CHAPTER TWO

MAJOR THEMES

... every drama must present a conflict. The end may be reconciliation or destruction; or as in life itself there may be no end; but the conflict is indispensable: no conflict, no drama (Shaw 729)

Indian drama written during the recent decades manifests a significant influence of the West. Several playwrights writing during this period show their indebtedness to Sartre, Camus, Pinter, Beckett, Pirandello and Brecht. Karnad, P.Lankesh, Chandrasekara Kambar and Chandrasekara Patil conscious of both the Western norms and the Indian tradition have contributed and enriched the contemporary Indian drama.

Karnad is considered as one of the three great writers of the contemporary Indian drama, the other two being Tendulkar and Sircar. Tendulkar and Sircar deal with the problems of the Indian middle class. Karnad on the other hand goes for Indian myth and legends and makes them a vehicle of a new vision. By making use of these myths he tries to show the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man's eternal struggle for perfection, the cultural deformity and the theme of shape-shifting. There are other themes as
well, such as the quest for human identity in a world of tangled relationships, and the search for completeness.

Karnad's *Yayati* tells the age-old story of the mythological king Yayati who in his longing for eternal youth sought to borrow the vitality of his son Puru. Karnad has borrowed the myth from Mahabharata and other puranas. The play is not available in English translation, and hence the scholar is not able to make a thorough study of it. Yet with the available sources the scholar tries to analyze the theme of the play. It is important for the formation of the thesis *Yayati* being the first play written by Karnad in Kannada.

Karnad gives a new meaning and significance to the traditional tale. The play is highly relevant in the context of life today. The symbolic theme of Yayati's attachment to life and pleasures has a new dimension in Karnad's play. Karnad's originality lies in working out the motivation behind Yayati's ultimate choice. Karnad gives a twist to the original story and even introduces new characters to attain the expected result. In the Mahabharatha, Yayati is able to understand the nature of desire itself. He realizes that there is no point of satisfaction for desires. But in Karnad, Yayati recognizes the horror of his own life and assumes his moral responsibility. This happens after a series of symbolic encounters.
It is interesting to note that an eminent Marathi novelist V.S. Khandekar used the Yayati myth in his novel *Yayati*. It was published in 1959. This novel has won many awards. Khandekar won the Jnanpith Award in 1964. In Khandekar's novel Yayati is a representative of modern common man. He is the happiest man, but remains restless and discontented. The mythical Yayati ran after sensual pleasures. But Khandekar's Yayati runs after all kinds of materialistic pleasures. In Karnad's Yayati, the Sutradhara brings forth the theme of responsibility. The purpose and the theme of the play are revealed through the character of the Sutradhara. As the play opens the Sutradhara informs the audience that it is a mythical play. However, the reality depicted in the play is applicable to modern times as well. According to Sutradhara, nobody can escape the burden of responsibility, because the joy of life lies in it. The characters, the incidents and circumstances are related to the old times. But the reality depicted in the play is applicable to the modern times. In Khandekar's novel, Puru's sacrifice brings a new liberating awareness to Yayati. *Karma* blinds Yayati, but *Dharma* brings him to his senses. But in Karnad's play it is Chitralekha's suicide that brings Yayati to his senses. He owns up responsibility for his actions. Existentialists like Sartre and Camus put great stress on choice and responsibility. In an interview with Rajinder Paul, Karnad says:

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 (3).

_Yayati_ is a self-consciously existentialist drama based on the theme of responsibility. Karnad interprets the ancient Hindu myth on the theme of responsibility. The play emerges almost like a self-consciously existentialist dream. In _Yayati_, Karnad takes the liberty with the original myth and invents some new relationships to make it acceptable to modern sensibilities. In Karnad's play the whole action takes place in one night. Chitralekha (Puru's wife) is disillusioned. She wants to bear a son. As her husband is old, she decides to offer herself to Yayati and then she commits suicide. This is an eye-opener to Yayati. In a moment of genuine remorse, he takes back the curse from his son.

Karnad's interpretation of the old myth baffled and even angered many conventional critics. But to others, who are trying to root their contemporary concerns in old myths, Karnad's "unheroic hero" Puru is a challenging experience. Karnad places the individual at the centre of his picture of the world. He tries to show that each man is what he chooses to be or makes himself. According to A.K.Sinha, "In his (Karnad's) psychological exploration, the
playwright shows an impressive insight and introduces concepts which greatly extend the area of moral self-knowledge and self-awareness." (106)

Karnad also frankly confessed in an interview with Meenakshi Raykar that he "wanted to tell people I had read Sartre, Camus and others," (New Quest 340). Karnad has indeed read wisely Sartre, Camus and others. One could easily understand how he blends the West with the East.

The first play of Karnad that appeared in English translation by Karnad himself is Tughlaq. This is his second play in Kannada. The play explores the Paradox of the idealistic Sultan Mohammed bin Tughlaq. His reign is considered as one of the spectacular regimes of history. In an interview with Meenakshi Raykar, Karnad has revealed:

he read a work of Kannada criticism which proved that many historical plays written earlier were costume plays and that no one attempted to relate a historical episode to modern sensibility like Shaw. This inspired me to write such a play in Kannada (New Quest 340)

Tughlaq works out its protagonist's progressive alienation with existential overtones. Tughlaq has been compared by critics to Camus's Caligula. Like Camus's Caligula, Tughlaq also may be seen as a play, which deals with an
alienated Outside Figure. He is estranged at various levels, from society and the individuals around him. He is also estranged from the traditional religion. The most significant point is that he is estranged from himself.

Caligula and Tughlaq present a tyrant using his power absolutely. Both indulge in wanton and senseless cruelty. In both the plays, the King appears as a "Carnivorous animal" and the King pays an unexpected penalty at the end. Both the plays do not stop being historical plays. Liberties are taken with historical facts in both the plays. Karnad adds a Sub-plot using purely imaginary characters and ignores historical facts in showing a close relationship between Tughlaq and his Step-mother. Both the plays have been invested with urgent topical significance. Critics generally describe both the plays as political allegories.

M.K.Naik asserts in his book *Studies in Indian English Literature* (132) that attributing political allegory will divert attention from both the plays. Karnad admits that what struck him about *Tughlaq's* history was that it was contemporary. *Tughlaq* is basically concerned with the tragedy of the limits of human power. A.K.Sinha is of the opinion that "In *Tughlaq*, the focus is on the psychological implication of the theme of human power in respect of a self-righteous idealist (the most dangerous combination possible) armed with absolute power over his subjects." (106,107) In *Tughlaq*, Karnad emerges like
Shaw as a playwright who is historically awake. Karnad, Shaw and Brecht share a healthy courage. Their plays are committed to a higher didacticism. The dramatic art utilizes the parables to please and teach simultaneously.

There are various levels of alienation in Tughlaq. From the opening scene, Tughlaq is seen as a man estranged from his society. As there exists the hostility between Hindus and Muslims, Tughlaq's broad-minded religious tolerance seems foolish to Muslims and cunning to the Hindus. They suspect his motives. The opening scene presents a Shakespearean exposition of characters and human motives. Somewhat like Gloucester and Kent in King Lear, secondary characters introduce the King:

Young Man: This King now, he isn't afraid to be human...

