Chapter Five

Conclusion:

Summation, Research-Findings, and Provocations for Future Explorations

Writing and reading a postcolonial text is a conscious foregrounding of the subjectivity, beauty, and dignity of the Other who aspires against odds that are hegemonic and self-serving. Originating from shared colonial and decolonizing experiences, postcolonial forms of semiotics move beyond the boundaries of neutrality of art, decode, and ensure that the choice of form becomes a political act that turns the writing and the reading of a postcolonial text into a creative force that critiques Eurocentric and neo-colonial notions of subjectivity and identity which are detrimental to the cause of the Other. In the process, the political act can be viewed as a poetic way of foregrounding and celebrating the dignity of the Other, marginalized hitherto. Readers familiar with the pioneering contributions of forerunners like Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, and post-independence-era thinkers and critics like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha to the cause of postcolonial writing, reading, and criticism would understand better what the dominant European and neo-colonizing local elite forces have done to the indigenous psyche, its aesthetics and sensibilities, via maximization of the self at the cost of the marginalization of the Other, under the influence of hegemony.
This study, begun initially as a reading of the plays of Karnad in the light of postcolonial theoretical framework, gradually, by the time the researcher formally registered for research, turned out to be a critical reading of tradition and modern thought in the plays of Karnad. The two phrases, ‘tradition and modernity’, vis-à-vis critical thought as part of cultural aestheticism, were viewed as key words in the course of further reading on Karnad. This led to an awareness of the possibility that postcolonial critical idioms could be accommodated within a framework of modernist ethos and ethno-symbolism. As the researcher writes this conclusion for the study, she feels comfortable to state that this study has made a modest attempt in reading select plays of Karnad through certain critical idioms to argue how Karnad, as a modernist of postcolonial and India’s post-independence era, explores myriad strands of modern thought within the matrices of tradition hyphenated by his commitment to the theatre of roots. To him, this return to the roots meant ensuring an adherence to and cherishing affinities with ‘ethno-symbolic imagining’ of the contemporary Indian problematic subjectivity.

Data collected, scrutinized and studied in depth to the best of her ken inspires this researcher to summate and conclude that Karnad’s plays are pebbles in the pond of India’s eclectic modernist ethos marked for their ethno-symbolism that facilitates a mythopoeic continuity of narrative system that upholds, or contests traditional values in the course of addressing the contemporary Indian problematics. As discussed in Chapter One, Two, and Four, and applied in Chapter Three vis-à-vis modern postcolonial critical idioms, ethno-symbolism consorts with ushers in cultural aestheticism that has the capacity to create the ripple for attitudinal change, a change that sensitizes the audience / readers, and by extension, the people of India and the citizenry across civilizations, to understand and appreciate the figural perspective that
changing the world for the better is more important than making money, or imposing hegemonic standards for self-aggrandizements, or arrogating with religious orthodoxies, or fanning fundamentalism of varied sorts induced by ideological, religious, political, and exploitative exigencies.

Thematic analyses done in the light of certain critical idioms, such as temporalization, intertextuality, hybridity, dialogicity, Otherness and subalternity, facilitated the researcher to discern the process of complex seeing in the Brechtian sense and appreciate the relationality of complex seeing to/with ethno-symbolic dialogic imagination, hybridity, and Other-friendly subalternity with reference to Karnad and to defend the stature of Karnad as ‘a cultural connoisseur’ who challenges his audience/readers through his plays, both as texts and performances, which tend to problematize the contemporary Indian subjectivity. It also enabled her to examine the relevance of his deconstructive and decolonizing dramaturgic strategies and critically reflect on their convergence towards ‘a mythopoetic vision of life’ that consorts both with tradition and modern thought. This justifies the title of the present study. His plays as idiomatic and critical-insideristmouthpieces, bordering on ‘drama of ideas’, foreground and expand Karnad’s grasp of and approach to ethno-symbolism and cultural aestheticism. In parenthesis, it is good to know that the drama of ideas Karnad wrings in is a strategy broader and more expansive than what Bernard Shaw brought in with his notion of drama of ideas vis-à-vis ‘life force’.

