Indian theatre emerged under the British influence. In cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, theatre followed the British legacy.

When drama in various Indian languages developed, it has not done so in Indian English. The reason for the failure of growth was due to the want of a living theatre. The real success of a play can be tested on the stage. A living theatre is needed for the acid test.

But recently Indian English drama has shot into prominence. Writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing. Dattani has published powerful plays like *Where there is a Will*, *Final Solitude* and *Tara*. Padmanaban's Onassis award winning *Harvest* has achieved worldwide acclaim. They do not write on traditional subjects like Karnad.
In big cities like Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta English plays are occasionally staged. The British Council and the American Centre arrange visits of foreign troupes in Delhi. Yatrik group have staged several plays and Bary John has made significant contribution to Delhi theatre. Many Indian English plays have been also staged in the West: Gurucharan Das' *Mira*, Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness* and Asif Cureembhoy's *The Dumb Dancer*.

Indian Drama in Indian Languages and the drama in English translations have marked a remarkable growth. Several plays written in regional languages have been translated into English. As a number of such plays exist, the scholar can assess and evaluate Indian drama in its totality. The translations have established a link between the East and the West, the North and the South and contributed to the growing richness of contemporary Indian English Drama. The regional drama thus paved the way for a "national theatre". All streams of theatrical art seem to converge into this "national theatre". A study of Tendulkar, Sircar and Karnad shows that they are the symbols of the new resurgence. They have made bold innovating fruitful experiments and new directions. Their contributions to the Indian English Drama is a significant mark of achievement.

Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. His contribution to the Indian theatre made it rich. The richness could be equated
with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution does not stop with theatre. He has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English. He has played leading roles in Hindi and Kannada art films, commercial movies and television serials.

Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran a town near Bombay as the fourth son of Raghunath and Kasibai. He spent his childhood in a small village in Karnataka. His stay in the village helped him to gather first-hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. His encounter with the Natak companies created a lasting impression in the mind of the young Karnad. As Karnad explains in an interview with Dharwadker:

It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, called Natak Mandalis or Natak companies, would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on. My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre, though some Mandalis still survive in North Karnataka in a very degenerate state. But in those days they were
good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved to see them and the magic has stayed with me. (360)

During the formative years, the historical context played a prominent role in the life of Karnad. In the literary scene, there was a clash between Western and native traditions. Again there were tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past. The war was between the attraction of Western way of thinking and our own traditions. After political freedom, people had in their minds various visions of the future. Karnad had to choose from the new modernistic techniques, a gift of the colonial rule and from the rich cultural past of the country. Karnad was very much fascinated by the traditional plays and the Western playwrights "opened up a new world of magical possibilities." (Three Plays 2)

Karnad graduated from Karnataka University, Dharwad in 1958 and went to Bombay for further studies. In Bombay, he went to see a play and that happened to be Strindberg's Miss Julie, directed by the young Ebrahim Alkazi. That was an experience for Karnad. He had read some Western playwrights in college. But nothing had prepared him for the power and violence he experienced that day. After seeing the play, he had been put through an emotionally or even a physically painful rite of passage. Karnad says:
Most of my contemporaries went through some similar experience at some point in their lives. We stepped out of mythological plays lit by torches or petromax lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers. The new technology could not be divorced from the new psychology. The two together defined a stage that was like nothing we had known or suspected. I have often wondered whether it wasn't that evening that, without being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright. (*Three Plays* 2)

When Karnad was at Bombay, he received the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship to do his Master's Degree at England. Going abroad was a rarer matter in those days. Karnad was the first member of his family ever to go abroad. He belonged to a large close-knit family and his parents were very much worried. The most wonderful event that happened was that "amidst the intense emotional turmoil". (*Three Plays* 2) Karnad found himself writing a play. He had fancied himself a poet and wrote poetry in his teens and he was writing a play in Kannada, as he said, in the language of his childhood. Another surprise was that the theme of the play was taken from *Mahabharatha*. From *Mahabharatha* he read the story of Yayati. The play he wrote was in Kannada. He took the theme from ancient Indian Mythology. The theme and the language were native, but the form and the structure were essentially
Western. At the age of twenty-two he realized the fact that he was destined to be a dramatist and not a poet.

The story of King Yayati occurs in the Mahabharatha. King Yayati is cursed to old age in the prime of his life for a moral transgression he has committed. Disappointed at losing his youth, he approaches his son Puru and pleads to lend him his youth. The son accepts the exchange and the curse. Thus he becomes old. Yayati blinded by his insatiable thirst for sensual pleasure is happy now. The father has to face the consequences of shirking responsibilities. In the case of the son the old age does not bring knowledge, wisdom and self-realization. Karnad has given the traditional tale a new meaning and significance. It has become highly relevant in the context of life today. The symbolic theme of Yayati's attachment to life and its pleasures as also his final renunciation are retained. Karnad's originality would be seen in his working out of the motivations behind Yayati's ultimate choice. In the Mahabharatha, Yayati recognizes the nature of desire. He also realizes that fulfillment does not mark an end to desires. But in Karnad's play Yayati recognizes the horror of his own life and assumes his moral responsibility. Karnad writes in his "Introduction to Three Plays":

While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed
at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future. By the time, I had finished writing on *Yayati*-during the three weeks it took the ship to reach England and in the lonely cloisters of the University - 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. (3)

The play owed its form to Western playwrights whom Karnad had only read in print. He turned to Anouilh, Sartre, Camus, O'Neill and the Greeks for the dramatic structure.