Third Man: But does he have to make such a fuss about being human?

(Tughlaq 1)

The scene hints at the lurking suspicion between the Hindus and the Muslims. While Tughlaq is deeply religious, he strives for Hindu-Muslim unity. He has no partiality for any particular community. Tughlaq wants to win the confidence of his subjects and to build an ideal empire. But he fails to carry his people with him. Society is held together by its traditions. Any attempt to break or undermine them meets with a violent reaction. This leads to the perennial
dialectic between the outsider and the society. Tughlaq's proposed changes pose a threat to the time honoured conventions and beliefs of society. So he meets stiff oppositions from all classes of people. To Tughlaq all are equal, before justice. His officers have illegally seized the property of Vishnu Prasad, a Brahmin. Tughlaq's announcement to restore the property to Vishnu Prasad, shows his sense of justice and fair play. He also announces his decision to appoint the Brahmin in the service of the state. Then he makes another startling announcement:

Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad.... Your surprise is natural, but I beg to realize that this is no mad whim of a tyrant.... But for me that 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. (Tughlaq 3-4)

He is alienated from the society. He is also estranged at the interpersonal level from the individuals around him. The interpersonal alienation manifests in two levels. First of all he is shown to manipulate people for his purposes. He treats them as objects and not as persons. Secondly he is unable to establish meaningful communication with others and is seen to be play-acting.
Tughlaq is shown as an ace schemer. He manipulates Sheik Imam-ud-din to act exactly to his tunes. By a clever strategy he gets rid of both his enemies - Sheik Imam-ud-din and Ain-ul-Mulk at one stroke. Tughlaq sees others not as persons but as pawns in a political game of chess. There is very little genuine communication in Tughlaq's relationship with others. He seems to be play-acting. At the interpersonal level he is revealing his alienation from others. He is giving a kind of performance all the time. He strikes a series of histrionic poses.

Even in his private conversation with his Step-mother, Tughlaq seems to be acting. When she asks him why he does not sleep at night, he launches into a lengthy inflated rhetoric. It is clearly theatrical. The Step-mother bursts into laughter with the comment. "I can't ask a simple question without your giving a royal performance." (Tughlaq 10-11) This, again, is one dimension of Tughlaq's alienation, explains Erving Goffman. "To the degree that the individual maintains a show before others.... He can come to experience a special kind of alienation from itself." (236)

Tughlaq distances himself from others by adopting a role. But later his inability to communicate becomes a matter of anguish for him. This anguish is brought out when Tughlaq unburdens his soul to the young Guard at Daulatabad. When the Guard responds to Tughlaq that he is not able to
understand what his majesty is saying, Tughlaq is infuriated and he rages at the Guard. "You don't understand! You don't understand! Why do you live? Why do you corrupt the air with your diseased breath?" (Tughlaq 54) It is the alienated outsider's rage. Tughlaq is also estranged from the religion followed by those around him. His alienation from traditional religion shows that he is an existentialist in his religion. So he is in conflict with the orthodox believers and fundamentalists in religion. This conflict is vividly presented in scene Three in the debate between Sheik Imam-ud-din and Tughlaq. According to the Sheik, the Koran is the only guide and that "if one fails to understand what the Koran says, one must ask the Sayyids and the Ulama" (Tughlaq 20) Tughlaq asserts his allegiance to the Koran as the Word of God, "I have never denied the Word of God, Sheik Sahib, because it's my bread and drink." (Tughlaq 20)

But he refuses to depend only on God and prayer. He believes in his own and resources. The Sheik sees Tughlaq as one who aspires to omnipotence and godhead, usurping God's power and position. The fact is that Tughlaq, an existentialist in religion is seen from his refusal to accept the Koran as the sole receptacle of truth. Tughlaq speaks ecstatically of the charm that Greek Philosophy and literature had held for him.

According to Jean-Paul Sartre a fundamental principle in existentialism is that existence precedes essence. A man's experimental knowledge drawn from
existence is superior to any principle or philosophy in its theoretical essence. (26). This is true in the case of Tughlaq also. The microcosm within the King is reflected in the macrocosm of his kingdom.

The first scene reveals Tughlaq as an idealistic reformer. He hopes to lead his people into a Utopia. At the beginning of the play, he is not alienated from human existence. When he becomes disillusioned, realising the unbridgeable gulf between aspirations and reality, Tughlaq moves towards existential alienation. His innovative measures are excellent in principle. But they fail because of two main reasons, his inability to win people's confidence and his failure to foresee the flaws in his schemes. His social alienation from the people thus paves the way for his existential alienation. Soon he realizes the helplessness of the individual and the brevity of human life. In scene Three, there are brief intimations of the beginning of existential alienation in Tughlaq. This is seen when he tells Sheik Imam-ud-din about the "Surrounding Void" which sometimes pushes itself into his soul and starts "Putting out every light burning there". *(Tughlaq 20)*

The turning point in Tughlaq's life comes in scene Six. The treachery of Shihab-ud-din whom Tughlaq genuinely liked and trusted, turns him against the world. This scene reveals the futility and absurdity of human existence. This is similar to Macbeth who sees human life as:
... it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of Sound and fury
Signifying nothing (Mac. V V 26-28)

In *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus expresses the absurd in the relationship between the individual and the world of existence. The absurd is in the encounter between the individual’s desire for order and rational explanations. Tughlaq cannot find any rational explanation either in the treachery of Shihab or his subjects' incomprehension of his idealistic measures. He realised the absurdity of human existence in this totally unreasonable act of treachery. Thus he has a vision of the absurd: the meaninglessness and chaos of existence.

Like Caligula, Tughlaq also tries "to control and release his metaphysical anguish by an exercise of tyrannical power", Christine Gomez observes. (38)

Tughlaq gives up the methods he had hitherto tried with his people – the method of rational explanation and persuasion. Now he is determined to rule them. "I was too soft, I can see that now. They'll only understand the whip." (*Tughlaq* 44) In this change Tughlaq resembles Camus's protagonist Caligula. There is the degeneration of the idealist.

In scene Ten, 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.
The ideal of building a Utopian empire is his life's mission. Tughlaq confesses that violence is not under his control:

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 know only too well. Not words but the sword - that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission (Tughlaq 66)

This speech reveals his attitude to murder. It is like the irresolute Macbeth becoming resolute after the murder of Duncan. Murder has given Tughlaq power and self-realisation through independent thinking and action. According to Christine Gomez, "Cruelty and tyranny are seen almost as vehicles to help him (Tughlaq) to overcome existential alienation and a sense of the absurdity of human existence. This is close to the Nazi mentality exposed by Camus in Caligula." (New Directions in Indian Drama 146) Tughlaq outbursts:

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)
He realizes his self-alienation and knows that he has reached the extreme edge of self-estrangement, which is madness. "I am teetering on the brink of madness Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me." (Tughlaq 68)

In scene Eleven, again Tughlaq indulges in role-playing and self dramatisation. Dramatically he 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 and calls it madness. Aziz puts it down as insomnia, but to Tughlaq it is an expression of his anguish at the trick played on him by life. 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. At the end of the play, Tughlaq reaches a dead end in complete exhaustion:

Barani, all I need now is myself and my madness - madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence.