Themes such as excessive human desire that includes lust, greed, and self-aggrandizing power politics, problems such as existential alienation, patriarchal exploitation and oppression, misgovernance, manipulative politics, leadership crisis, corruption, caste and class discriminations, communalism, fundamentalist-cultural chauvinism, religious hypocrisy, poverty and marginalization are part of Karnad’s
artistic distillation. Issues such as female sexuality, sexual freedom, quest for gender justice, subalternity, and individual and national identity are part of his preferred choices for third space negotiation, or encounters. Concerns such as contemporizing and historicizing vis-à-vis juxtaposed readings of myth, history, and folktales with the contemporary Indian socio-cultural and political problems and issues, juxtaposing antiquity and modernity, interspersed with modernism and postmodernism, and mediated through a critiquing postcolonial eye that tends to subvert and dismantle hegemony, condescending hierarchy, patriarchy, and foregrounds and celebrates subalternization, feminine psyche in terms of subjective agency for articulation for new woman-identity and liberal modernist ethos are part of his poetic and figural realism.

A summating note on Karnad’s dramatic techniques may be appropriate here. His plays have the tone and expression of great drama. With performance as the focus, his plays are ‘actable’. Well-organized plot-structures coupled with devices and techniques, such as parallelism and contrast, and suspense and surprise, ensure that his characters are ‘vivid’, and enhance the holistic effect in terms of performance. His dramaturgic narrative techniques and literary devices are open enough to provide ethno-symbolist, cross-cultural, and multidimensional spaces for complex viewing, hybridization, dialogism, heteroglassia, and polyphony. He weaves divergent devices such as folk-friendly half-curtains, masks, miming, chorus, songs, dancing, oral style of narration, ritual elements associated with Yakshagana-tradition and such other indigenous and European forms as well, and mythopoeic power structures using myths, folktales and history, all textured into his dramatic oeuvre, that highlights his affinities with theatrical ‘interculturalism’ that, in no way, diminishes his predilections for ‘return to the roots’, or ‘critical insiderism’. They contrapuntally and diachronic-synchronously connect, intersect, and communicate multilayers of meanings facilitating
an artistic and ‘poetic carnivalesque’ in terms of polyphonic voices. The language he uses is simple and plain, with vocabulary gathered from different stocks of imagery, irony, and metaphors which heighten the dramatic effect. The motifs and symbols he brings in contribute to the Dionysian-kind of evolving of meanings which are open-ended.

Above all, his dramatic vision, impacted by diverse influences and attuned to a compassionate worldview and deep-rooted humanism shines through when it is captured through the mediation and application of certain critical idioms. This study has used these idioms only to the extent required so as to ensure a scientific enquiry into the themes and techniques of the plays of Karnad. The Bakhtinian, Brechtian, Bhabhan, and Spivakian provocations in this regard were quite illumining, enlightening, and contributing to the overall quality-input of the study.

By dividing the study into five chapters, the researcher has made a modest attempt to connect and interpolate the polyphonic dimensions of Karnad’s worldviews vis-à-vis interpersonal human relationships, re-reading history, issues arising out of patriarchy, casteism, and certain other social concerns bordering on Indian subjectivity. Positing and elaborating the thesis statement, the First Chapter highlighted the divergent strands of modernism as emerged in the West, and the Indian approaches to modernism at the national level with reference to the theatre of roots, and with special reference to the Navya movement in Karnataka as Karnad was part of the movement, projected the rational for the study in the light of a comprehensive review of literature, put forth the objectives and research concerns of the study, and indicated what the focuses of the other four chapters of the study would be, leading to certain findings which could contribute to new knowledge. The fact that the modernity of thought ingrained within the matrices of tradition in the plays of Karnad has a diachronic-
synchronic blend ushering in polyphony in terms of meanings has been amply highlighted and substantiated in this Chapter.