The purpose and the themes of the play are revealed through the character of Sutradhara. When the play opens, the Sutradhara informs the audience that it is a mythical play - a page from the history of the unknown past. The incidents and the circumstances are related to the old times. But the reality depicted in the play is applicable to the modern times as well. According to the Sutradhara nobody can escape from the burden of responsibility. It is the joy of life. Everyone carries a tree of responsibility all along one's life journey and finally hangs from it. Karnad gives twist and turn to make it
more contemporaneous and more appealing to the modern audience. Characters like Devayani, Sharmistha bring turmoil in the life of Yayati. The conflict between Devayani and Sharmistha goes on. Sharmistha does not give proper respect to Devayani as she is the daughter of Shukracharya and who could bless Yayati with immortality. Yayati knows that his problems are due to Sharmistha's presence in the palace. But he does not have the heart to tell her to go away. Even Devayani does not do so. The crisis in the life of Yayati is precipitated by his refusal to part with Sharmistha. Finally it is Devayani who leaves the palace. She refuses to yield and the result is the curse of premature old age on Yayati.

Shukracharya has cursed Yayati with old age. Yayati does not accept the responsibility for what he has done. He accuses Sharmistha of this. The curse demoralizes him. He loses control on himself and does not know how to handle the situation. He refuses to believe that his son Puru, would be of any help in saving him from the curse. Sharmistha tries to pacify Yayati by asking him to accept what has come his way. Yayati gets violent and refuses to accept old age. He goes to the extent of saying that Puru must be celebrating the occasion for it gives him an opportunity to assume the mantle of the king. Karnad's Yayati speaks a lot against Puru in the presence of Sharmistha. In Karnad's play Yayati is made to speak like that. This is possible because in Karnad's play Puru is not Sharmistha's son as in the Mahabharatha. This is a
dramatic approach by Karnad. Karnad makes it clear in his play that Puru is the son of another wife of Yayati. This helps the dramatist to create the expected result. Indian audience is fond of melodrama and the dramatist makes use of the chance to create a sentimental situation.

When Puru comes back and informs that Yayati's curse can be redeemed if some person accepts his old age. Yayati is jubilant but Puru informs Yayati that nobody is willing to accept his old age. Yayati does not believe it. Yayati thinks that all his subject would come forward and readily accept his old age. He feels very hurt when nobody comes forward to take upon himself the curse of old age. He is ready to give whatever one wants in return. He even proposes to take back his old age after five or six years. When Yayati cries bitterly and with folded hands looks at Puru, Puru decides to accept the curse of senility inflicted on his father. Puru offers to accept the curse and thus Yayati succeeds in transferring his old age and his sins to Puru. But in the process Yayati experiences shattering disillusionment and loss of faith. The final recognition of horror comes to Yayati through Chitraksha, Puru's young wife. Chitraksha holds Yayati responsible for pushing Puru towards death. Yayati asks Chitraksha to rise above petty considerations. To come out of the net, Chitraksha puts a proposal before Yayati. She would like Yayati to take the place of Puru in her life. So that she can bear a child
of the family. Chitralekha finds reality too much to bear and poisons herself. But Yayati tries to idealize Chitralekha's sacrifice.

To Chitralekha's offer, Yayati is shocked. She can think of only one solution and that is suicide. After taking poison, she is not willing to die. Sharmistha accuses Yayati of forcing Chitralekha to end her life. Sharmistha sarcastically calls Chitralekha's death as "the first victory of Yayati's new life". (Plays of Girish Karnad 113) It is Chitralekha's suicide that brings Yayati to his senses and he owns up the responsibility for his actions. Yayati proposes to Sharmistha to accompany him to the forest. Now he wants to wash his sins and wants to spend his old age in the forest. When Chitralekha dies Puru is stunned. He regains his youth from his father and he repents for what he has done. By using the myth Karnad tries to show the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts. The puranic theme has taken a fresh interpretation and the style unites the elements of traditional Indian theatre. One could realize a strikingly modern sensibility for contemporary socio-political reality in Yayati.

Karnad has always found it difficult to find a suitable rich subject for writing plays. After Yayati he read much to find a plot. He read the History of Kannada Literature by Kirtinath Kurtkoti. Karnad learnt from him that Indian history has not been handled by any writer the way English history has been
done by Shakespeare or Brecht. He was much impressed and went through and the subject, Tughlaq struck him. That was a subject in tune with the times. In those days existentialism was quite under discussion. Karnad felt that in Tughlaq he had hit upon a fantastic character. Tughlaq was an extraordinary character to come to the throne of Delhi. He was an unsurpassable ruler in religion, in philosophy, in battle, war field and even in calligraphy. Karnad realized that he had absorbed this character and was growing in front of him. Writing on such a subject was challenging and rewarding for Karnad.

Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Karnad's *Tughlaq* bear several resemblances. Tughlaq is both temperamental and whimsical. Both the plays revolve around the eccentricities of their protagonists. Like Shakespeare, Karnad maintains perfect objectivity of a true historian presenting the historical events and complexities of the time. Karnad exhibits his skill in using the colouring of art.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* was a tremendous success with the reading public. It achieved greater popularity on the stage also. Actors liked to play the role of the Emperor. Karnad wrote this play in the convention of the company Natakas. Karnad was no more interested in the Western style for the form of the play. He divided the play into scenes. For scene divisions, he followed the indigenous fashion of the Natakas.
Karnad is a skillful translator. He writes his plays in Kannada. He writes articles, essays and film scripts in English, but not his plays. When he translates his own work, he has a great advantage like Rabindranath Tagore. He has a lot of freedom that another translator will not have. A translator cannot make changes if it is somebody else's text. A translator has to be faithful to the text. But Karnad's translations have the approximation to the original. Karnad could maintain the sensibility of the original even in the translations, because he is the author of the original text. He could understand the mental state of the writer of the original text as he himself is the translator. But even then, to begin with, Karnad was quite reluctant to translate his own plays. He realized that translating from Kannada to English required a great deal of rewriting - a kind of trans-creation. Karnad feels that translating from one regional language to another is easier than translating into English. This may be due to the awareness of the regional sensibility. The basic problem for the translator lies in his search for appropriate cultural equivalents. Karnad translated \textit{Tughlaq} into English when Alyque Padamsee a Bombay based producer - director was to stage the play. He translated \textit{Hayavadana} for the Madras Players.

Mohammed Bin Tughlaq is a well-known king in the Indian history. He is known more for his wickedness and insane policies. Karnad has immortalized this character in his play titled \textit{Tughlaq}. As the character has been portrayed
in poor light both by historians and critics, a Karnad reader is likely to approach the character of Mohammed Bin Tughlaq with slightly prejudiced mind. When a character is drawn from history and projected in fiction, the character ceases to be a historical figure. He is merely a character in fiction and needs to be treated as such. This is essential to appreciate the play in the proper perspective.

Karnad's play *Tughlaq* is an excellent work of art, with an intricate plot, subtle irony, copious satire and delicate symbolism. It is *Tughlaq* his second play that took Karnad sky-high and placed him along with such dramatists like Tendulkar and Sircar. *Tughlaq* reflected the national disillusionment of the Nehruian era. Karnad described Mohammed Bin Tughlaq as the most intelligent and idealistic king to have ruled Delhi. Misunderstood and maligned, he grew alienated and desperate. He became a tyrannical failure.

*Tughlaq* is not an ordinary chronicle play. It is a very imaginative reconstruction of some of the most significant events in the life of a great king. The theme of the play is from Indian history, yet the treatment of it is not historical but highly political. Karnad's subject for the play was the life of Mohammed Bin Tughlaq, a fourteenth century sultan of Delhi. He was the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures. This may be the reason why Karnad selected such a subject. In
a person like Tughlaq the playwright could infuse the aspirations, hopes agony and pain, when he delineates the character. According to Karnad:

In a sense, the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence, and the coming to terms with cynicism and realpolitik. (*Three Plays* 7)

Karnad also gives reasons why he had inevitably selected a Muslim subject for his second play. He wanted to make use of the Parsi stage craft and the play was historical. Mixing these two only he could go for a Muslim subject. In his introduction to *Three Plays*, he points out that the Hindu mind with its belief in the cycle of births and deaths, has found little reason to chronicle or glamorize any particular historical period. Moreover it was independence that made history suddenly important to Indians. Karnad adds:

It was the Muslims who first introduced history as a positive concept in Indian thought, and the only genuinely Indian methodology available to us for analyzing history was that developed by the Muslim historians in India. (*Three Plays* 7)
Kamad's play *Tughlaq* works out its protagonist's progressive alienation with existential overtones. Like Camus's *Caligula*, *Tughlaq* also may be seen as a play which deals with an alienated outsider figure. Tughlaq is estranged at various levels, from traditional religion, from existence and from the human predicament in this world and himself. From the opening scene itself, Tughlaq is seen as a man estranged from his society. He is a man ahead of his age. The society around him does not understand him. His ideas and ideals are beyond the comprehension of his contemporaries. His broad-minded religious tolerance is appreciated neither by Muslims nor Hindus. Both doubt him. To Muslims he is foolish and to Hindus he is cunning. He wants to win the confidence of his subjects. He wants to build an ideal empire together with them. But he fails to carry his people with him. Any society is held together by its traditions. Attempt to undermine them will lead to violent reaction. Thus arises the perennial dialectic between the outsider and the society. This is what happens in the case of Tughlaq. His proposal for changes pose a threat to the time-honoured conventions and beliefs of society.

His plans regarding the change of capital and the introduction of a token copper currency are sound and reasonable. But they fail to convince his subjects. One can understand his frustration at his subjects' non-comprehension. In scene Two, he speaks his mind to his Step-mother:
But then how can I spread my branches in the stars while the roots have yet to find that hold in the earth? I wish I could believe in recurring births like the Hindu but I have only one life, one body, and my hopes, my people, my God are all fighting for it.