But I am not alone, Barani. Thank Heaven! For once I am not alone. I have a Companion to share my madness - now the Omnipotent God! (Tired) (Tughlaq 85)

The rescue triangle in Karnad's Tughlaq is a point to be discussed in detail in connection with the major themes in his plays. The very idea of 'rescue triangle' is originated by Dr. Eric Berne. It is borrowed from 'Transactional
Analysis' a new - Freudian school of psychology. Stephen Karpman developed it and hence it is known as Karpman Drama Triangle. There are three roles in the Drama Triangle: that is the Rescuer, the Persecutor and the Victim. One suffers from various psychological problems and tend to act in one of these roles, instead of living one's life naturally and spontaneously one plays the role depending on one's favourite feelings. The feelings accumulate to form a racket. Guilty feelings make one play the rescuer, angry feelings the persecutor and hopeless feelings Victim. P. Ramamoorthi says: "There is a close parallel between life and theatre and quite often life is theatre-like and vice-versa." (38)

Usually a person plays only one role. But often he shifts from one role to the other temporarily as the situation urges him. The concept of Drama Triangle betters one's understanding of Karnad's play Tughlaq. Almost all the characters in the play seem to be involved in the Drama Triangle.

The theme of metamorphosis or shape-shifting in Karnad's plays is another important point for discussion. Shape shifting is a major theme in Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala. In Tughlaq also there is a certain amount of shape-shifting. Before dealing with the shape-shifting in Tughlaq, it is essential to know what is shape-shifting and how it contributes to the thematic concerns. Shape-shifting or metamorphosis is the term cultural anthropologists and folklorists use to describe the transformations that are so common in the myths
and folk lore of most cultures. The epics, puranas and folk tales are full of examples of shape-shifting. Karnad draws upon such resources in his plays. Shape-shifting is a universal motif, which does not have a uniform significance. Its meanings and function change depending on the context. But it has an underlying purpose. Shape-shifting is a way of exploring similarity and difference. Shape-shifting in Karnad's plays is a means to work out some ideas. In any play an actor playing a character pretends to be someone else. Drama itself depends on shape-shifting. A mask, which is the central metaphor of theatre, is symbolic of shape-shifting. It is not merely a central structural strategy but a means of reviving the ancient and sacred function of drama as ritual. It takes place in non-realistic fantasies, fables, myths or folk tales. It is associated with the supernatural. The artifice of shape-shifting is traditional, ritualistic, mythical, but the outcome is tragic in the modern sense.

In *Tughlaq* the major example of shape-shifting is the attempt to change the capital to Daulatabad. What's being tried is to turn Daulatabad into Delhi. The attempt miserably fails because there is a fundamental difference between illusion and transformation. In the former one thing pretends to be another: in the latter, one thing becomes another. *Tughlaq* is a play full of dissimulations, illusions and lies. The whole play is about lies and hypocrisies. This is the dominant theme, illustrating the moral decline in polity, apt to the modern times.
Karnad's play *Tughlaq* has been much acclaimed by critics for its depth and range. The play contains the suggestiveness and richness of a work of art. It lends itself to various interpretations of its thematic concerns at different levels. The betrayal motif in *Tughlaq* is another theme to be discussed. The historical theme is quite obvious in *Tughlaq*. Whatever the central concerns - religious, political, social, historical, psychological and interpersonal – one motif, which unites the action in the thirteen scenes, is that of betrayal of ideals, of trust, of friendship and so on. Revolving round the theme of power, the play replete with lies, intrigue, dissimulation, hypocrisy and treachery underlying the different sorts of betrayal is irony. It is from this irony the play acquires its significance.

Betrayal of religion is also evident in the way "prayer" is treated by Tughlaq. Prayer, which is very closely related to religion, is used for murder in the play. It is widely criticized that Tughlaq has his father and brother killed during prayer time. Priests with the Amirs hatch a plot to murder Tughlaq while at prayer. But the Amirs' revolt is crushed and Tughlaq also feels betrayed. He summarily decrees, "there will be no more praying in the Kingdom.... Anyone caught praying will be severely punished." (*Tughlaq* 44) This makes his alienation complete. It makes him guilty of blasphemy. It is a kind of revolt against God himself.
What inter-links the different stages of the action and the different fields of interaction in the play is the common motif of betrayal. The betrayal takes different shapes. It is evident that Tughlaq's thematic concerns have a universal significance, thus betrayal traces the course of alienation, leads to anguish giving rise to cruelty and tyranny and finally culminates in the tragic failure of one of the most idealistic kings in Indian history.

*Hayavadana* is an enigmatic play. Karnad's play in a characteristic way begins where the *Vetal* story ends. Karnad always takes a leap from the original story and develops it further. This forms the fulcrum of his play and it is the artist's imagination that becomes a challenge to the glib solutions offered in the original stories. Critical opinion is divided about the theme of *Hayavadana*. Kirtinath Kurtkoti in his Introduction to the English translation of *Hayavadana* published in 1975 says:

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 fulfillment of human destiny. (V)
But Karnad's play poses a different problem that of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. According to U.R. Anantha Murthy: "The play exposes the audience to a significant theme like 'incompleteness in a comic mode'. Later he says: "The play tries to create an illusion in us that the head determines the being of man". (177)

The theme has two aspects, a socio-cultural aspect and a metaphysical one. It shows the conflict between two polarities. It is the vital truth of human existence. These two polarities are the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of life. They are the vital truth of human existence. If the fusion of these two polarities means perfection or completeness, the play *Hayavadana* never suggests such a fusion and hence perfection or completeness is something impossible. Padmini's predicament is a predicament of a modern woman who is torn between the two polarities. A civilized Apollonian society will not accept such a woman. The two men will not accept each other when it comes to the question of sharing a woman. It will destroy all the three in the process.

Padmini doesn't want to play the role of a Pativratha, and in that case she could have opted for Devadatta, suppressing her desire for Kapila, Padmini wants them both. But society would not accept this. She knows exactly what she wants from each of them. She wants Devadatta's mental calibre and Kapila's physical strength in one man. She likes a "perfect man", with both these aspects
of human personality. She creates the "perfect man", in her excitement by transposing the heads of Devadatta and Kapila.

When Devadatta appears on the scene with sword he and Kapila decide to fight: "No grounds for friendship now. No question of mercy. We must fight like lions and kill like cobras." (*Hayavadana* 61) Devadatta is a changed man now. There is no generosity, mercy and friendship in him. Both of them realize that living with Padmini is impossible and the only alternative is to kill each other. Padmini prepares to perform "Sati". But the very idea is ridiculed. The very idea of "Sati" keeps the audience detached from any kind of emotional involvement.

