CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF THE PLAYWRIGHT
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Girish Karnad: The Making of the Playwright

Girish Karnad is a multi-faceted personality and is a significant contemporary playwright of India. He meritoriously deals with Indian culture in general and performing arts in particular. Out of his outstanding dramatic genius, he stands as a singular figure in the post-Independence Indian English literature. Girish Karnad confesses, "I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know I’ve been an actor, a publisher, a film-maker. But in none of these fields have I felt quite as much at home as in playwright."¹ In India, unfortunately the writers cannot live on their writing alone. It does not yield enough royalties for sustenance. Karnad admits that one cannot earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. But he is a playwright first and foremost that Geetha Sharma feels: "It is playwriting that he has really enjoyed all along, and will undoubtedly be remembered by posterity for."² His
career as a playwright was launched just before leaving for England and earned international fame there.

The seventh and latest Jnanpith Award winner from Karnataka, Girish Karnad was born at Mathern, a town near Bombay. His father Raghunath and mother Kasibai were his parents and he spoke Kannada. He hails from the semi-Marathi and semi-Kannada Saraswat community. While growing up in Sirsi, he had ample opportunity for watching plays in Kannada. The span of his childhood was spent in a small village in Karnataka. In his childhood, he was exposed to two theatres, Natak Companies and Yakshagana which designed his mindset to theatre differently. His father took the entire family to see plays staged by these troupes of professional actors called 'Natak Companies' which used to tour the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semi-permanent structures on proscenium stages with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps. His father, being a doctor, had a free pass. His parents considered the performances of Natak companies quite superior to their taste. His encounter with the Natak Companies at the early stage cultivated an indelible impression upon the mind of young Girish Karnad. Karnad says:
It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, called Natak Mandalis or Natak Companies, would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on. My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre, though some Mandalis still survive in North Karnataka in a very degenerate state. But in those days they were good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me.4

As his parents considered 'Yakshagana' performances inferior to their taste, the young Karnad went to such plays with the servants.5 The technical aspects of these two varieties of drama have obviously gone into the making of Karnad's plays, though he has imbibed the best from the western theatre too. He had read some western playwrights in college, but nothing had prepared him for the power and violence that he experienced that day. He had been brought up to observe the inner recesses of the human psyche which seemed obscene for the public taste. What impressed me as much as the psychological cannibalism of the play was the way lights faded in and out on stage. Until they moved to the city, they had lived in houses lit by the hurricane lamps. Even in the city, electricity was something which was
switched on and off. The realization that there were instruments called dimmers that could gently fade the lights in or out opened up a whole new world of magical possibilities. Since his father was an Arya Samajist, Karnad did not have the orthodox way of life. For this precise reason, he is often drawn to the orthodox forms of life, especially those of the high caste, in his plays and films. In his early life, however, he has a serious ambition to become a famous poet in English but to his dismay he turned out to be dramatist, but not in his mother tongue which is Konkani.

It is worthwhile to record the playwright's academic adventure in brief. His initial schooling was in Marathi. He got his degree of Bachelor in Arts in Mathematics and Statistics from Karnataka University, Dharwad in 1958 where he ranked first in the University. He got his degree in Master of Arts in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University in 1963 where he won the Rhodes (Holder of any of 190 scholarships tenable at Oxford by members of British Dominions or United States) scholarship. He was also the President of Magdalen Junion Room during 1962-63. He was the President of Oxford University union Society in 1963. He worked as a Manager in the Oxford University Press, Madras during 1963-70. After serving the Oxford University Press for
seven years, he resigned in order to concentrate on his writing and film making. He became the Director of Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, during 1974-1975.

In this way, we can experience that Karnad is internationally known as a playwright. Apart from it, he is also a highly talented film maker, a versatile actor, an able cultural administrator, a noted communicator and a person of wide accomplishments and interests. His creative intellectualism obviously permeated through his views and subjects of his plays which communicated his own independent and original feelings, thoughts and interpretations:

When he went to Bombay for Postgraduation, he came into intense and intimate contact with the western theatre, especially the naturalistic theatre of Strinberg’s ‘Miss Julie’ as produced by Ebrahim Alkazi. Later when he stayed in England, Karnad had first hand knowledge of World Theatre. However, he has consistantly banked upon the traditional Indian dramatic forms and conventions of all forms and techniques available to him but he is largely an Indian playwright with the strength of the Natak Company and Yakshagana.7

During his formative years, we can witness the diverse influence upon Girish Karnad. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct conflict between western and
native traditions. It was India of the fifties and the sixties that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life—adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. Karnad’s position was akin to that of John Dryden, the Seventeenth Century British dramatist who, while writing his plays, had to choose between the classical, and native tradition. In the first, norms had been set rigorously by Aristotle. The second was a more liberal, native approach that was practised by Shakespeare. Dryden evaluated the merits and demerits of both the traditions in his famous critical treatise, *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. Karnad was fascinated by the traditional plays, nonetheless the western playwrights that he read during his college days opened up for him “a new world of magical possibilities.”