(Tughlaq 10)

Tughlaq realizes here that his idealistic dreams can never reach the stars unless they are rooted in the firm support of his people. But despite all his efforts he is unable to win the confidence of his subjects - both the aristocrats and the commoners. He fully realizes the tragedy of his predicament. Something is responsible for his failure. It is his alienation from his people. One cannot blame the people alone for his failure. If they failed to understand his reasons for proposing these schemes, he too fails to foresee their reactions to them. Tughlaq says: "But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't even opened their eyes to the light of today?" (Tughlaq 39)

Tughlaq does not take into account the emotional attachment of people to their native soil when he proposes a change of capital. He does not take precautions against the possibility of counterfeiting when he introduces token copper coins. The repeated failure of Tughlaq to win the confidence of his people turns Tughlaq into a different man. It also paves the way for gradual
disillusionment and fall from his ideals. Ultimately it ends in a state of existential alienation.

In the very first scene he tries his best to impress his people by playing the role of a just and impartial ruler. The Vishnu Prasad episode is a best example for it. Mohammed speaks:

My beloved people, you have heard the judgement of the Kazi and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom - Without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. (Tughaq 3)

The speech has all the qualities that a politician of today ought to have. At the end of the scene the Guard dismisses the crowd saying, "What are you waiting for? The Show's over! Go Home ---" (Tughaq 5) These words suggest that the Guard has almost seen through the theatricality of the entire performance which had been staged by Tughlaq to win popular support. Even in private life Tughlaq does acting.

By adopting a role, Tughlaq distances himself from others. Later the inability to communicate becomes a matter of anguish for him. In scene Eight, when Tughlaq unburdens his soul to the young Guard at Daulatabad, he meets with gross incomprehension. Tughlaq becomes angry. But anger is followed
by a philosophical acceptance of the fact: "I'm sorry. It's my turn to apologize. It isn't your fault. You are also one of them" (Tughlaq 54)

Tughlaq is alienated from traditional religion also. This arises from the fact that he is an existentialist in his religion and therefore inevitably comes into conflict with the orthodox believers and fundamentalists. This conflict is vividly presented in scene Three in the debate between Sheik Imam-ud-din and Tughlaq. The Sheik believes that the Koran is the only guide. Tughlaq never denied it but refuses to depend only on God and prayer and believes in his own strength and resources. To the Sheik this sounds like blasphemy. The fact that Tughlaq is an existentialist in religion is seen from his refusal to accept the Koran as the sole truth. He cannot reject the Greek philosophy and the truth in other religions. Even he had felt the thrill of a brave new world opening before him:

I can still feel that the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And 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 pieces 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. (Tughlaq 21)

It is the treachery of Shihab-ud-din that turns Tughlaq against the world. Those who he trusted and loved betray him. In scene Six this is revealed in his tortured question to 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 slap the night and melt away in the silence? (Tughlaq 43)

This reveals an intense awareness of the futility and absurdity of human existence. This is similar to that of Macbeth who sees human life as absurd.

His cruelty in the play arises out of his anguish. The repeated frenzied stabbing of Shihab-ud-din even after he is dead, the order that the bodies of the conspirators should be stuffed with straw and exhibited throughout the kingdom and the insistence on the immediate vacating of Delhi are acts of cruelty and tyranny. Karnad juxtaposes Tughlaq's existential alienation with his earlier idealism. Again and again in the play Tughlaq is made to realize the vast gulf between aspiration and fulfillment, ideals and reality. His idea of creating a Utopia becomes a rubbish dump of degeneration when his step-
mother taunts him with killing his father, brother and Sheik Imam-ud-din, Tughlaq claims to have killed them for an ideal, perhaps the ideal of building a Utopian empire. He considered it to be his life's mission. He tells his step mother: "I killed them - yes - but I killed them for an ideal" (Tughlaq 65)

Once he has tasted the exhilarating power of killing, it has become a compulsion as in the case of Macbeth. Tughlaq has found that the most powerful argument lay not in words but in the sword, in cruelty, violence and murder. He has therefore adopted tyranny as a way of life to fulfill his mission in life:

I couldn't. Not now. Remember Shihab-ud-din of Sampanshahr? He was the first man I killed with my own hands. And I had a glimmer then of what now I known only too well. No words but the sword that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission. (Tughlaq 66)

Soon after this Tughlaq insists that none of the deaths which he had brought about were futile:

No they were not futile. They gave me what I wanted - power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself. (Tughlaq 66)
This speech reveals his startling attitude towards murder. Murder has given him power and self-realization through independent thinking and action.

In scene Ten, soon after condemning his step-mother to death, one finds Tughlaq experiencing self-estrangement. Self-alienation has been defined in philosophy as "alienation of a self from itself through itself" (The Encyclopedia of Philosophy 76-80). It is a division of self into conflicting parts, which become alien to each other. When the self division becomes extreme, the person suffers from various psychological disorders and may even be driven beyond the border of sanity into the total self-estrangement of madness. Left alone, he falls on his knees, clutches his hands to his breast and desperately pleads with God to help him.

God, God in heaven, please help me.

Please don't let go of my hand.

... I started in Your path, Lord,

why am I wandering naked in this desert now?