The fusion of the Apollonian and Dionysian is Padmini's dream. She wants to realise the dream through her son. But Padmini's and Devadatta's death affect the growth of the child. "Doesn't laugh, doesn't cry, doesn't even smile.... There's something wrong with him..." (*Hayavadana* 66)

K. Narasimha Murthy in his book *Modern Kannada Literature* says: "*Hayavadana* is a Brectitian kind of play employing native folk theatre strategies to present through a folk tale, man's logically futile aspiration for perfection." (23)

The sub-plot of *Hayavadana*, the horse-man is Karnad's own invention. It deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness. It is treated on a
different plane. It provides the framework of the play both as a Prologue and as an Epilogue. Krishna Gandhi writes:

The theme of the play is an old one... man's yearning for completeness, for perfection. It's this yearning which makes people restless in the ordinary existence, and makes them reach out for extra-ordinary things.... But the ideal of perfection itself is ambiguous. The character of Hayavadana is invented as an example of this ambiguity. (Enact Aug-Sep 1972 N. Pag.)

The focus of the play is on Padmini, the woman who is faced with an impossible situation. Padmini is fascinated by both Devadatta and Kapila and this creates the problem. Padmini sends Devadatta to fetch new dolls for the child and she walks into the embrace of Kapila. She takes the child with her and claims it to be the child of both Devadatta and Kapila. Padmini's visit troubles Kapila. He had buried all those faceless memories. But Padmini has dug them up. He is in a tough situation and asks Padmini: "Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?" (Hayavadana 57)

When Devadatta reaches the forest, he asks Kapila:

Devadatta: Tell me one thing. Do you really love Padmini?
Kapila: Yes

Devadatta: So do I.

Kapila: I know. (silence) Devadatta, couldn't we all three live together – like the Pandavas and Draupadie?

Devadatta: What do you think?

(Silence. Padmini looks at them but doesn't say anything)

Kapila: (laughs) No. It can't be done.

Devadatta: That's why I brought this (shows the sword) what won't end has to be cut.

Kapila: I got your body - but not your wisdom

(Hayavadana 61-62)

The two have to die and reduce their beloved Padmini to ashes. Before sacrificing herself in the funeral pyre, Padmini makes it clear that she cannot hope to get perfection even in her next life. She prays to Kali, Mother of all nature!

... you must have your joke even now.

Other women can die praying that they should get the same husband in all the lives to come. You haven't left me even that little consolation. (Hayavadana 63)
It is the child who combines the thematic strands of the main plot and the sub-plot. This abnormal child has never laughed by itself. Hayavadana's laughter restores the boy to normalcy and makes possible his return to humanity. As M.K.Naik suggests: "Modern man must recover his sense of childlike curiosity, wonder and amusement at the sheer incongruity of life in order to achieve integration." (Dimensions of Indian English Literature 196)

The quest for perfection is evident in Karnad's Hayavadana. But the thirst for completeness is lurking in the play. It is characteristic of human nature to search for the fulfillment of wants within human beings, man looks for completeness of what looks incomplete. It is human nature to ignore the importance of what one possesses, what one has, what one is. This is illustrated in almost all the major characters in this play. They struggle throughout in the quest successfully or unsuccessfully. The theme of the play is a complex one.

_Hayavadana_ is a link in his continuing thesis of Karnad - that life is a conundrum. The man who tries to crack the puzzle is a seeker, with the attributes of the romantic and the adventurer. The tendency to ask questions does not yield answers, but leads to more questions. There is continuity from one kind of problem to another.

Another major theme of _Hayavadana_ is the problem of alienation. The play begins with the worship and then the description of Lord Ganesha, the
elephant-headed God, who symbolizes alienation since his head and his body are incompatible. A little later Hayavadana comes and like Ganesha he too is a symbol of alienation, since he is a horse-headed man. Karnad makes use of these mythical figures to throw light on the alienation of man and its consequences in human society. The modern man represented by Devadatta - Kapila suffers from self-alienation. After the transposition of their heads, Devadatta discontinues physical exercise and gradually loses his physical vigour, while Kapila regains his physical vigour by taking rigorous physical exercises. Actually their friendship is based on the fact that they depend on each other for what each lacks. This is why Raykar says: "They are thus complementary to each other." (The plays of Girish Karnad 177)

Devadatta is 'the mind' and Kapila 'the body'. Thus both suffer from alienation. Therefore the problem is more than the passiveness of Devadatta's body and Kapila's mind. There is little or no communications between their body and mind. Padmini not realizing the real problem juxtaposes the active mind of Devadatta and the active body of Kapila. So even after the transposition of their heads, their self-alienation continues. The alienation of the mind and the body is unnatural and artificial while their unification is natural.

Most of the critics including M.K. Naik and Shubhangi S. Raykar think that it is humanly impossible to achieve perfection. The unification of the
Apollo and Dionysus symbolized by Devadatta and Kapila is not possible. In the primitive man, the body and the mind are in perfect harmony, which Norman O Brown calls Dionysian Ego. (160) 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.

Power politics is another theme to be discussed in Hayavadana. But it is of a totally different kind. It is Freudian. In the mental structure of Devadatta there is always the total attraction between his wife Padmini and his best friend Kapila. In Hayavadana there are no realms to be won over, no kingdoms to be fought over. Rather it is in the heart of a young maiden Padmini, "the Shyama Nayika" - born of Kalidasa's description, the war rages. There is certainly power-politics. It is a psychological warfare. Devadatta seems to have won the battle in the beginning. But his victory is only illusory. Kapila never stops trying. He thinks she needs "a man of steel", which of course he qualifies to be. For him she is "Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumathi, all rolled into one". (Hayavadana 16) Both Karnad and Mann seem to point out that head is not superior to the body as in the original story.

The play starts with the worship and then the description of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, with physical deformity. Like Ganesha, Hayavadana the horse-headed man, also suggests physical deformity. The
Bhagavata mistakes his head for a mask and tries to pull off it with the help of an actor, but fails. Then he learns from Hayavadana that he is born with a horse-head, as his mother married a stallion, a cursed Gandharva, Hayavadana has been striving to become complete through various religious penances and social service for several years. Bhagavata advises him to go to goddess Kali for her blessings.

Devadatta practices in the gymnasium and participates in sports. Padmini is happy about his physical powers. The dolls that he bought from Ujjain for his son talk about his vigour:

Doll II. With his rough labourer's hands.
Doll I. Palms like wood...
Doll II. A grip like a vice... (Hayavadana 44)

Later he resumes his Brahminical life style and gradually loses the physical vigour of Kapila's body. The dolls also talk about the change of his body.

Doll I. His Palm! 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.

Doll II. Do you think it'll swell up to? (Hayavadana 47)

Similarly Kapila does hard work and regains his physical vigour. Thus he gradually loses the softness of Devadatta's body. Padmini loses interest in Devadatta on account of his weak soft body with a pot belly. Her unconscious mind longs for Kapila. She dreams of Kapila. But Padmini still says:

Yes, you won Kapila. Devadatta won too.

But I the better half of two bodies....