Girish Karnad is one of India’s foremost modern playwrights. Girish Karnad gets the country’s highest literary recognition for his contributions to modern Indian drama. Karnad’s plays—all in Kannada—have received country-wide critical acclaim. Fortunately, his translations of his major plays into English have contributed and acquainted the world with his art of theatre. The comfortable adaptation of his plays into a western language medium is a reflection at
one level of his command of the two languages. More than that, however, it is Karnad's ability to universalise the individual and society's predicament through the medium of drama that has given his works a wide appeal and easy entry into the world of other directors such as E. Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey, B.V. Kananth, Alyque Padamsee, Vijay Mehta, Shyammand Jalan and Amal Allana. They have also been translated and performed for audience abroad. Karnad is, in fact, one of the most popular Indian playwrights abroad. Girish Karnad has also made a substantial contribution to Indian cinema, having scripted for and directed a number of films in Hindi and Kannada, besides his acting in many films. In this way, Girish Karnad has played many roles in his lifetime as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, translator and script writer. He is a well-known celebrity of Indian culture in general and for the performing arts in particular.

Karnad has written ten plays out of which he has translated five into English. Although rooted in Indian mythology and history, his plays, at the same time, convey a strong and unmistakable western philosophical sensibility. The existentialist crisis of modern man is conveyed through strong individuals who are locked in intense psychological
and philosophical conflict. ‘Karnad has been accused of escaping into the past’, said Lakshi Chandra Shekhar, an academic and an active figure in Kannada theatre. ‘But the use of mythology in most modern literature validates individual experience and universalises it. And I think Karnad has been able to do that.’

Girish Karnad has written only nine plays and most of them are highly successful both on stage and among literary critics: *Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Anjumallige, Hittina Hunja, Naga-Mandala, Tale-Danda, Agni Mattu Male* and *Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. Persuaded by somebody or the others, he has also translated many of his plays into English. Further he has extended his translation activity to play by his contemporaries, notably Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar (a very renowned scholar of oral tradition). Besides, he has written with great acumen on Indian theatre. His essays “Theatre in India”, for example, will remain as a landmark in Indian theatre and drama criticism for years to come.

In spite of all other qualities of Girish Karnad, he is an apt and skilful translator. Mostly his plays are written in Kannada. His second language, English is the language of his adulthood. He used English as his power of knowledge in his articles, essays, film scripts but not in his plays. When he
translates his own work into English, it becomes a unique creation in the art of theatre which earned him a universal recognition as a playwright. Karnad wrote all his eight plays in Kannada which have been translated into major Indian languages including the national language of India, Hindi. Five of his plays—*Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*—have been translated into English. The first three of these have been published by Oxford University Press in India and the remaining two by Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi. He has a lot of freedom that another translator will not have as he was both writer as well as translator of his own texts: "My translation," says Karnad, "must, therefore, be seen an approximation to the original." To begin with, he was quite reluctant to translate his own plays. But he realized that translating from Kannada into English required a great power of rewriting which is a kind of transcreation. He translated *Tughlaq* when Alyque Padamsee was to stage it and then *Hayavadana* for the Madras Players. He feels that translating from one regional language to another is easier than translating into English. The basic problem for the translator lies in his search for appropriate cultural equivalents.
Besides his own plays, Karnad has translated Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* which was well received in literary circles. He found translating the play very enjoyable and rewarding. As a translator,

he kept in mind the utterance value of the dialogue. He also conveyed appropriate rhythm and pace of the original language. Karnad has an immense faith in the discipline of translation. It is the only way for creative writers to reach a wider audience. How else, wonders Karnad, should one experience world theatre.\(^\text{10}\)

Girish Karnad wished to be a prominent poet but soon he realized that he was to write plays, not poetry which he aspired to write. Native stuff, history, mythology and folklore are the sources of the inspiration. In all his plays—be the theme mythical, historical or legendary—Karnad's approach is modern. He uses the conventions and motifs of folk art, like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouments. He rightly believes that the energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values. It also has the means of questioning these values. The various conventions—the chorus, the music, the apparently unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of the human and the non-human worlds—permit a simultaneous presentation of
alternative points of view. Like Bertolt Brecht, Karnad strives to break the illusion "of the theatre by which the spectators become so engrossed in a play that they forget, for the time being, what they are. Therefore, like Becht, Karnad leaves the stage apparatus visible, presents synoptic announcements, has narrators directly talking to the audience. All this compels the audience to respond intellectually to the action of the play and to question it, instead of responding emotionally and merely accepting it.

