CHAPTER IV

QUEST FOR COMPLETENESS IN KARNAD’S PLAYS
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In the existential plays of Karnad, situations and characters are intertwined and they cultivate an atmosphere of predicaments in which characters are trapped. As a result, they appear as an incomplete personality and they become that they don't desire. In \textit{Yayati}, Puru as a devoted son accepts the curse of his father and becomes old. Chitralekha, his young wife, is frustrated, deserted and finally spoilt. Yayati, transformed from old to young, could not relish youth out of frustration. Therefore, the personality of Yayati, Puru and Chitralekha are fractured and divided. They are always in quest of completeness and their cravings are full of existential situations and frustrations as well. In \textit{Tughlaq}, the king as a protagonist, is a frustrated ruler who is an idealistic visionary and a confused ruler who shifts his kingdom from Delhi to Daultabad and vice-versa. He kills his relatives and loyalists for the sake of his crown. Neither he becomes a complete ruler nor a complete
human being. His divided self mirrors his split-personality and he appears an incomplete personality. There is always a quest for completeness in him. In Hayavadana, we can witness that horse is talking to someone else. The title suggests that horse is half-horse and half-man and the quest is to be complete man or a complete horse. The story tells the story of incomplete love going on between Padmini and Devadatta and that of Padmini and Kapila. She requires a fabulous body as well as a fabulous mind. The play suggests that mind is Uttamang which is superior to body. The quest of completeness is an interesting part of the play which is existential in approach. In Naga Mandala, Rani and her husband, Appanna, are incomplete as a husband and wife. Rani is caged like a bird in her husband’s home and he enjoys with ‘a concubine’ or ‘a harlot’. When she becomes pregnant with role of Cobra, her husband doubts her chastity. She has to justify the Snake Ordeal or an Agni pariksha like Sita of the Ramayana era for proving her chastity. Later on, she becomes victorious and is ranked into the category of Goddess. She is neither a complete wife nor her husband a complete husband. Such quest for completeness makes the play existential in suffering, isolation, helplessness, inaction and stranger or outsider to the contemporary society. The Fire and
The Rain is Karnad's play of jealousy, power-politics, sexual exploitation, humiliation and isolation of characters. Everybody is anybody's enemy in name of power and jealousy. Raibhya, Parvasu, Arvasu, Nittilai, Andhaka, Vishakha are incomplete in some or other way. Parvasu wanted to be supreme; Arvasu, a character of humanness, is exploited by his brother; Vishakha as a wife of Parvasu is neglected and isolated housewife. The drama of incompleteness continues in the play and make it existential in approach. Tale-Danda is based on caste-politics and power-politics which is still prevalent in the life of national political history. Caste is quite deep within the skin of man. Everybody is trapped within the limits of his caste. It is a strange situation in the play which cultivates the terror and bloodshed not only in the play but also in the country. As a result, the common man is being tortured, exploited and trampled and it creates a network of situations in which man is captivated, chained, isolated and tortured. Such social tapestry is full of existential predicaments.

The present chapter devoted on the quest for completeness in the plays of Karnad is an analytical study of the plays which create an existential problems in the life of characters.
Existentialism has influenced literature in a substantial manner. It puts stress on the dignity of man as man. Man is not a plaything in the ruthless hands of destiny or any preordained force. He exists first and makes himself out of his conditions. He, therefore, is the maker of himself. Existentialism believes that man can only be free through consciousness of his "illogical position in a meaningless universe." Every individual fashions his existence differently. It is concerned with the individual as he deliberately exists as the living, choosing, deciding, selecting individual.

Existentialism has influenced all genres of literature throughout the world. Literary celebrities—Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Kafka, Rilke, Herman Hesse, Malraux, Hemingway, Graham Greene, Hardy, Dickens, Sri Aurobindo, R.N. Tagore, Nissim Ezekiel, K.N. Daruwalla, Asif Currimbhoy and Girish Karnad etc. have painted human conditions in light of existential concerns in their writings.

They highlight self-consciousness of man in light of living a genuinely meaningful life. Girish Karnad, the Kannada playwright, who translated *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana* into English is an exponent of existentialism. These two plays are imbued with existential thought and deal with freedom, choice,
alienation, despair, anguish and even absurdity which characterise the tenets of existentialism. Karnad’s first play \textit{Yayati} which has not been translated into English, is “a self consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility.” \textit{Tughlaq} too is an existentialist play which “deals with philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of a whole kingdom which a dreamer like him controls.”