I neither win nor lose" (Hayavadana 57)

Following the model of Norman O Brown it can be said about the play that it deals with three phases of human history, Karnad is successful as he cleverly exploits Indian myth and folk theatre. Hayavadana and his mother who is cursed to become a mare by her husband stand for the first phase when primitive human beings like animals enjoyed Dionysian ego: the undifferentiated and unified body-mind. Hayavadana's father, a handsome stallion, becomes a celestial man Gandharva. This symbolizes the process of human civilization when man attains Apollonian ego by losing Dionysian ego gradually. So Devadatta and Kapila who represent the modern man suffer from the problem caused by their Apollonian egos. As they cannot get rid of their
Apollonian egos, they end their lives. Veena Noble Dass observes: "In Devadatta, Karnad does not show the superiority of the mind, rather he shows its limitations" *(Modern Indian Drama in English Translations 158)*

*Naga-Mandala* deals with gender inequality in a particular way. Karnad wrote the play after a very long gap. The play mocks at and questions the unjust values of the patriarchal society. It is about Rani, representing a typical Hindu wife. Appanna a wealthy village youth marries her and brings home, when she attains womanhood. He has a bath and lunch, locks her in and goes to his concubine. He does not care for her feelings. He considers her a sub-human slave. She had to serve him with absolute loyalty. He treats her with the contempt of a typical male chauvinist. She feels lonely, frightened and miserable. When she expresses her fear and loneliness, he mercilessly disregards her feelings. He says to her:

> Look, I don't like idle chatter.
> Don't question me. Do as you are told and you won't be punished. (*Naga-Mandala 7*)

She is literally imprisoned in the house and it is almost a solitary confinement for her. Appanna orders:

> She won't talk to any one,
> And no one need talk to her (*Naga-Mandala 14*)
She is deprived of the affection of her fellow human beings and the knowledge of the outer world. Hence her personality remains underdeveloped. She is a child mentally and she craves for parental affection.

Kurudavva, a friend of Appanna's mother learns about Rani's sufferings. She gives Rani an aphrodisiac root. Rani follows her instructions. She makes the curry with the root. But the curry explodes and boils over, it gives away coils of pink steam and smoke. She is afraid that it may harm her husband. So she throws it on the ant-hill. Appanna expects his wife to serve him like a robot.

Naga, a King Cobra, living in the ant-hill consumes the curry and immediately falls in love with Rani. He assumes the form of Appanna and visits Rani during night. He commiserates with her over her pathetic condition and showers on her parental affection that she badly needs. Her pent-up sorrow bursts out. She feels relieved and happy. She cannot comprehend the situation since Appanna cannot be so compassionate. She willingly suspends her disbelief and enjoys Naga's love and care. She feels happy and secure in his company. Appanna and Naga represent the two unconnected roles of a husband - "as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night", Karnad observes. (Three Plays 17) Rajinder Paul rightly points out: "It is a play where a Cobra plays the lover and proves to be better behaved than his human counterpart who is as
insensitive as a husband as we read about in bad tales." (The Book Review 1990 31). Rani falls asleep in his embrace and Naga feels happy about his success.

Rani does not know his real identity until she sleeps with her own husband. Rani enjoys Naga's affection and she is happy. But when she realizes what Naga has done to her, she feels aghast, she moves away from him, she feels cheated into committing the horrible sin of sex. Naga is shocked at her erotic ignorance. He explains to her how natural love-making is. But she feels a sense of shame. Gradually Naga's nocturnal visits cure her frigidity and starts enjoying the erotic pleasures. Rani becomes pregnant. Appanna discovers her pregnancy and is sure that she has committed adultery. He decides to go to the village elders to punish her.

Naga-Mandala questions and exposes gender-based values and morals of patriarchy, which have oppressed women for ages. Karnad juxtaposing Appanna and Rani in the village court does this effectively. They ask Rani to prove her chastity. She requests them to permit her to take the Snake-ordeal. Indian culture considers marriage to be the supreme boon of a woman. It offers her salvation through her service to her husband. To her, chastity is superior and preferable to life. This concept reduces her to a non-living object. Her father offers her to a man as a gift in marriage (Kanyadhan). She is denied love, enjoyment in life. Even education is denied to her. Hence there is no
development in her personality. Rani's situation is exactly this. She is simple, innocent and ignorant. She has grown physically but not mentally. She behaves like a frightened child, in Appanna's presence. Naga gives her love, enjoyment and even some education. So her personality grows. She gets transformed into a confident, courageous lady. She says:

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)

This is the reaction of patriarchal culture. Though men commit the worst sexual crimes, people still say that women spoil the society.

*Naga-Mandala* has several examples of shape-shifting. The main one is the Cobra assuming the form of Appanna to make love to Rani. But in the beginning of the play, the flames take on human shapes to gossip at the temple, after they have been "put out" in the houses. Again the story becomes a young woman and the song a sari, Later Rani, after the Cobra ordeal is shape-shifted into a living goddess, an extraordinary woman. There is some significance to shape-shifting in the play. In Karnad's plays, Shape-shifting is a means to work out some ideas. According to Paranjape: "The play *Naga-Mandala* is about narrativity or the truth of fictions" (New Direction in Indian Drama 92)
Shape-shifting is a central metaphor in Karnad's plays. It is a thematic device. It is a convenient method of exploring differences and similarities. Shape-shifting is a means to illumination and self knowledge not only for the characters, but for the audience too.

_Naga-Mandala_ reveals the burning core of mental or spiritual reality. The main concern of the playwright here becomes centered on human beings in combination, interacting, entering into one another’s lives, becoming part of one another. Karnad is very much interested in the real meeting of the selves, depending on mutual knowledge. Realism is kept away in the play and it takes one to a world that appears to be metaphysical. Events have meaning only in relation to characters. As A.K. Sinha puts it: "Karnad here presents a world where things happen inexplicably, and the schemes and intentions of people do not seem to control the action. Indeed, Girish Karnad's art can be described as a vision of reality". (New Direction in Indian Drama 123)

The concept of chastity is another theme of _Naga-Mandala_ Srilatha Baltiwala raises a pertinent question:

Why do women oppress women? Since the beginning of civilization, every society has lived by certain values and beliefs, which are cleverly transformed into immutable truths. In reality, these ideologies are specifically created
and disseminated to justify the inequalities and injustices of prevailing social structure, and thus protect the rights and privileges of the powerful. (III)

Chastity is such a value invented by patriarchal culture and accepted by women. It is a very powerful yet invisible cultural fetter. *Naga-Mandala* is a feminist play. It questions the patriarchal moral code. The moral code demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband.

If the society is to change for the better, patriarchy should give way to matriarchy and the play anticipates such a change. *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* prove that chastity is a myth. If Chastity is spiritual or psychological, Rani has not lost it though she sleeps with Naga before the judgement. Padmini in *Hayavadana* enjoys marital life with Devadatta who gets Kapila's body after the transposition of the heads. Chastity is a patriarchal concept. It has been used to oppress and weaken women for ages. The raped women and the women deceived by their lovers commit suicide while the men culprits go unpunished. The concept of chastity is gender based and women care more for chastity than men. In Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, Carvino's wife Celia is very beautiful. He locks her in when he goes out. When he sends her to sleep with Volpone in order to inherit his property, Celia refuses to do so. This shows that the concept of
chastity proves to be more powerful than the strongest lock. M. Sarat Babu in his essay on "The Concept of Chastity and Naga-Mandala" points out:

Mandala is a tantric concept indicating inner concentration, a source of energy, Naga-Mandala is a magico-religious ritual involving Naga, the snake-god of Hindus who grants the wishes of his devotees, especially the wish for fertility.