Even at the age of twenty-two when he realized that he could not be a poet, but only a playwright, he wrote Yayati. Karnad fancied himself to be a poet. As a result, during his teens, he had written poetry and had trained himself to write in English. "The greatest ambition of my life was to be a poet," says Karnad. During his college days, he wanted to write in English and to become a novelist of international fame. He thought that there have been more poets and more novelists but the few playwrights with few good plays. Karnad further realized that the art of a poet or a novelist was much easier than that of a dramatist. As he says:

The subject that interests most writers is, of course, themselves and it is easy subject to talk about. But you know it is always easier if you are a poet or a novelist because you are used to talking in your voice. You suspect your whole life
talking as writer directly to the audience. The problem in being a playwright is that everything that you write is for some one else to say.

In spite of all a Playwright has many problems. What is upsetting for a playwright is the total lack of plays in India. Although the Natak Company tradition made a major contribution that flourished since the early decades of the eighteenth century. Where does the playwright look for the source? And why does one write plays at all?—questions Karnad. There is hardly any theatre in the country. Karnad got into films in an effort to find some kind of a living audience. And perhaps to earn his livelihood.

Karnad’s devotion to drama is perceptible. Devoted to drama, Karnad had to turn to other field for earning his livelihood. After coming from England, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras, as an assistant manager. His stay there proved to be fruitful for him in more than one way. He could actively participate in the Madras Players group as an actor, a playwright and a director. He also published his plays in English from Oxford India. After he rose to the position of manager, Oxford University Press, Karnat went to Pune as the Director of Film and Television Institute of India, it was easy for him to get into the popular Hindi films. P.
Dhanavel said: “His action, Direction, Script writing all came as grist to his mill. He did not leave the small screen either.”¹¹ He appeared in several T.V. serials, including R.K. Narayan’s *Malgudi Days*. He continues to turn up on the T.V. for the weekly “Turning Point” programme among others. He has held important administrative posts like Chairmanship of Sangeet Natak Akademi and Children’s Film Society.

Existentialism of Girish Karnad is approach of human life. Influenced by existentialist drama, his first play *Yayati* (1961) explores the complexities of responsibility and expectation of parents within the Indian family. The story is derived from myth of the *Mahabharata*. When Karnad was preparing to go to England, amidst the intense emotional turmoil, he found himself writing a play. One day as he was reading the *Mahabharata* just for fun, he read the story of *Yayati*. It clicked in his mind and he started writing the play. Karnad expressed in it a personal dilemma between his family’s demands and that of his own wish for freedom. He was not only surprised by the surfacing of epic material in his work, but also that he should write a play on such theme in Kannada though he desired to be a poet and continued to do so. Consequently, he became a prolific playwright. His
first play, however set the tone for his further works. The words of the character Yayakri in his play Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain) might be applicable to Karnad as well: “The Past isn’t gone. It’s here inside me.” In his plays Karnad has striven to relate the past, be it myths from the epics, folk tales or historical events to the present.

His second play Tughlaq (1964) on the historical Muhammad-bin Tughlaq was written during his studies at Oxford and captures the disillusionment of many Indians with the idealistic politics of early Independent India. Tughlaq was directed by E. Alkazi and presented in London by the National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1882. The play shows the transformation of the character of the medieval ruler Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq who turned from a sensitive and intelligent ruler to the humanist ruler of people. Tughlaq, misunderstood and maligned, suffers an increasing sense of alienation and is forced to abandon his earlier idealism and end up as a tyrant. This play secured his place as the foremost playwright of India. Not only does Karnad strike to make the past relevant, he also tries to incorporate traditional dramatic techniques of the country.

Hayavadana is the third play of Girish Karnad. Kamaladevi Award was given to him for his this play in 1972.
Hayavadana the theme of which was drawn from ‘Transposed Head’, a story of Thomas Mann. Karnad used the folk art of Yakshagana in order to examine the modern problem of body/intellect divide. The character Padmini’s search for the complete man who must have the best attributes of mind and body is frustrated in spite of her best efforts and Padmini realises that it is the mind that is always supreme and always determines what a man is and will become. The play was directed in German by Vijaya Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches Nation Theatre, Weimar. The oneiric activity is perceptible in the world mythology, literature, arts and many other areas. However, the mythological instances are immediately appealing and full of attraction. For example, Centaur is of half man and half horse, Minotaur is of half man and half bull, and Sphinx is of a lion’s body and a woman’s head. The three witches in Shakespeare’s Macbeth and Hayavadana in Karnad’s Hayavadana are good literary examples. Condensation can also be seen in word formation for which examples include common words like horse-donkey and horse, and brunch-break fast and lunch. This combination of different elements, a metaphorical process par excellence is the basis of any creative activity¹³, says Freud.
In *Naga-Mandala* (1988), Karnad has presented his genius for the ignorant men and women and their place in the universe. He shows his love for the contemptible and frightful creatures. In *Naga-Mandala*, Rani shows her sympathy towards cobra after realizing its greatness and kindness for herself by saying this: "My hair! Of course, come, quick. Climb into it. Quick now. Get it. Are you safely in there? Good. Now stay there. And lie still. You don’t know how heavy you are. Let me get used to you, will you?" 14