\textit{Tughlaq}, a visionary and idealist, finds himself in an existentialist situation—a situation of confrontation with orthodox and bigoted Muslims who oppose him at every step. He does his best to put his ideals into practice and realising his responsibility to himself and to his countrymen he makes an independent choice. As a true existentialist, Tughlaq says, “Justice works in his kingdom without any consideration of might or weakness religion or creed”\textsuperscript{1} and he earnestly wishes to attain “greater justice, equality, progress and place—not just peace but a more purposeful life.”\textsuperscript{2} What he intends is to guarantee freedom of choice and meaningful existence to his countrymen. He thus tries to promote the understanding of human existence amidst sufferings and insecurities. Tughlaq does not sleep in night because his primary concern is to feel
and to make others feel the truth about existence. He tells his mother:

I wish I could believe in recurring births like the Hindu but I have only one life, one body, and my hopes, my people, my God are all fighting for it. Tell me, how dare I waste my time by sleeping.³

Karnad’s Tughlaq makes a difficult choice. "Choosing is always painful. It involves besides a sense of freedom anguish and responsibility that weigh heavily upon the chooser." Tughlaq has made difficult choice with the best of intentions, but he is convinced of the authenticity of his choice which he has felt, realized and lived. He cannot give up his choice despite tough opposition from the narrow-minded citizens. He frankly and vehemently tells Sheikh Imam-ud-Din about the excellence of his existential choice:

I still remember the days when I read the Greeks—Sukarat who took poison so he could give the world the drink of gods, Aflatoon who condemned poets wrote incomparably beautiful poetry himself—and I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sang to them. And my kingdom too is what I am—torn into pieces by visions whose validity I cannot deny. You are asking me to make myself complete
by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify me people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha.4

Existentialism implies the indefinable nature of man who despite his freedom of choice, is a bundle of contradictions. Tughlaq is always in the midst of complicated situations. His ideals and policies are vigorously resisted and challenged. So he takes hasty decisions which reveal his thoughtlessness, rashness, recklessness and want of sound judgement. He recourses to strategems and masking himself in innocence he cunningly manages to kill Sheikh Imam-ud-Din, Shihab-ud-Din and millions of other people. He pretends to be religious, yet his acts are irreligious and inhuman.

In order to accomplish his ideals and policies, Tughlaq performs some deliberate acts of his own choice—parricide and fratricide, the inadvertent decision to change the capital from Delhi to Daultabad, reckless murders of his opponents and ultimately the use of religion as a political game. Tughlaq’s wilful acts may be regarded as existentialist decisions due to their emotional intensity, the crisis situations which generate them, and finally, in the way they change the entire shape of the lives of the individuals concerned. All these acts originate
from "bad faith" and result in self-deception, and feelings of guilt, alienation, anguish, anxiety, despair and dread. After sentencing his mother to death Tughlaq finds himself in an existentialist situation which is indicative of the realisation of the feeling of guilt, anguish, anxiety, dread and despair. It shows his personality incomplete, lonely, restless and full of despair. Tughlaq's following words have an existential significance:

God, God in Heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it mine and how much of others. I started in your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of you. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud?5

In the end, he is full of despair and dread, and his freedom of choice shows the downfall of his high ideals and finally Tughlaq comes to grief. He represents alienated humanity and finds himself in the predicament of despair. In Tughlaq, Karnad suggests that man's concern is not the problem of contemplation or sterile abstraction but poses the problem of decision and action. It is an existentialist problem. Man should choose, decide and act as a participant in life situations. Such active participation alone can help in solving the riddle of
existence and in creating perfect climate for moral upsurge and profound understanding between man and man. His decision and choice is incomplete which shows his divided self.

The comic pair, Aziz and Aazam, represents alienated humanity in the play. Through mutual understanding and tolerance, these downs and outs have formed themselves into a kind of 'alternative society'. Aziz assumes the leadership. Aazam sometimes acts as a detached philosopher. Aziz, a dhobi, is both unscrupulous and ruthless and Aazam is a common pickpocket. These two derelicts are shown by Karnad as both estranged from society and alienated from themselves. Aziz, who is an opportunist, misappropriates Tughlaq's ideal plans to suit his own interests; assumes several disguises, kills people, commits all sorts of crimes and in the end is crowned with success. Aziz's deliberate acts of choice are existentialist decisions which despite their immoral nature, bring success to him. He lives in the present. He wants power and authority. It is a modern trend of flattery for survival in society like these characters.

Aziz manages to kill Aazam when he makes up his mind to abandon his company. In complicated existential situation both Tughlaq and Aazam fail but Aziz comes out successfully.
Tughlaq deals with the crisis of faith and the problem of truth. Tughlaq hopes against hope but, in the end, all his hopes are shattered into pieces and he fails to realise the truth of human existentialist truth born out of action and experience. Men are weak and limited. Life seems to be meaningless. Human beings should cultivate understanding based on pity and compassion for one another in order to create an ideal state of life. Tughlaq is constantly in search of completeness as his freedom of choice cultivates a predicament in his life.

In Hayavadana, he employs dramatic techniques—non-rational events, social euphemism, continual self-deception, imaginative cruelty and threat. They lead up to an effective undermining of all rational structures of human intercourse. Devadatta and Kapila, the two intimate friends, face an existential crisis when Padmini falls in love with Kapila. Devadatta feels alienated and estranged both from Kapila and Padmini. When they go to the temple of Rudra, Devadatta in a fit of sheer frustration and anguish, goes to the temple of Kali and cuts off his head. Kapila, too, reaches there searching Devadatta and he also beheads himself. Padmini, who has created this existential crisis by her wrong choice of action, also comes to grief. Hers is an existential concern only for herself.
She is lost in great anguish: “They’ll all say the two fought and died for this whore. They’re bound to say it. Then what will happen to me?” She worships goddess Kali, who grants her the boon to adjust their heads on their bodies and to press the sword on their necks, and they would come to life. In utter confusion, she transposes their heads and, thus, creates an entirely absurdist situation for Devadatta, Kapila and also for herself. This chaotic state creates the problem of identity and after serious deliberation, it is decided that “the head is the sign of a man.” Bhagavata solves this problem:

As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta and his is the rightful husband of Padmini.