(248)

In Naga-Mandala, Naga grants Rani all her wishes, which she does not express openly.

Karnad's plays reflect contemporary Indian cultural and social life through the use of folk tales, myths and historical legends. He weaves together timeless truths about human life and emotions contained in ancient Indian stories with the changing mores and morals of modern life. Karnad's plays are particularly concerned with the psychological problems, dilemmas and conflicts experienced by the modern Indian men and women in their different situations. In the essay "Naga-Mandala: A story of Marriage and Love", Santosh Gupta observes:

His (Karnad's) Play Naga-Mandala (1988) is a powerful portrait of the agony and anguish faced by both men and women in their development into adult roles and social
adjustment in a society where the individual is given little space for self-development, awareness and independence as a being." (The Plays of Girish Karnad 249)

A.K. Ramanujan had collected many folk tales and their variables, as they existed in different parts of India. A.K. Ramanujan points out in his "The Prince Who Married His Own Left Half" (Aspects of India 1-15) that a folk tale of a Prince whose extreme mistrust of women prevented him from loving any woman, and whose encounter with a woman's desire for love has as many as forty variants. The central theme of all these tales is "The Narcissism" of the "self-involved hero" who undergoes a test put to him by the wife in order to survive. Because of this psychological inadequacy he is prevented from self-transcendence.

Myths and folk tales in a patriarchal society are "man-oriented". In these stories, the woman's experiences and inner feelings do not find adequate expression. The story is presented in the play by a woman-narrator, a flame that has come to tell a story. Many flames have come from different households in the village. Each flame is a female. The identification of the flames with women is a brilliant device used by Karnad for creating a particularly female context and content in the man-oriented folk tale. He brings in the play the story association between oral narrative tradition and women's sub-culture,
existing within the patriarchal societies. The female experience expressed in female narratives is woven within the folk tale as the flame tells her story to the professional male playwright.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Rani and Appanna pass through several stages of doubt, uncertainty and even failures before they become mature and learn to live harmoniously as husband and wife. This transformation of both Appanna and Rani presents the significance of the institution of marriage. It is through their adjustment that they gain a status within the life of the community. They gain selfhood. Because of the social pressure, they put aside personal feelings about selfhood, fantasies and dreams about love and freedom. They learn to surrender to the other for the sake of family and community, Rani's dreams of a lover who had awakened her and loved her as a woman, and Appanna's self-centered and physical relationship with the prostitute are given up. They work together in the interest of the family and the community.

Men are all born whole human beings. But gender based division of labour breaks one into male and female fragments. Each fragment retains only half of the human potential. The retained part overgrows. Gender deformities are thus caused. In the case of *Naga-Mandala*, it is a significant point that the title of the play comes not from any human character, but from a snake - Naga. The story suggests that the play does not merely dramatize the folk tale. It
implies a deeper meaning. The Naga represents several images. In Hindu mythology, snakes are the symbols of human maleness and strength. Sometimes they are portrayed as handsome man or as half-man and half-snake. Karnad in his *Naga-Mandala* uses the folk tales and the mixing of human and non-human worlds. It is a distancing device and this brings in the element of alienation in the play. The folk tale element and the magical power of the Cobra remind one that one is 'watching' a play.

Kurudavva plays a very important role in the play. It is this blind lady who gives the magical root to Rani to make her husband love her. But it is the Cobra who falls in love with Rani instead of her husband Appanna. One can easily identify the similarities between goddess Kali in *Hayavadana* and the blind lady Kurudavva in *Naga-Mandala*. Goddess Kali helps Padmini in relieving Devadatta and Kapila.

In the same way Kurudavva gives 'solution' to Rani's problem. The error of destiny leads both of them and the entire story moves towards disaster. One wonders whether this disaster is human destiny or result of human error.

Rani resembles Padmini in many ways. Like Padmini at the Kali temple, Rani in a hurry pours the magic paste in the ant-hill. This is the turning point in the story. The events in the second Act raise many questions. Rani's gestures to
Naga thinking that Naga is Appanna, is questionable. There are sufficient reasons to believe that Naga is not Appanna.

Both Rani and Appanna knew that Rani has lost her chastity. They do not bother about it. Neither Rani, nor Appanna nor the Cobra is chaste. So one may ponder over the idea that this world is dominated by 'compromise' happiness. In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad reinterprets and restructures the traditional values of social and political systems concerning religion and caste.

In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad re-examines the need and the structure of the caste system in India that was once in the past, hailed as an ideal one. Picking up historical and political background for his plot, he moulds his theme of *Tale-Danda* to serve his present needs. He writes: "I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the 'Mandir' and the 'Mandal' movements were beginning to show again how relevant the question posed by these thinkers were for our age". (*Tale-Danda* 1)

It is through the *Sharana* s, Karnad advocates his philosophy. Basavanna, the great *Sharana* saint poet is the mouth-piece to announce the author's views. King Bijjala also expresses the author's views. The major theme of Karnad's *Tale-Danda* is that of deconstruction of caste and religion to arrive at its proper, real meaning and to restructure the same for the benefit of the society and the country. Scene by scene Karnad gives new doses and fresh out-look to the set beliefs. He removes and changes the rooted religious faiths. According to the
traditional caste-system, the king should be either a Rajput or a Kshatriya. Look at the stunning dialogue between Bijjala, the king and Rambhadevi, the queen:

Bijjala : What is my caste? Tell me.

Rambhadevi: We are Kshatriyas.

Bijjala : Your family - the Hoysalas, you may be Kshatriyas. But I am a Kalachurya. A barber. His majesty King Bijjala is a barber by caste. For ten generations. My forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five, they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight. Bribed generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so they could have the caste of Kshatriyas branded on their foreheads. (Tale-Danda 14)

Karnad achieves two aims here. He shows that the king of Kalyan is not a Kshatriya but a barber. Further he shows that noble thoughts and noble characters are not the in born characteristics of one community only.
The only argument in Tale-Danda is, treat every one as 'a human being'. Religion cannot ill treat any one. It cannot reduce also any one from his being a human being. Greatest evils have been done in the name of god. The deadliest wars have been fought in the name of religion. Science exists in proofs and religion purely survives in faith. Principles of science have changed, then religious beliefs cannot have rigid unalterable sayings. Bijjala explains to his queen the difference between god and human being and difference in him and god in the words: "But the one truth I know is that I exist and god doesn't". (Tale-Danda 15) Karnad disagrees with the established tradition of considering a caste or creed on the strength of "physical parentage". He stresses that "knowledge" is the right cannon to judge a human being. Be it religion or science, it needs to be reviewed, restructured and deconstructed for better set up and for better understanding and 'knowledge'.