The Second Chapter concentrated on the impact of personal, contemporary, social, theoretical, literary, and Indic aesthetic influences upon Karnad’s dramaturgy, literary sensibilities, his worldviews, and his aestheticization of the contemporary Indian problematic. That Karnad’s genius and creativity are drawn from varied sources of inspiration from his childhood, exposure to Western thought paradigms, Indic myths and folktales, his interactions with his contemporaries, his fascination with the dynamics of myths, and his commitment to the return to the roots, which all moulded his thought foxes and made him the dramatist he has been till date, have been examined, discussed and reiterated in this chapter. That mythification of life through ethno-symbolism has a better and sharper focus when it is interpolated with the legacies of myth, folklore, and re-reading of history is one of the mainstays of the arguments in the Chapter.

The four domains of the modernity of thought, posited and elucidated in Chapter Three vis-à-vis problematizing the contemporary Indian subjectivity have their preferentiality and referentiality to certain critical paradigms and idioms such as intertextuality, polyphonic dialogicity, hybridity, Otherization, and subalternity which reflect the postcolonial angst and eye of the author chosen for the study. Chapter Three is an amply substantiated critical reading of select plays of Karnad that elucidates how Karnad shaped his ethno-symbolist cultural aesthetics vis-à-vis the contemporary Indian subjectivity. The four domains synergistically sum up what Karnad stands for with regard to modernist ethos.
Chapter Four looked at the stature of Karnad as a cultural aesthete in the light of his significant contribution to literary sensibilities and aesthetics. It provided an elaborate matrix for appreciating the research-findings of the study which revolve around discerning the cultural and ideational dimensions of Karnad’s plays. The cultural and ideational dimensions were expanded with reference to four major cultural categories, namely ‘modernist ethos’, ‘ethno-symbolism’, ‘postcolonial eye’ and ‘subalternization’. In the course of highlighting these categories, the Chapter also touched on and reinforced the idea that Karnad’s cultural aestheticism exuding modernity of thought has its affinities with certain Indic aesthetics hinging on the beauty of truth that celebrates ‘understanding culture’ rather than ‘abstraction culture’, posited as one of the major arguments in the study. A brief note, compact enough, on motifs, symbols, techniques, devices, and ritual elements abundant in the plays of Karnad also formed part of the Chapter. The study has pointed out that motifs, imagery, and symbolism Karnad integrates in his plays have a lot to do with the traditional Indian dramatic modes of presentation rather than the Western modes. His symbolic and metaphoric language, as visual art, locates conflict situations with myriad perspectives indicating polyphonic voices. The play, *Bali: The Sacrifice* may be regarded as Karnad’s finest illustration of the relevance of polyphonic voices in the contemporary context of India.

In the light of the research done, the following may be placed as research findings emerging out of this study and these findings have reference to the research concerns formulated in the first of Chapter:

1. Karnad is a fine modernist myth-maker and cultural connoisseur capable of ethno-symbolic complex seeing that does a fine tuning with the Indic tradition of the theatre of roots, a seeing animated and guided by an eclectic
hybridization of modern thought conducive to problematize the contemporary Indian subjectivity and to look for multiple meanings in the quest for solutions to the existential angst of contemporary problems. The interface between tradition and modern thought in his plays, an artistic process that vivifies and is vivified in the sense T.S.Eliot means in his well-known essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”.