Through this Girish has depicted his nature of indulgence to the trivial creature, which is really appreciable. In this way, second ending of *Naga-Mandala* has an emphatic concern for the cobra, which is then revived and recoiled in the tresses of Rani as a burden worth carrying for life. Who else other than Karnad will have such extraordinary love for the usually contemptible and frightful creatures. In *Naga-Mandala* turns away from the ‘classical’ traditions as his source to local Kannada folk-tales, which he had heard from India’s renowned scholar of oral tradition, A.K. Ramanujan. Here he combines two tales, the central one focusing on the snake as lower motif. While the frame story explores the notion of stories having a life independent of their narrators, derived from oral tradition.
Tale-Danda (1990) retells an episode of the life of the twelfth century Lingayat and founder of the movement, Basava. This play was prompted by the political situation at the time of writing. In Ayodhya the agitations regarding the alleged birth place of Rama on the site of the Babri Mosque had started, which were to lead to the masque’s destruction in 1992. This and the protests against the Mandala Commission’s policy of caste-reservation exemplified the religious fantacism of the time. Karnad, by exploring aspects of the Lingayat tradition from the eight centuries earlier criticises contemporary religious fundamentalism and the violence committee in the name of religion.

Another major play is Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain) (1995). In this play Karnad deals with the traditional controversy between asceticism and ritual, using as his source an episode from the Mahabharata. It is a complex play with different story-lines, as well as a play within a play, and it has been seen by some critics as Karnad’s best work. This play also picks up a theme central to Indian epics and that of the relationship between brothers and cousins. Karnad carried the ideas for this play in his mind for years, and was inspired to write it after reacting an academic piece on the relation of drama to ritual within Indian traditions.
In Karnad’s most recent radio-play, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997), he draws on Tipu Sultan’s dream-book, fascinated by the idea that an important warlord should write down his own dreams privately. The document on which the play is based has so far only partially been translated from the Persian original. Here Karnad switches from English to Kannada which highlights the multilingual reality in India.

In brief, we can assess his plays which have received an international recognition which have been widely performed in Europe and America. The play *Tughlaq* has been translated into Hungarian and German. The B.B.C., London broadcast it in 1979 and *Hayavadana* in 1993. Directed by E. Alkazi, *Tughlaq* was presented in London by the National School of Drama reportory company as part of the Festival of India in 1982. Karnad’s mythical play *Hayavadana* was presented at the Berlin Festival of Drama and music in Germany in 1985. Directed in German by Vijaya Mehta, it was part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar in 1984-95. It was rechristened as ‘divided together’ and presented the Ark Ensemble in New York in 1993.

The play *Naga-Mandala*, directed by Vijay Mehta in German, was presented by the Leipziger Schauspiethaus at
Leipzig and Berlin for the Festival of India in Germany in 1992. Again, it was performed at the University Theatre at Chicago and subsequently at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis as part of its thirtieth anniversary celebrations in 1993. In the same year, Guthrie Theatre commissioned Karnad’s latest play *The Fire and the Rain*.

Karnad received numerous prizes and awards which are following:

1. Mysore State Award for *Yayati* in 1962.
2. Government of Mysore *Rajyotsava Award* in 1870.
9. Presidents Silver Medal for the second best Indian film
for *Kaadu* in 1974.

10. Padma Shri Award by President of India in 1974.


13. Film Fare award for the best script for Godhuli (shared with B.V. Karanth) in 1978.


15. President, Karnataka Natak Academy in 1976-78.


18. Visiting Professor and Fulbright Scholar in Residence at University of Chicago in 1987-88.

19. Chairman, Sangeet Natak Academy, National Academy of Performing Arts, New Delhi, 1988-93.


22. National Award for the best non-feature film on social
issues for “The lamp in the Niche” in 1990.


24. Karnataka State Award for the best supporting Actor in Santa Shishunala Shareef in 1991.


27. Awarded Padma Bhushan by the President of India in 1992.


32. Doctor of Letters, Karnataka University, Dharwad in 1994.

33. Special Honour conferred by the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi in 1994.


Karnad is also an important and prominent film-maker and writer of film-scripts. He has written the script and dialogues for Samskara and also played its lead role. The film was initially banned on grounds of its bold anti-caste message which would spark tensions. With B.V. Karanth, he has co-directed and film Vansha Vriksha (1971) in which he has also acted, and Godhuli (Hindi) Tabbaliya Ninade Magane (Kannada) in 1977. He has also directed films like Kaadu (1973) and Ondanondu Kaladalli (1978) in Kannada, Utsav (1984) and Cheluvi (1992) in Hindi. His roles in Manthan (1976) and Swami (1978) are among his best performance in Hindi art cinema. He has made three documentaries: a film on the Kannada poet D.R. Bendre in 1973. Kanaka Purandara (English) in 1988 on two medieval Bhakti poets of Karnataka, and 'The Lamp in the Niche' (English) in 1989, on Sufism and the Bhakti movement. A number of his films and documentaries won awards and have been shown at Film Festivals all over the world. Karnad has also acted in seven Hindi and Kannada feature films for well-known directors.
like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Shyam Benegal. He has also contributed substantially to the literature on Indian theatre and cinema.