The inter-caste marriage between Sheelavant, a cobbler boy and Kalavati a Brahmin girl achieves new dramatic heights in Tale-Danda. The author brilliantly develops this delicate matter in a masterly way. The girl is willing, but the boy is hesitant to accept the girl because the girl "Can't stand the smell of leather". (Tale-Danda 40) King Bijjala wants to forbid the marriage, Basavanna a Sharana is not ready for such a kind of wedding. The protection given to Sharanas proves too costly to the king. His son, Prince Sovideva conspires against the king and imprisons him. Basavanna could not save the king.
Jagadeva kills the king in the Sanctum. Sovideva takes over as king and declares: "From this moment, all Sharanas, foreigners and free thinkers are expelled from this land on pain of death," (Tale-Danda 90) Karnad's Tale-Danda a tragedy shows Basavanna's Principle of movement and progress in human enterprise, ending in terror and bloodshed.

If there is a common aspect among the cultures of the world spanning the West and the East, it is the marginalization and inferiorization of women. This turns them into shadows of their male prototypes. The male has voice, presence and power. But the female is silent, absent and powerless. They never try to cross the threshold. In literature many tried to cross the threshold and met with destruction. For instance Flaubert's Emma Bovany, Ibsen's Nora and Hawthorne's Hester. Many are comittedly passive, servile and silent. The high-caste women in Tale-Danda are stereotypical. They are docile and shouted at. They are asked to mind their own business and even rejected and packed off to their parent's.

The Queen's real standing in the royal palace, as the Queen is no better than a servant. She has to wait and cry to persuade Bijjala to leave. The deep-rooted patriarchal superiority attitude made him behave in a rude manner. In this context, she represents traditional women in the society.
Social deformity in Tale-Danda is another important theme. Division of labour is an evil of civilization. The urge for superiority effected privatization, another major process of civilization. The alienation of human beings caused the urge to overcome the feelings of inferiority. The hierarchization gave rise to competition, which replaced co-operation. All these have caused and consolidated social deformity and inequality, Exploitation and oppression have become a natural norm in our society. Consequently everybody takes inequality for granted, Claude M. Steiner talks about the dehumanising effects of competition, "In our mad scramble to the top, we forget how to love, how to think, and we lose track of who we are and what we really want". (187) Marx also comments on the evil effects of the division of labour and social deformity. "It proved, incontrovertibly, the disastrous effects of machinery and division of labour: the concentration of capital and land in a few hands: over production and crises." (64)

The social deformity in the Hindu society took the form of 'caste-system'. The Hindu society consists of four recognized classes called Varnas and one unrecognized class called Avarnas. The four are: Brahmins (priests, poets, teachers and ministers), Kshatriyas (Kings and Warriors), Vaishyas (tradesmen) Shudras (Craftsmen) and Panchamas (menial workers). Shudras and Panchamas produce wealth by their sweat and the higher classes enjoy it. According to a Hindu myth the four recognized classes emanated from the
mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet of Brahma, the God of creation, respectively. Such types of myths and literature were widely propagated by Brahmins and they justify the social hierarchy in their favour. Shudras and Panchamas are subdivided into various castes. Ambedkar elaborates on this: "Caste system is not merely a division of labourers - which is quite different from division of labour - it is an hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one about the other." (87) The gradation of the various castes of labourers prevents them from being united and makes them easily exploitable. The Shudras are created by the creator to be the slaves of Brahmins. The condition of the Panchamas is still worse. They are treated as untouchables. Atrocities committed on Shudras and Panchamas are still worse. They are treated as untouchables. Atrocities are committed on Shudras and Panchamas by high caste Hindus even in the modern age of democracy. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Sircar, Mohan Rakesh and Karnad are concerned with social deformity and express the evil effects of caste and class in their writings.

Karnad feels that *Tale-Danda* is relevant even today as religious fundamentalism is strong enough to destroy the Babri Masjid and claim the lives of thousands of people. 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 25 Sep 1992 76) Social deformity
is thus illustrated in its various aspects in Karnad's Tale-Danda.

One of the functions of myth is to transcend its own factual core by
magnifying it. There should be elaboration of it. When the myth is and retold it
enriches itself and thus it is refined. By means of repetition through generation,
it assumes new shapes and forms and frees itself from the regular frame. It is in
theatre that the myth finds its validation because the theatre is bound by the
three unities of time, space and action. Thus myths have a special place in the
theatre. Theatre may be described as the fount of myth. The theatre reinforces
the universal quality of truth.

One has to approach The Fire and the Rain, Karnad's latest play, with
such fundamental consideration. In the preface, it is mentioned that the text of
the play as published is the embodiment of a text that evolved through the
process of workshop and performance involving in the Guthrie Theatre in
Minneapolis, U.S.A.

The Fire and the Rain takes Karnad's personal quest for truth forward.
The play is built upon the little known myth of Yavakri, son of the sage
Bharadwaja. It is revealed through the play that Yavakri's quest for knowledge
is not the proper method. He obtains divine powers from Indra. He uses his
power to humiliate his father's rival Raibhya. Yavakri sexually assaults
Raibhya's daughter-in-law. The furious Raibhya creates a clone of his daughter-in-law and lures Yavakri to death. Bharadwaja in turn curses Raibhya to suffer death at the hands of his first-born son Paravasu who is engaged in an elaborate fire Sacrifice on behalf of the king. Paravasu mistakes his father for an animal and slays him. He does not deter from the sacrifice, though he committed patricide. He transfers his guilt to his brother Arvasu. Actually Arvasu is betrayed. He invokes the Sun God and manages to reverse the flow of time. The dead are restored to life. Yavakri becomes aware of the true way to pursue knowledge, Karnad compresses this complex narrative into three acts. Karnad gives it greater depth and tries to bring in various themes. The play is relevant to the times and transcends barriers of language and constraints of a given culture. The myth blossoms into a drama with universal appeal. The philosophical content of the myth is flashed out with emotions of love, jealousy, loneliness and despair. They are common to all humanity. The playwright is able to make the mythical very real without taking away the wonder.

The play opens on the site of the Yajna or fire sacrifice to propitiate Indra, god of rains in a land long gripped by drought. In the Prologue the importance of plays are mentioned.

As in Tale-Danda, in The Fire and the Rain also Karnad brings in the caste problem. By birth Arvasu is a Brahmin and he is in love with a hunter girl
Nittilai. As Arvasu is not able to turn up in time to meet the parents of Nittilai in connection with his marriage, they turn down him and arrange her marriage with another boy. Nobody bothers why he is late. Arvasu and Nittilai are two principal characters in the play. Arvasu is young, exuberant and imbued with all the qualities of the ideal hero. But he is not qualified to attend the Yajna. This is because of his brother's betrayal. He performs the penitential rites for the killing of a Brahmin. He does it on Parvasu's request. As a result of all these he suffers. Nittilai is depicted with all good qualities, even with such a surfeit of it. One could think of her as Karnad's equivalent of the "noble savage."