(Tughlaq 67)

There is the tone of despair, helplessness, and bewildered incomprehension in his prayer. But there is also a note of anguish in the end:
I was trying to pray! Think of that - no one in my Kingdom is allowed to pray and I was praying. Against my own orders! But what else could I do Barani? My legs couldn't hold me up any longer. (*Tughlaq* 68)

In scene Eleven, Tughlaq again indulges in play-acting and self-dramatizations. He strikes a pose of humility and dramatically falls at the feet of Aziz Ghiyas-ud-din. This histrionic gesture has its effect on the crowd. In scene twelve Aazam reports the nocturnal vigil of the Sultan in his proposed rose garden - turned - rubbish dump. Aazam calls it madness, while Aziz puts it down to insomnia. At the end of the play as Barani passes out of his life, Tughlaq reaches a dead end in complete exhaustion. Tughlaq claims that his madness is a divine frenzy a kind of *Rudra Tandava*. But it has left the man exhausted and he falls asleep just as prayer is restored in his kingdom after a ban of five years. As far the theme of alienation is concerned the play is open-ended and inconclusive.

Many of the other characters in the play serve as foils to the protagonist. Najib Barani, Aazam and Aziz highlight certain elements in the character of Tughlaq. Aazam and Aziz form the comic pair derived from the Akara - Makara tradition in Karnad's drama. They are reminiscent of Vladimir and Estrogen in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Aazam and Aziz present an
interesting parallel to Tughlaq's existential alienation in a lighter vein. Aziz reveals some startling similarities to Tughlaq.

It is evident that Tughlaq's thematic concerns have a universal significance. Karnad grapples with fundamental human motives. The psychic structure of the characters are critically explored. The moral and manners of the practical world is sensitively commented upon.

In his next play *Hayavadana*, published in 1970, Karnad poses the problem of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. He uses the conventions of folk tales and folk theatre - masks, curtains, dolls, the story within a story, indifferent gods, dolls that speak and children who cannot. *Hayavadana* is based on *Kathasarithsagara - Vetal Panchvinshati*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. Karnad has borrowed the story through Thomas Mann's "The Transposed Heads." The original story poses a moral problem and Mann treats it to show the mechanical conception of life which differentiates body and soul. But Karnad's play puts forward a different problem, the identification of a human being in this world of strange relationships.

The theme of the play is a complex one. Karnad good-humouredly yet critically manipulates the very concepts of the rational and the physical. The multiplicity of characters and their individual psychic circles playing into
each other build up a complex pattern of human relationships. By projecting these human sympathies against a gradually intensifying clash of personalities, Karnad presents a comprehensive picture of the human beings in search of perfection and completeness.

Karnad in almost all his plays makes use of ancient myths, legends, stories and traditions to interpret this age-old human situation with reference to contemporary experience. Karnad takes one deep into traditional mythology to reveal the conflict that tears man's mind. In Hayavadana, he seems to toy with the theme of incompleteness. According to Krishna Gandhi, in Hayavadana:

The theme of the play is an old one. ... men'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 is ambiguous. The character of Hayavadana is invented as an example of this ambiguity. (Enact Jan-Feb 1968 68-69)

It is interesting to note that the play is titled after a minor character, Hayavadana does not play a major role in the weaving of the plot. His story is not directly related to furthering of the principal chain of action. This is
because Hayavadana turns himself into a symbol striving after the ideal of perfection. This could be conscious or unconscious.

The main plot of the play is very simple, as that of a folk tale. Devadatta, the only son of the learned Brahmin Vidyasagara falls in love with Padmini, the daughter of a merchant. With the help of his friend Kapila, the only son of the ironsmith Lohita, Devadatta marries Padmini. Unable to seek all the qualities in Devadatta, Padmini drifts towards Kapila. This creates problems. On their way to Ujjain, Devadatta becomes suspicious of the relationship between Padmini and Kapila. Devadatta goes to the Kali temple in the hills and offers his head to Goddess Kali:

Forgive me, Mother. You fulfilled the deepest craving of my life - you gave me Padmini - and I forgot my word....

Here, Take it, Mother accept this little offering of my head.

(Hayavadana 28)

Kapila also kills himself and the scene is hilariously comic. But the scene has profound dramatic implication. Now it is Padmini’s turn to kill herself. But Kali intervenes. Padmini does as asked by Kali and in her excitement she mixed the heads of Devadatta and Kapila. Thus an overwhelming situation is created and the scene ends with the question to the audience who is the rightful husband of Padmini!
Now Padmini lives with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. Gradually Devadatta changes to his former self so does Kapila. Padmini is also disillusioned. And in the end Devadatta and Kapila kill each other, while Padmini performs Sati. The deaths indicate the absurdities of the situation. Karnad has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience.

The play opens with Ganesha Pooja. This is significant because Lord Ganesha with human body and animal head properly suggests the central theme of incompleteness of being. Karnad makes the Bhagavatha question regarding the comprehension of completeness by stating:

Could it be that this Image of Purity and Holiness, this Mangalamoorty, intends to signify his very appearance that the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend? (Hayavadana 1)

Karnad depicts the mythological legend in a very interesting and humorous manner. Karnad describes the horse-man searching for completeness in a very comic vein. Karnad successfully pictures Padmini's thirst for completeness, for perfection. Probably what Karnad tries to reveal through Padmini is the predicament of a modern, free and bold woman who is torn between polarities. He presents a woman who loves her husband as well as
someone else for two different aspects of their personalities. Padmini after the exchange of heads is happy for she has the best of both men. But slowly reality surfaces. She has the capacity of complete experience. Karnad here described her situation through the symbols in the Female Chorus. The end is not tragic. It applies an absurd meaning to the drama. It is very well to say that one cannot have all these qualities in one man, but it does not mean that one should be satisfied with one man.