Between 1963 and 1970, Karnad was an active member of an amateur group called Madras Players. He worked as actor and director in such plays as Evam Indrajit, Six Characters in Search of an Author, Uncle Vanya, The Caretaker, The Crucible and A View from the Bridge in English during 1964-69. He also acted the lead roles in Oedipus Rex and Jokumaraswamy, directed in Kannada by B.V. Karanth, for the open-Air Festival in Bangalore in 1972. Karnad has also published a number of articles like “In Search of a New Theatre” included in Contemporary Indian Theatre, ed. Carla Borden (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1988) and “Theatre in India” in Daedalus, Vol. 118, No. 4, pp. 331-52.

Karnad has been a bitter critic in recent years of the rise of religious fundamentalism in India. He publicly condemned the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992; he uses all public platforms to warn of the threat Hindutva poses to secularism, multi-culturalism and the freedom of expression. When religious fundamentalists tried to whip up communal tensions over the controversy about the Idgah Maidan in Hubli, Karnad (who hails from Dharwad) strongly opposed them. More recently, he has publicly opposed the
threats made by the Sangh Parivar of stopping the Tipu Bicentennial celebrations.

He is a good social thinker. He threw a due light on the dark side of society. Every aspect of the society are dealt by Karnad. So social relevance is one of fine characteristics of his plays. Karnad’s plays have mostly a remarkable contemporary social relevance which establishes as a thinker playwright. Karnad has carefully and distinctively selected the themes of his plays which have the social contexts and meanings. He used the myths, histories and folk-stories for personal reasons. This autobiographical dimension is indubitably evident in *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. He is also excited by the universal characteristics of certain recurrent archetypes-problems, characters, situations, themes and so on. “The personal and the social, the past and the present, coming in Karnad’s plays which will ever remain relevant to mankind,”\(^15\) said Dhanavel about the theme and style of Karnad.

In his “Author’s Introduction” to *Three Plays*, Karnad expresses that he wrote *Yayati* ‘as an escape from my stressful situation’ at the age of twenty, when he was going abroad for study. Similarly, *Tughlaq* too reflects a fear of failure that the playwright himself suffered. In his interview
with Rajinder Pau, he has confessed: “And I think basically as a person struggling against failure and failing more, somewhere must have found an immediate echo in me.” 16 Most importantly, “the problems of faith in God that Tughlaq faced himself are reflected in all the plays of Karnad. Hayavadana too has a personal strain that he has related to Raykar.” 17 He has said that he was acquainted with the family of one woman and two men, one husband and another friend. The woman loved both of them and used to confuse their names, which is dramatized in the episode of the transposition of heads. Given the nature of Karnad’s plays and his background, it is possible that the other plays too have such personal meaning for Karnad. However, the significant fact is that all his plays have a direct contemporary social relevance. This is Karnad’s humanistic vision.

In the age of Karnad, political freedom did not come the personal human freedom to all citizens. While the people were yet to feel themselves independent, the Indian leaders went ahead with their grandiose plans of national development and reconstruction, but their unscrupulous followers went along with their counter-plans of selfish development. The net result was complete disenchantment
with the independent India, which has taken alarming proportions today. The noble ideals of patriotism, liberty, equality, justice and so on were thrown to the winds. Consequently, every sensitive artist reacted to the depressive and oppressive environment in all his plays. His latest play *Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, in fact, commemorates the Golden Jubilee of Indian independence with a dream of the Golden era in the past.

In that time caste politics was in practice. Unlike *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda* offers adequate scope for Karnad to explore nicely the caste politics. In the Preface to the play, Karnad has said, "I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the Mandir and Mandal movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age." Basavanna, the twelfth century Kannada saint, believed that casteless society could be established and he did, but the caste system was too strong to be overthrown. This eternal problem distresses Karnad so much that he asks with anguish, "Why is that some of our problems seem perennial?" and further asks, "why did Kabir not succeed?" The fact is that the Kshatriyas need the Brahmins for their support as the latter need the former. Monarchy has given way to democracy but it has proved a blessing for the
high caste people to occupy positions of power for themselves. Though the system of government has changed, the caste system has not been removed from its hold. The recent developments in politics, especially after the Narasimha Rao government, speaks volumes for the deep concerns that Karnad has articulated in *Tale-Danda*.