2. Karnad’s cultural aestheticism and renaissance thoughts hover around problematization, rather than solution to, of issues and concerns related to contemporary Indian subjectivity, vis-à-vis received history, traditional notions of identity, and staple impressions about certain life-related issues such as interpersonal human relationships, man-woman relationships, patriarchy, female subjectivity, dignity of subalterns, especially the marginalized ones. His worldviews are poetic or romanticized musings which point to certain ideational dimensions which have their affinities with the Indic dimensions of poetics and aesthetics, hinting at the relevance of sustaining the poetic plausibility of certain new modernist ethos even in the midst of the human struggle and challenge to realize them in terms of practicality. Karnad’s concerns, such as man / woman does not live by bread alone, he/she has his / her emotions and angsts, he/she has the right to assert when his/her sensibilities are hurt, marginalized, when he/she has little say because of arrogation of power, male-gendered hegemonic attitudes and practices and because of dehumanizing forces standing as barriers to the blossoming of human worth and dignity, are well connoted by contrapuntal juxtapositions, mythopoeia, connotations and implications. Karnad’s cultural aestheticism has the embrace of critical insiderism as its matrix.
3. Karnad’s mythification of life through tradition foregrounds certain modernist ethos which appeal to both the modern and the postmodern generation of readers / audience. His predilections for and affinities with ethnosophism that ushers in cultural aestheticism substantiate the perception that there is little sign anywhere in his plays that Karnad is a believer in nihilism or indeterminacy of meanings in hermeneutics or aesthetics. This is a sign that Karnad is not particular to pursue the Western Derridean or Roland Barthean kind of writing and reading as if writing or reading is were meant to result in ‘undecidability of the text’ of ‘indeterminacy of meaning’ of the text. He does problematize fixity of meanings critiquing irrationalities if they are part the fixity, be it a reference to traditional value systems, or religious orthodoxies.

4. There is nothing ‘political’ in his aestheticization or mythopoeic rationalization in the sense some postcolonial writers may expect him to be. He does not fan protestations in terms of binaries meaning black vs white, or male vs female. His honest indignation fine tunes with the art of being a critical insider with animosity towards none, with a fine sense of ‘inclusive aesthetics and understanding culture’, as already enunciated in the study.

5. There is little sign or ground to argue, as Sandeep Balakrishna, author at ‘IndiaFacts’ (an online blog), columnist, author of Tipu Sultan: The Tyrant of Mysore, and translator of S.L. Byrappa’s Avarana: The Veil, does in Four Parts of his critical and somewhat opinioned essay, “How Girish Karnad’s Plays Distort Indian Culture” (2013), that Karnad’s plays accommodate “a perverse world” meant for “wealthy whores devoid of nobler qualities”, and his characters are “hideous”, and his vision of life is “perverse” as it “corrupts and distorts Indian culture” (http://indiafacts.co.in/how-girish-karnads-plays-
distort-indian-culture-part-3/) as Karnad were anti-religion, anti-tradition, anti-Indian culture, or anti-Hinduism. This researcher disagrees with the columnist’s biased and angulated reading of Karnad. It is submitted that Karnad’s leaning towards atheism or agnosticism does not colour his approach to hybridized ethno-symbolism he is fine with as a playwright and thinker. The ways Karnad foregrounds the literary word and the world as temporal categories, the ways he integrates ethno-symbolism, and the ways he assimilates and celebrates plurisignifying possibilities of perceptions, attitudes, values, and meaning-making strengthen the view that he is not only a concerned critical insider but also a refined cultural aesthete whose modernist ethos have a greater appeal to the modern/postmodern generation among the audience / readers across cultures within and beyond India. The temporality of his dramatic musings and his dramaturgy is rooted in and routed through topics, themes, and concerns associated with ground realities, and its connotations reflect a-spatiality and affinities with certain eternal verities of life which may have little reference to specific religious orthodoxies, or one particular ideology. His modes of presentation and enactment projecting an ambience of carnivalesque are a pointer to how “serious” he is “as a playwright”, to refer to the write up of Devina Dutt again, rather than how demeaning he could be as a “satirist” or “distorter” as Sandeep Balakrishna tends to angulate and judge. Many may not subscribe to what or how Karnad thinks of Tagore as a playwright but that need not blur an impartial and objective assessment that Karnad deserves in all fairness. This study may be viewed as an honest and modest attempt towards that step.
6. Among the themes prioritized, the theme of subalternization of the female subjectivity gets an outstanding treatment. Karnad’s commitment to the cause of equality in terms man-woman relationship and gender justice is abundantly clear in his characterization, dialogues, and symbolization. Chapter Three has amply demonstrated and substantiated this perception with reference to two plays, *Hayavadana* and *Nāga-Mandala*, with cross-references to other plays too like *Yayati* and *The Fire and the Rain*. As already cited in Chapter Three, Anupama Mohan’s observation that Karnad’s poetic commitment to serve as a cogent agency of articulating the feminine subjectivity inspires and propels him to overwhelm and submerge his male identity to the extent that, poetically speaking, he himself becomes a feminine principle in tune with certain modernist ethos he delineates by dramaturgic representations and connotations.