The meeting between Yavakri and Vishakha, Parvasu's wife is another turning point in the play. Yavakri tells her: "Ten years ago I swore to you that I would not look at another woman. I kept my word." (The Fire and the Rain 12) Then, they were lovers. He was away to the forest to gain "Universal knowledge." Even after the attainment of "Universal Knowledge", the 'man' in Yavakri longs for Vishakha, his former love. His yearning for her is in his words:

The day I decided my penance was over. I fell down in a dead faint. I don't know how long I was in that state. It was terrible exhaustion, the pain of sheer relief.... Ten years ago, I had come to your house to bid you goodbye. And you
led me quickly to the jack-fruit grove behind your house. You opened the knot of your blouse, pressed my face to your breasts then turned and fled. I stood there stunned. The trees were loaded with fruit.... The smell of your body. Ten years later I opened my eyes and I knew I was hungry for that moment (The Fire and the Rain 14)

Even a man like Yavakri, who has conquered "Universal Knowledge", is a slave to the elemental passion. This is the universal passion of love. Man longing for woman. One could easily find here the Lawrencian touch in Karnad. Whether it is East or West, the theme of man-woman relationship is same everywhere, through out the universe. Vishakha now opens her stories of worries. "Because I know that hunger well, Yavakri". (The Fire and the Rain 15) The question is whether Vishakha was happy with Paravasu. In the night of the wedding, Paravasu promised her, "I will make you happy for a year". (The Fire and the Rain 16) He plunged her into a kind of bliss. It was heaven for her. Then on the first day of the second year of the marriage, he says: "... enough of that. We start our search". (The Fire and the Rain 15) The happiness she enjoyed receded into the background,

... he used my body, and his own body like an experimenter an explorer. As instruments in a search. Search for what?
I never knew. But, I knew he knew.... Shame died in me.

And I yielded.... I had a sense he was leading to something.

Mystical? Spiritual?” (The Fire and the Rain 16)

This is the predicament of modern man. He is in his never-ending travel without knowing he is in search of what.

The interchange of scenes and the juxtaposition of Yavakri's hermitage and the banyan tree add much to the seriousness of the scene. Arvasu asks Andhaka to tell Yavakri about the Brahma Rakshasa. Vishakha is with Yavakri informing him about the calling of the Kritya by her father-in-law. But the emptying of the Kamandelu by Vishakha makes one doubt the authenticity of her. One doubts whether this Vishakha is a creation of Raibhya as he created the 'Kritya. One can think otherwise also that by emptying the water, she helps him to run away to his hermitage. She knows that he could save himself only thus. But Yavakri dies as Brahma Rakshasa spears him.

In Act Two, Karnad has twisted the story and given a new dimension. In the myth of Yavakri, he mistakes his father for a wild animal and kills him. But here Karnad gives it a human touch. In order to make it more realistic and reliable, the playwright introduces a new theme. The theme of lust, as old as mankind and applicable to the whole world.
The power-war rages between the father and the son. The ego is at its zenith. Raibhya is not happy over his son's selection as the Chief-Priest for the fire -sacrifice. When he goes out in the dead of night he snubs. "It's not the wild beasts one has to watch out for - it's the human beings" (The Fire and the Rain 30)

He is disgusted with the activities of the human beings. The scene, which follows, brings more about the envy between father and son. Brahma Rakshasa meets Arvasu in Epilogue for the final release. A kind of self-realisation has blossomed on Arvasu. He does not like to be the cause of another tragedy, another suffering. He has suffered and he has attained wisdom. Brahma Rakshasa comes in with the request of final release:

Arvasu : What do you want?

Brahma Rakshasa: I want release - release from this bondage. Your father gave me this life. We are brothers. So you must complete what your father couldn't - I want to melt away - I want peace - eternal peace - I beg of you - intercede on my behalf with gods ---

Arvasu : Lord Indra, you heard that. Could you ---

Indra : Arvasu, the Wheel of Time must roll back if
Nittilai is to return to life. It must roll forward for the
Brahma Rakshasa to be released. You can't have it both
ways, Choose----

(The Fire and the Rain 60)

Arvasu is placed in an embarrassing situation. He represents the modern man.
He has to choose among many things. Arvasu is helpless.

Indra: There's another consideration, Arvasu. Not even the
gods can guarantee a soul the ultimate release. That
is a law beyond us. I may grant his release from
birth and death. Because you ask for it. But there
is every chance it may not work. In that case, his
situation will remain unchanged and you'll lose
Nittilai.

Arvasu: You heard that, Brahma Rakshasa. So forgive me ---

(The souls draw closer to Arvasu, their eyes pleading with him.)

Brahma Rakshasa: I don't forgive. I can't. But you are a human being.

You are capable of mercy. You can understand pain
and suffering as the god's can't ---

(The Fire and the Rain 60-61)

And Brahma Rakshasa takes out the last arrow:
Remember, Arvasu. If Nittilai lives again. She'll live a life as tormented as mine - tormented by the knowledge that her resurrection condemned me beyond salvation. And every moment of her life, she'll hear my screams. What are you asking for is not a boon. You are asking Indra to condemn Nittilai to a hell-hole much worse than the one I'm in. Think Arvasu, you're wiser now. — *(The Fire and the Rain 61)*

Sudden comes the decision.

Arvasu: Grant this Brahma Rakshasa his release. Let him go.

Indra: You're sure you want that?

Arvasu: Nittilai would have wanted it so.

Indra: Well then, so be it.

*(The Fire and the Rain 61)*

The Brahma Rakshasa roars with laughter and melts away. It begins to pour down. People dance with joy. They roll in mud. Arvasu sits clutching Nittilai's body:

Arvasu: It's raining, Nittilai! It's raining. *(The Fire and the Rain 62)*

The play ends perhaps with the spiritual rain. Human beings should be merciful even to gods. Human beings should rescue gods. Man is ready to
In fact the play *The Fire and the Rain* takes Karnad's personal quest forward.

A second layer of myth, the fratricidal violence between Indra, Vishwarupa and Vrittra is superimposed on the base narrative of the myth of Yavakri. Arvasu transits between the two layers. He has the power to do so because he is the performer in the play. The two layers of myths are placed against the backdrop of a sacrifice and Karnad finds his themes are reflected in a suitable way.

Interculturalism is somewhat a vexed issue with reference to a few specific trends in the development of contemporary theatre in India. Like other contemporary art forms in the country, Indian theatre is extremely complex in its relations to modernity as well as tradition. We see this complexity and variety in Karnad's play writing efforts to fuse traditional forms with modern, post-colonial influences. To explore the dynamics of interculturalism in Indian theatre in the writings of Karnad, should be rewarding. Interculturalism is a Western-centered concept. The concept of interculturalism has a meaning and a value far beyond the limitation of its current interpretations and usage in the West. 'Culture' should be understood in a broader sense. Then only one can realize the sense of identity, the different societies offer. Then
interculturalism can apply to Western as well as non-Western societies as a more meaningful approach towards defining their relations with each other.

Karnad's early plays *Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana* show strong Western influences and often-blatant similarities. His *Naga-Mandala* projects the intertwining of the themes of the neglected, suffering wife and the magical transformation of hatred to love. *Tale-Danda* is about the problem of class. In *The Fire and the Ruin*, it is on another level, perhaps two types of cultures come into contact with each other. However the implications are double: negative and positive. Karnad has achieved success in presenting various themes and has adopted various theatrical techniques to present the themes. Theatrical techniques form the nucleus of the next chapter.