Karnad dismisses the quest for perfection on the one hand and on the other pleads for its continuity. What probably Karnad tries to convey is the fact that the world is full of incomplete individuals, indifferent dolls that speak. The world is indifferent to the desires and frustrations, joys and sorrows of human beings it is conveyed through a superb and ingenious capacity of Karnad.

Karnad's next play *Naga-Mandala* is based on two folk-tales from Karnataka. He heard these tales several years ago from A.K. Ramanujan. The play begins with a prologue. One is taken to the inner sanctum of a ruined temple. The idol is broken and therefore cannot be identified. It is night and a man is sitting in the temple. He is yawning involuntarily. It reminds one of Kali yawning in *Hayavadana*. He turns to the audience and confides:

I may be dead within the next few hours.... I asked the mendicant what I had done to deserve this fate. And he said,
You have written plays. You have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who came trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs, that all that abused mass of sleep has turned against you and became the Curse of Death. *(Naga-Mandala 1-2)*

The man with a self-directed irony swears that if he survives that night he will have nothing to do with themes, plots or stories. He abjures all storytelling and all play acting. Naked lamp flames enter the temple. They talk each other in female voices. A new flame enters and is greeted by the other flames. The new flame tells others:

> My mistress, the old woman, knows a story and a song.

> But all these years she kept them to herself. ... This afternoon... The moment her mouth opened the story and the song jumped out. *(Naga-Mandala 4)*

The story took the form of a young woman and the song become a sari. This young woman wrapped herself in the sari and stepped out. Within no time the story arrives at the temple with the song. The story looks despondent. The flames gather around her. There is no point in the flames listening to her. They cannot pass the story. The man jumps out and ultimately agrees to help the song. The prologue ends and Act one begins with the story addressing the
audience. Thus the plot of *Naga-Mandala* unfolds. Appanna marries and fetches Rani home to keep her locked inside the house. Appanna maltreats her. He comes home only for lunch which Rani cooks with great pains. Then he goes away to a concubine, leaving Rani alone and locked up in the night. Kurudavva who plays the Kali in this play provides Rani with some magical roots to make her husband come round her. Because of fear Rani pours the magical potion prepared out of the roots into the ant-hill in which lives a king-cobra. The magical potion turns the Naga into her lover. Naga begins to call on Rani in the shape of her husband in the nights and love her. Rani becomes pregnant. But her husband accuses her of infidelity. The village elders test her with the naga ordeal. Rani comes out successfully in the fidelity test with the help of the Naga and now her husband Appanna asks her forgiveness. Appanna's concubine volunteers to do menial work for Rani. Rani gives birth to a son. But Appanna knows that he never slept with his wife. Appanna is not convinced of Rani's chastity.

When Rani sleeps with her husband on the day of the judgement, she comes to know that Naga in the guise of Appanna has been with her all these days. She expresses her gratitude to Naga for all the help by making her son cremate the dead cobra who commits suicide. Appanna has never bothered about the purity of his wife and he and Rani have enjoyed happy marital life. The play has two ends. In end One, Naga enters Rani's bedroom and dies for the
sake of Rani and her family. Naga's sacrifice, paves way for Rani's happy married life. In end Two of the play the Naga does not die. He is allowed to live in her tresses. The lover is always present, he lives with her within the family.

_Naga-Mandala_ is a feminist play. The play presents the concept of chastity. It is also a story of marriage and love. The play questions the patriarchal moral code, which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband. But a husband need not be faithful to his wife. This moral code is accepted by both men and women. Appanna commits adultery but nobody objects to it. The village elders do not find fault with him. Nobody believes the innocence of Rani. She does not discover the identity of Naga who assumes Appanna's form by using his magical power. The interesting point is that she is suppressed by both Appanna and Naga. She is not allowed to ask questions. In a patriarchal society women are supposed to remain ignorant. If she had discovered the real identity of Naga, she would not have allowed him to enter her bedroom. As a typical Indian, _Pathivritha_, she is frigid and despises sex. But she craves for affection and Naga pours it in plenty. Naga uses his erotic art and cures her frigidity. This may be the reason why Appanna and Rani are able to enjoy marital life later.

There is also change in the character of Rani. Rani before the Naga affair and Rani after it are different. The simple, innocent and ignorant girl becomes a
confident and courageous lady. This can be seen when she speaks to Naga. "I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot." (Naga-Mandala 32) She later shows the same courage which shocks Appanna. After the village elder's judgement, Rani becomes the head of the family. Rani never orders Appanna, she only requests him if she needs a favour.

In the beginning both Rani and Appanna do not know how they can relate to each other. She feels sick and lonely. The initial stage is painful for Rani, who is still very much attached to her parents. Appanna's behaviour reflects his divided emotional and physical selves. It seems that the emotional aspect of his personality is underdeveloped. Appanna treats Rani with contempt, aggression and mistrust. Naga-Mandala depicts that the man and woman pass through several stages of doubt, uncertainty and even failures before they become mature and learn to live harmoniously as husband and wife within the family hold.