7. An ambivalent position continues to prevail in the mind of this researcher when she thinks of him as a postcolonial playwright. As stated earlier in the first and the second Chapters of the study, many diverse influences impact him, prompting the researcher to mediate his plays through multiple interdisciplinary and cross-cultural idioms and do a hybridized hermeneutical engineering, as done in Chapter Three, facilitating her to be convinced, and to argue and assess Karnad as a cultural aesthete, as done in Chapter Four. Therefore, it would be limiting his dramatic urges and imaginative genius if one were to conclude that Karnad is a postcolonial writer. Just like modernism, postcolonialism itself can be a problematic term, all the more in an era when new and emerging knowledge societies prefer and lean towards hybridization of thought with or without reference to tradition. In the case of Karnad, his option to return to the roots, just a few of his contemporaries did, is a tenable
one. The artistic engineering he does vis-à-vis the modern and postmodern existential angst and the contemporary Indian problematic takes him beyond the realm and limitations of mere postcolonial articulations. His perceptive mind is open-ended, and like an ocean, it embraces all that could prevail as noble and humane, and rejects all that would mean oppressive, exploitative, and dehumanizing. Karnad’s cultural aestheticism is a carnivalesque on critically historicizing and contemporizing and poetically evaluating and initiating the process of decolonization of the mind in terms of de-learning and re-learning looking for certain tenable modernist ethos hovering around hybridization of modern thought in the light of modernity of tradition and compassionate worldviews hyphenated with Indic touches. This is not deny that his postcolonial consciousness subverts the Western hegemonic discourses and their claim to superiority, elevates his theatre as a radical medium of modernist enlightenment and entertainment. His theatre is a perfect synthesis of his dramatic version of problematizing the politics behind the contemporary Indian subjectivity and his cultural aesthetics connoted polyphonically.

8. Karnad is more in tune with A.K. Ramanujan, one of the finest Indian folklorists, who, as K. Satchidanandan points out in his essay, “The Folk and the Classical: Interrogating the Boundaries” (2010), was aware of both “the great and little traditions” of India vis-à-vis the Indic tradition of storytelling and theorizing, whose “context-sensitive, pluralistic, and reflexive” vision of life continuities and alternatives, and who had the intellectual acumen to critique Manichean kind of binaries --‘the classical and the modern’ for instance, and discern the interdependence of all the systems of literary, cultural, and aesthetic articulations. As he observes further, Ramanujan’s theorization, “Sanskrit,
classical literature, bhakti, folklore, are all systems that comment on each other and cannot be understood independently of each other” (10-11).

Like Ramanujan, Karnad has his reservation against the dangers of dichotomic categorization in the name of boundaries such as ‘the classical and the folk’, ‘the structuralist and the poststructuralist’, or the postmodern and the postcolonial’. His awareness of the cast/class/ideological paradigms still at work in sustaining hierarchical divisions and hegemonic angularities makes him move cautiously lest he should mechanically apply the conventional or new idioms and notions, Western or Indian for that matter. Karnad’s affinities with context-sensitive, pluralistic, reflexive and dialogic representations of his plot-structure and characterization resonate well with Ramanjuan’s affinities with such idioms. The researcher’s critical reading of the plays of Karnad and the critical idiomatic-hermenutic framework used in the course of the reading propel her to measure Karnad’s stature on the lines of the yardsticks used by Satchidanandanan in assessing Ramamaju. Like Ramamnujan, Karnad also found his ‘continuities and alternatives’ between folklore and classical traditions. His eclectic spirit is accommodative enough not only to imbibe diverse influences which reflect his idea of tradition as a contemporaneous vibrant entity but also to ensure that his conscious return to the roots, facilitate myths and folktales to serve as counter-systems to the hegemonic karma-dharma system. This is how Karnad practises the art of improvisation in the spontaneous flow of his dramaturgy hyphenated with Indic rasas and Indic worldview.