Girish Karnad tried to show the absurdity of life with all its (myth, legend) elemental passion and conflicts and man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Karnad went back to myths and legends and made them a vehicle of his new vision. Unlike Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar who delved into the problems of the middle-class man. Sircar wrote six plays while working as a town-planner in Nigeria. Three of these plays are *Bagh* (Tiger), *Jadi Aur Ek bar* (if there were other chances) and *Pralap*²¹ (Mad speech). Though these plays are not inconsequential, they are far from what Sircar believes is his central concern as a playwright, nothing less exciting than “the responsibility of mankind for the events of our times.”²²

With his plays *Yayati, Tughlaq, Atte ka Kukkut*²³ (the Dough Cock) Karnad has won the national recognition. He has been in the west and has been attracted by the drama of Giraudoux, Anouilh, Camus and Sartre in his search for new
forms of the drama. His reworking of myths, Puranic, historical and literary, relates him to Kailasam and Rangacharya as much as it does to those European dramatists who remake their myths.

There is one drawback in Karnad's characters. All of them are intelligent. There is hardly any who is less than intelligent. This is a good characteristic of his art of characterization. Aziz and Tughlaq appear as one. There is nothing that really makes them what they are individually. Individuality is missing. This defect is seen in Devadatta and Kapila also. They lack an individuality that is theatrically essential to their characters holding sustained interest. We see them as chess pieces moved to definite purposes by the playwright.

Karnad remains the most important dramatist of the contemporary Kannada stage. He has provided the Kannada theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. He has shown the Indian stage as to what depths the mythical themes could be taken to in order to recreate a contemporary consciousness. Karnad's advantages are many—his expert knowledge of contemporary European theatre, his exposure to the Western dramatic literature and more importantly his theatrical
sensibility—all these certainly sharpened by his deep knowledge of the stage. He has shown to the Indian theatre community and to the world theatre community how our past and present can coalesce to give meaning to our present day existence to theatre as well as its direction.

In above discussion, matters related to Karnad’s personal, familial, educational, social, political and historical background have been deliberated. Apart from it, Karnad had a humanistic vision. We should discuss about humanism first which is an umbrella term and which covers a wide range of humanistic connotations. It refers to the philosophical outlook fathered by Protagoras, a fifth century B.C. Greek Sophist, who conceptualises his ideas that a ‘Man is the measure of all things.’ Such point of view gathered momentum only when Petrarch, a fourteenth century Italian poet and scholar, initiated the process of Renaissance to break away from the medieval clutches. Gradually, Renaissance humanism, which was compatible with the contemporary religious beliefs and practices, became very popular throughout Europe. Shakespeare, for instance, was as great a humanist like Erasmus, Moore and Montaigne. It contextualises to Karnad’s plays as ideas of writers in the past four decades cropped in his mind with problems of *Yayati*
which had been associated by the dramatist in the modern existential contexts. It became the suitable context in the emerging post-Independence Indian literature which got expression in the play as well as on the stage of Indian theatre.

In *Naga-Mandala* and *Hayavadana*, he has dealt with the problems of women's freedom. In these two plays, he tries to show how women are playthings in the hands of men. In *Naga Mandala*, Rani is married to Appana but is deprived of her sexual, personal and familial needs. She is even treated like a maid servant. She is locked in the house like a prisoner. She is, worse still, not allowed to speak with her husband. When she attempts to communicate with Kurudava, first dog and then a mongoose guards in her house. The husband lives with a concubine instead of living with her. By the strange magic of Kurudava's roots, however, Rani gets the love and affection of Naga unknowingly who also finally gives her freedom from oppression after the snake Ordeal afflicted by the elders, sitting in the chair of judgement. Does a woman have to face such an Ordeal?, Karnad seems to ask and suggests that women's bodies cannot be kept in safety lockers, while the men can be thieves elsewhere. Perhaps the matriarchal order may be conducive to male as well as
female. He raises such feminine questions out of his humanism.

Karnad has given his fullest expression to a woman’s innermost feelings in Hayavadana through Padmini. A man can keep as many wives or mistresses as he likes but a woman is denied such privileges. In Hayavadana, Kapila proposed his idea to Padmini and Devadatta is noteworthy: “Devadatta, could not we all three like together-like the Pandavas and Draupadi.” Padmini does not show her agreement but shows her negligence and disagreement. In this way, question arises whether it means that a woman does not have a desire to have more husbands than one? The play answers the questions affirmatively. Karnad accepts that a woman has her desire but cannot live like a Draupadi of the Mahabharata in the contemporary society. This problem is contemporary and becoming more serious and dangerous in the context of freedom of modern woman. They find out their soulmates outside marriage and family. How are these women to live in such oppressive patriarchal society? When Padmini goes to the forest, Devadatta follows her with a sword in hand. In The Fire and The Rain misbehaviour of male gender towards female gender is also perceptible in the character of Nittilai and Vishakha. Nittilai
is also killed by her husband, when she walks out on him. It is the concept of Pativrata which is applicable to women like Padmini who die for two husbands? As a corollary, what will happen to the children born of such complicated relations? Who will look after children like Hayavadana and Padmini’s child? Do the parents have a right to leave their children to the vagaries of fate? Many such significant questions are raised in the play. Thus each of Karnad’s plays is relevant to the contemporary society.