The story of Karnad's Tale-Danda which literally means beheading is borrowed from an important historical movement that took place in the city of Kalyan in 1168 A.D. The play depicts the ugly deformity of the Hindu society. It exposes the twelfth century community struggle in the city of Kalyan in North Kanara when Bijjala was the king, Basavanna the king's officer and a
great poet-philosopher united the brilliant people of Kalyan and fought for equality. They shed their castes and become Sharanas or devotees of Shiva. They talked about God in the language of the common people. They denounced idolatry. They condemned all the inhuman traditions and believed in social and gender equality. Finally their noble movement ended in a disaster when the marriage of a Brahmin girl to a Panchama boy led to the fateful war between Sharanas and orthodox people. The movement ended in terror and bloodshed. Karnad writes in the preface to Tale-Danda:

I wrote Tale-Danda in 1989 when the Mandir and the Mandal movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solution they offered. (1)

Tale-Danda is historical like Jaghashay. It throws light on the inhuman system of caste that has prevailed for ages in the Hindu society. According to the Hindu tradition there are four Varnas. Brahmins are the most privileged of all. And the last class which is not considered a Varna is that of Panchamas, untouchables. Bijjala is a Shudra, a barber by caste. His forefathers
were very rich and they bribed the Brahmins for branding the caste of Kshatria on their hearts. Thus they acquired the eligibility to rule the kingdom. Bijjala marries a royal princess, Rambhavati and has a son Sovideva. Bijjala knows that the people of higher castes do not respect him properly. It is Basavanna and his men work for the development of the city. The king loves *Sharanas*. The king himself says:

Every *Sharana* seeks only to earn the day's keep, makes no extra demands, treats profits with contempt. So who profits? From every corner of the country, trade and commerce have come poured into Kalyan, and now the city is bursting at the seams with money and activity. Even those who despise the *Sharanas* for their beliefs need them for their economic enterprise - as indeed I do - and - they pour money into the *Sharana* coffers. (*Tale-Danda* 24)

This is the sign of an ideal society. Bijjala feels grateful to Basavanna and his men. But his son Sovideva with Damodara Bhatta and Manchanna Kramita tries to tarnish the name of Basvanna and plans to open the royal treasury. This is defeated by Jagadeva a *Sharana*. Again the marriage infuriates the orthodox Hindus and they turn against the *Sharanas* and the Blood bath continues. Basvanna with all his ability and foresight fails to save
the king. It is a Sharana who kills the king and he commits suicide. The
crowning ceremony of Sovideva goes on as the city of Kalyan is ablaze.

Karnad has worked on this theme for nearly fifteen years to set the feel of
the times, the people, and their literary output. In an interview with Gowri
Ramnarayan in *Frontline* Karnad says:

"My play is not another Becket dealing with the king and his
officer. It is about the whole period with a large cast of
characters. It is issue-based, focusing on the philosophical
implication of the two forces, which clashed - the Sanatana
Dharma and the Bakti movement. (76)"

The episode also led one to reflect on Hinduism. Karnad feels that *Tale-Danda*
is relevant even today, as religious fundamentalism is very strong. What
happened in the twelfth century is still happening. So Karnad rightly remarks:
"It seems 800 years have solved no problems. We are back exactly where we
started." (*Frontline* 76)

Karnad has often turned to history, legend, myth, and folklore for sources
for his creative expression. Every time he gives a new meaning and a new
interpretation. His journey to history and legend created *Tughlaq* and *Tale-
Danda's encounter with folk-lore led to Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala and his long contemplation with myth resulted in Agni Mattu Male.

*The Fire and the Rain* is a translation of the Kannada play *Agni Mattu Male* by Karnad himself. It is based on a myth from the Mahabharatha. Karnad was impressed by the dramatic possibilities of the Yavakri or Yavakrita which occurs in chapter 135-38 of the *Vana Parva* of the Mahabharatha. He came across the story of Yavakri and Paravasu while still in college, in C. Rajagopalachari's abridged edition of the epic. Karnad realized the greatness of this myth as Rajaji did not discard this seemingly peripheral tale in his edition. Karnad observes:

...for the moment I read the tale, I knew it had to be turned into a play. For the next thirty-seven years, I struggled with it, trying to fit all the ramifications of the myth within some sort of manageable shape. (*The Fire and the Rain* ix)

What forced Karnad to write a play bearing on the long cherished myth was a commission in 1993 from the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, U.S.A. The transformation of the myth into a play relevant to the times with universal significance was a new experience to Karnad. The play transcends barriers of language and constraints of a given culture. Emotions of love, jealousy, loneliness and despair common to humanity is flashed out. The triumph of
the playwright lies in the fact that he is able to make the mythical very real with all its wonders. Lakshmi Chandrashekar, a theatre person in Bangalore observes: "He foregrounds the social context of individual conflict, something that is further developed in Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain), his most recent play. The modern relevance is unmistakable." (118)

The play opens on the site of the Yajna or fire sacrifice. It is being held for seven long years to propitiate Indra the god of rains. It has not rained for nearly ten years. Drought grips the land. The drought symbolically represents the spiritual down fall also. As the play unfolds within the play and the myth of Yavakri is brought also with the archetype characters.