9. Critics and paper or chapter writers on Karnad have touched on Karnad’s Tughlaq as ‘a Nietzschean enigma’, meaning that Tughlaq was man ahead of
his times, like Nietzsche. This idea has already been referred and briefly discussed elsewhere in the present study. Here, the intention to go back to the same idea is not to comment further on Tughlaq. The point here is that the same idea-analogy may be extended relating it to Karnad as a modernist visionary writer. Karnad is not in a mode of contemplating and pursuing the idea of ‘superman’, or ‘overman’ in the delineation of his characters. He is not an artist hypnotizing or breaking his ‘nerve or intellectual system’ as Nietzsche did in his pursuit of ‘the ideal type of man’. Tughlaq, despite being a man of higher vision, ahead of his times, had a wishful thinking about creating a new world order based religious and communal harmony, ideological dialogues, and human equality and brotherhood but failed, failed miserably, in his leadership, and had to suffer on account of his naivety, and spilt-personality culture he started indulging in. Karnad’s mythopoeic cultural ideational rendition concentrates on both limitations and aspirations of man / woman, and provides an interpretation within and outside time and history hinting at certain eternal verities of life. He is aware of the challenges associated with the Nietzschean enigma but he is down to earth in visualizing his artistic rendition and in his emotive affinities with certain modernist ethos helpful in the human quest for perfection and completeness. It is within this artistic compass that this researcher has tried to portray Karnad as a cultural aesthete, connoisseur of varied facets of life in its entirety and contemporaneity, crisscrossing through varied shades of thought derived from the contours of influences upon his thinking, philosophical reflections, and horizons of his dramatic outlook, and above all, his inclusive, eclectic, and compassionate approach.
Regarding limitations of this study, the researcher admits that the study has not pursued a rigorous and detailed textual analyses of the all the select plays because of space constraint and because of the assumption that such studies have already been done by several scholars. Instead of repeating, she opted for reading through the mediation of certain critical idioms which have their ambivalent dimensions which have not been gone through or discussed at length in the study. Perhaps, this could be viewed as a tangible lacuna. By further explorations beyond the time-frame of the research, the researcher hopes to focus on this issue and expand the discussion on Karnad through her additional writing and publications in the years to come. A personal interview with Karnad that was originally planned could not be held before the completion of the writing of the dissertation. It is still a possibility. It will be pursued for personal enlightenment and sharing of fresh ideas and plans on the part of Karnad who wishes to continue to write.

New knowledge and innovative exploration are the keystones towards contributing to research. This researcher is of the view that areas for further explorations are still available vis-à-vis the plays of Karnad in terms of current and emerging theoretical framework. Day by day, life goes on with more complexities. Artists have their angst and concerns regarding how life evolves and how human relationships evolve. Karnad’s plays can be read in the new light thrown by life experiences. Comparative readings with writings with similar wavelengths or comparable art-emotions and comparative readings with regional and translated literary texts by other writers are possible. They need to be promoted.

To conclude, when Arthur Miller was asked what he thought of his own play, *Death of a Salesman*, he responded: “Well, it’s about the death of a salesman and he dies. What can I tell you?” (qtd. in Terry Otten 27). As this Chapter is concluded, the
researcher wishes to state that it is time that all those who know that Karnad is much more, or different, than how he has been presented in the study should go back, once again, if not three or more times, to the theatre for witnessing the performances of his plays and opt for re-reading his plays as texts a few more times.

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