About Girish Karnad, Dhanavel says: “Girish Karnad is a humanist in the sense that he has a profound concern for both men and women, especially the oppressed and downtrodden.” He believes in the past as a mirror for reflecting on the present and so has constantly turned to the past myths, histories and oral tales for his themes. Apart from being a humanist, he is iconoclastic enough to demystify the dominant beliefs and practices, both secular and spiritual which are more often put to evil use by the crooked and the biased people. He is a humanist who affirms the physical and earthly life as it is, mainly through the indomitable women characters while the men appear to negate life. No wonder, Karnad as a humanist has deep insight into the contemporary social and political problems,
which are eternally relevant to mankind. Karnad does not openly suggest any pragmatic solutions for them. Karnad’s humanistic solutions are implicitly embedded in the plays themselves. Karnad’s humanism is tinged with a sense of loss, pain, suffering, incomprehension and helplessness. Like the rebellious humanist, he, however, succeeds in making his voice heard. When the saint Basavanna and the saintly king Bijjala can be crucified, how can the society be redeemed? Questions like these are nailed fast to the readers and the audience of Karnad forever. The humanistic vision projected by Karnad is multidimensional and highly complex. There is something eccentric about the king in Yayati who does not like to shoulder his responsibility and shifts it to his son, Puru. The reason seems to have no place in the human world, but then there is no other alternative for human problems.

*Hayavadana* occupies a unique status in the humanistic world of Karnad. First, it encompasses three worlds of experience: the divine, the human and the animal. Within the human, the play includes the experiences of men, women, children as well as of the city and the wilderness. Second, the play presents the archetypal mother earth, teeming with desires for life and flowering the lotus love for perfection and
completeness. Third, Karnad's pro-vision of the child in the modern world is commendable. Despite his Brechtian alienation effects, sympathy is generated for Hayavadana who becomes a horse, and he child that learns to laugh. The tragedy of the adults is left behind and the comedy of the children is looked forward to. Though the irony is felt but the iron will of Karnad asserts itself giving the colour of hope to Karnad's humanistic vision. Being a thoroughgoing humanist, Karnad suggests that transcendence is possible only in immanence and believes that the generous acceptance of the tantalizing reality will be meaningful, even if the world remains terribly incomprehensible and inexplicable.

It is clear that contemporary Indian drama is dominated by a host of great playwrights like Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. All of them are regional dramatists in the sense that they write their plays in the regional languages like Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada, respectively. They have together produced in Karnad's words: "The best plays in the last thousand years."²⁶ Like the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett who wrote his immortal plays like Waiting for Godot and Endgame, in French and latter translated them into English to become the unassailable icon of contemporary British drama. Karnad has
authored his monumental plays in Kannada and then translated them into English to emerge as the emblem of a vibrant and rich contemporary Indian drama for the whole world.

Karnad’s imagination is fertile and creative and he is much influenced by V.K. Gokak and A.K. Ramanujan. Karnad’s creative imagination is thoroughly original and Indian every inch and in its blood cells he speaks courageously. Karnad said: “My three years in England had convinced me Western theatre had nothing to offer us.”27 To define the phrase “Indian imagination”, one has to enter labyrinth of the vast multicellular sub-continent of India and its dense thickest psychology, sociology and anthropology. However, the pioneering efforts of V.K. Gokak and A.K. Ramanujan may be followed as signposts in this direction. In the illuminating chapter on “Indian Literature as an Expression of Indian Culture”28 of his book India and World Culture, Gokak used the phrase “Indian imagination” and suggested that it arises from the Indian setting encompassing the philosophical and religious beliefs, the flora and fauna, the historical developments, and the political, social and scientific transformations.
Subsequently, Gokak defined a wide variety of characteristics of the Indian imagination into a precise formulation in his paper on "The Concept of Indianness with Reference to Indian Writing in English." Raising two key questions, 'who is an Indian?' and 'what is Indianness?', he combined the partial answers to them and observed concisely: "An Indian, then, is a person who owns up the entire Indian heritage and not merely a portion of it. This integral cultural awareness is an indispensable feature of Indianness." Karnad was preparing himself assiduously to own up the British culture but found himself "nailed to my past." His playwriting then is the blood oozing out of the nailed and crucified Karnad. In fact, he is a living martyr for the cause of Indian drama.