Karnad's play breathes life into the Mahabharatha story of Yavakri and Paravasu. There are the Brahmins who represent the system with all the cunning and compromise. Arvasu, the rebel arises from among them. He wishes to change the old order. There is Yavakri the ascetic when Indra himself grants Universal Knowledge. But this Universal knowledge is nothing in the face of burning emotions. In Karnad's play Visaka is a symbol of suppressed womanhood. The tribal girl Nittilai stands for hope and love. Nirupama Dutt writes:

The play moves at a racy pace through three acts and an epilogue unfolding the complexities of human relationships, power games love and betrayal to make for compelling
reading Arvasu is trapped in the very role he sets out to play and hope dies along with Nittilai, yet there's renewal as the crowds sniff at the smell of wet earth, thunder rolls, and rain comes pouring down. And Arvasu cries out: "It's raining, Nittilai! It's raining!" (The New Indian Express Magazine 1)

The end of the play makes one think that Karnad is an optimistic writer. The Fire and the Rain also take Karnad's personal quest forward.

Karnad is known to the man in the street more through his sporadic appearance in popular TV serials, a few Hindi films with national awards and critical approval for scripting and directing films in Kannada, Tamil and Hindi. But his claim to more lasting fame is as a member of that rare breed of genuine contemporary playwrights of India today. Perhaps it was the unconscious influence of Yekshega and company natak in his home state of Karnataka that decided Karnad's vocation for play-writing.

Beginning his career as manager of the Oxford University Press, Madras, Karnad has been an enterprising adventurer in showbiz, with simultaneous involvement in the cultural and academic fields, through creative and critical writings, participation in seminars, festivals, committees and institutions.
It seems only natural that Karnad has been honoured with the Jnanpith Award. Karnad has acted and scripted a number of films and documentaries. He scripted U.R. Anantha Moorthy's award winning novel Samskara. He played the lead role also. The film won the President's Gold Medal for the best film in 1970.

Certainly writing is Karnad's soul. Whenever he diverted himself from that, he managed to hold on to the power of the word. He scripted for films such as "Vamsa Vriksha", "Kaadu", "Ondanandu Kaaladelli" - all in Kannada. He acted in some of them, directed some of them. He moved on to Bombay and was the scenarist for Shyam Benegal's "Nishant" and "Manthan". His acting in them was incidental. He has feathers in his acting cap for "Swami", "Subah" and "Nishant". He went further and got into television. His "Khandan" made new waves in the 1980s. His other TV serials are "Malgudi Days" and "Apna Aasman." "Cheluvi" based on a Kannada folk tale emphasising the fact that man and his environment are inseparably bound for existence and survival, is a telefilm. "Manas" is another TV project by Karnad.

He has made some documentaries also: on the Kannada poet D.R. Bendre in 1973, Kanaka-Purandara (English) in 1999 on two medieval Bhakthi poets of Karnataka, and The Lamp in the Niche (English) in 1989, on Sufism and the Bakthi movement. A number of films and documentaries won awards and
have been shown at film festivals all over the world. He has worked for well-known directors such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Shyam Benegal.

Karnad was awarded the Padma Shri in 1974 and the Padma Bhushan in 1992. He was the President of the Karnataka Nataka Academy (1976-78) and chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy of the Performing Arts (1983-93). He was visiting Professor and Fulbright scholar in Residence at the University of Chicago during 1987-88. He was made Doctor of Letters by Karnataka University in 1994. He has been appointed President of the Film and Television institute of India Society. He has won the Kalidas Samman Award on 1999 for his contribution to theatre. He has also won the Federation of Engineers Award at Ichalkarinji on 14.3.1999.

Karnad lives in Bangalore with his wife Dr. Saraswathy Gnanapathy and two children Shalmali Radha and Raghu Amay. Karnad’s new venture is a film in Kannada and a teleserial in Hindi based on the Kannada novel Kanaru Heggadithi by Kuvempu - the first Jnanpith Awardee.

Karnad has been a bitter critic in recent years of the rise of religions fundamentalism in India. He publicly condemned the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992. He uses all public platforms to warn of the threat Hindutva poses to secularism, multi-culturalism and the freedom of expression. In a recently got up function to felicitate Karnad at Shimoga by the Asakthi, the
Karnataka Sangha and the Manasa Trust, he lamented that Hindutva is being used for political gains.

Karnad is not impulsive by temperament, and does not resort to writing just at the flash of an idea. He follows a golden mean of thought and action when he launches a new play. The classical qualities of balance and restraint are true of the passion of Karnad too. A committed writer, he has realized the necessity of humanism. The realization of humanism gives a comprehensive depth to the writings of Karnad. Though the themes treated by Karnad belong to distant past, myth, folk legend and history for his plays, they reflect contemporary life. His plays are at once universal and contextual. They are "timeless" and "temporal" to borrow the terms from Eliot. (49) How he blends the East and the West is the concern of the whole thesis and in the next chapter the scholar attempts an exhaustive study of the major themes of Karnad plays.