If Gokak identified Indianness with the entire Indian culture, A.K. Ramanujan located the concrete process of the Indian way of thinking in his provocative and perceptive essay on "Is there an Indian way of Thinking? An Informal Essay." According to him, there are three aspects of the Indian personality:
1. Inconsistency
2. Inability to distinguish between self and the other
3. Particularism.
Karnad is the first Indian dramatist to reflect the really typical Indian characteristics in his plays, as he has consciously resisted the influence of Western theatre which fails to take cognizance of Indian milieu in its entirety. That is why the achievements of playwrights like T.P. Kailasam, Adya Rangacharya, Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindranath Tagore are sadly limited. On various occasions (Karnad 198933, Karnad 199534, Murthy 199535 among others), Karnad himself has drawn attention to this significant fact.

In the plays of Girish Karnad, theory of Karma, rebirth, bhakti, etc. is perceptible. Name of Hindu's Holy places are also addressed in his plays. On account of Karnad's Indian imagination is incomplete without its linguistic manifestation in words, phrases and idioms along with the social and occupational lines. For language in general is indicative of the speaker's rational, social and occupational origin. In India, caste also plays a crucial role in the language of a person irrespective of his social standing. In addition, there is the phenomenon of Indian English too. He has used "Standard English" for his translation in its spoken form. He has used many Indian idiomatic, proverbial expressions and the words of Indian origin from Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi in its pure forms in his plays.
Karnad does not leave out any domain of Indian or even universal experiences—religion, politics, family, educational, career, friendship, motherland, poetry, drama, urban and rural life, man's eternal quest and many more—from its dramatic microscope. The play includes the very birth, growth and death of imagination, especially for the development of Indian drama. In this sense, *Hayavadana* is to Indian drama what James Joyce's *Ulysses* is to the Western novel. As *Ulysses* is the first bet novel of twentieth century, according to the Random House Committee, so is *Hayavadana* the first best drama of this century of India.

Karnad the playwright has excavated the Indian imagination from Bhasa through Kalidasa to Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar and elevated it to the firmament of world Drama with vital infusion from the double plot of William Shakespeare, the comic genius of Moliere, the social problems of Henrik Ibsen, the dramatic lyricism of Anton Chekhov, the naturalism of John Strindberg, the symbolic expressionism of Eugene O’Neill, the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht, the religious quest of T.S. Eliot, the mythical and historical reinterpretations of Jean Anouilh and many more. Karnad’s electric and synthetic approach to Indian drama has enabled him to portray the contemporary psycho-religious,
socio-political and literary-cultural turmoils authentically and admirably. Man does not learn from history but some individual men and women do.

To sum up, we can perorate that a great Indian playwright, recipient of Jnanapith Award, Girish Karnad is a bright and grandiose star in the sky of Indian English Literature. We can touch only a fringe of his multi faceted personality who deserves even a lot of more honour and compliment beyond our assessment.

Karnad’s themes, no matter, is what garment they are couched or embellished, always contain an unmistakable thread—a comment on contemporary ideas allegorized in whatever form he thinks best. The most telling example is that of Tughlaq, where he depicts the mood swings of the controversial Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, but the underlying comment was always on the going on of the Nehruvian era. If staged today, it can always be compared to any one of the scattered brain politicians who is leading our country or state.

Coincidence, destiny or pure chance one may call it or what one will. But despite the tremendous response to his plays, Karnad feels that the theatre scene in Karnataka and India is not something healthy to write in homeland. A major
obstacle is not a glut of T.V. shows and soaps, but bad roads, dense traffic and lack of efficient public transport are the major deterrents. If we look at the classy T.V. shows in the U.S. or U.K. where theatre-goers flock to shows. It is a disheartening scenario in our country which created a hurdle of problems before our theatre-goers.

Thus, we find that today whenever the modern Indian playwright wants to express himself, all existing dramatic forms fail him. This necessitates him to find a new form and this urge induces him to begin with the search of all traditional theatre forms of his own state or that of elsewhere. This forces him to examine all the aspects of the folk and classical traditions where it was not difficult to find answers to his questions but the real difficulty was to synthesize them in order to create a new form. What the modern playwright has achieved is a thorough synthesis of all the three traditions—classical, folk and contemporary western, which when used discriminately and intelligently, leads to a discovery of a new form and it results in a new style of production leading to the evolution of "Indian" drama. Thus Girish Karnad has a huge and grandoise personality of a good and sincere playwright which also makes him a distinguished dramatist of Indian English drama.
The present chapter, in brief, has assessed the different aspects of Karnad as a playwright. His insight to experiment and explore the new horizon for drama is praiseworthy which distinguishes him from other Indian as well as Western playwrights and he twinkles in the galaxy of other stars of world.
References


15. P. Dhanavel, op.cit., p. 29.


20. Ibid., p. 50.