Devadatta and Padmini return to Dharampura and Kapila goes to the forest. Padmini whose existence depends on the realisation of selfish pleasures, is happy with Devadatta, who now combines intellectual vigour with masculine verity. She is now very happy, but she is under a delusion that she has searched the real identity of transformed Devadatta. Head governs the body and hence Devadatta changes.
Padmini who does not undergo change finds herself in an existential crisis which results from a confusion of identities, revealing the ambiguous nature of human personality. She says:

What are you afraid of, Devadatta? What does it matter that you are going soft again, that you are losing your muscles? I'm not going to be stupid again. Kapila's gone out of my life forever. I won't let him come back again. Kapila? What could he be doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still and his face dark? Devatta changes. Kapila changes. And me? 

Padmini again falls in love with Kapila whose Brahmin's body changes and becomes virile. She is bewildered. She does not know how to solve the tangled web of existence:

Yes, you won Kapila. Devadatta won too. But I—the better half of two bodies—I neither win nor lose. No, don't say anything.

Kapila did his best to forget the faceless memories of the past but her appearance revives them. Kapila's desperation, anguish and dread in this existential situation is revealed in the following lines:

The river only feels the pull of the waterfall. She giggles, and trickles the rushes on the banks, then
turns a top of dry leaves in the navel of whirlpool, weaves a water-snake in the wet of silver streads in the green depths frightens the frog on the rug of moss, sticks and bamboo leaves, sings, tosses, leaps and sweeps on in rush—while the scare crow on the bank has a face fading on its mudpot head and a body torn with memories.¹⁰

Devadatta comes. Both Kapila and Devadatta fight and kill each other. Padmini performs sati. None of them attains completeness. Kirtinath Kurtkoti writes:

Neither the death of the lovers nor the subsequent suttee of Padmini is presented as tragic; the deaths serve only to emphasise the logic behind the absurdity of situation.¹¹

In Hayavadana Girish Karnad’s aim is to highlight the absurd in the accepted norms of social behaviour. The reinterpretation of folk tale in the light of contemporary concerns and existentialism is a great and monumental achievement in Indian English drama. His approach to human life is existential in Tughlaq and Hayavadana.

In an interview, 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 story of Yayati."\textsuperscript{12}

The purpose and 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—a page from the history of the unknown past. The characters, the incidents and circumstances are related to the old times. However, the reality depicted in the play is applicable to modern times as well.

The Sutradhara says that neither a scholar nor an ordinary person can escape the burden of responsibility wherein lies the joy of life. Whether it is an old man in search of lost youth or a saint lost in the darkness or the mute actress following him—everyone carries a tree of responsibility all along one's life journey and finally hangs on it. The Sutradhara says:

> Sometimes when we are walking along a path we see two paths in front of us. We can take only one road and feel that we are fulfilling our life's purpose. However, we are always conscious of the inaudible voice which says: What would have happened if we had walked on the other road.... Yet let the untrodden road be untrodden and let its secret
remain buried. Let us stick to the morals of the grandmother’s stories that we heard in our childhood. This is the sad story of our life.¹³

The play starts with Swaranlata complaining to Devayani against Sharmishtha. Though Devayani defends Sharmishtha we soon learn of the on-going conflict between the two. Sharmishtha does not accord proper respect to Devayani because she knows too well that Yayati married the latter as she was the daughter of Shukracharya who could bless him with a gift of immortality. When Sharmishtha and Devayani have an argument, Sharmishtha tells Devayani:

Yayati hopes for only one thing: nectar to be immortal. Who does not want to be immortal? He accepted you in the hope of immortality. As soon as he came to know that you were Devayani, he had an urge to conquer death.¹⁴

When Devayani insists that Yayati did not know her identity when he married her, Sharmishtha comments:

Yayati asked your name only after your marriage? Even a prostitute’s name is asked beforehand! If you were not Shukracharya’s daughter he would have left you there. Without bothering about your virginity, he would have passed you by.¹⁵
Sharmishtha brings a turmoil in the life of Yayati. It is because of her that Devayani falls into the well and Yayati appears on the scene and saves her. That is what Yayati intends when he says: “You pushed Devayani into the well, and hence this crisis. I saved her but am caught in the crisis. Didn’t you have an atom of humaneness when you did this?”

Yayati knows that his problems are, due to Sharmishtha’s presence in the palace, but he doesn’t have the heart to tell Sharmishtha to go away. Even Devayani does not do so and Yayati is conscious of the fact of life. He tells Sharmishtha: “Sharmishtha, no one is as mad as Devayani. She is playing with fire.”

The crisis in the life of Yayati is precipitated by his refusal to part with Sharmishtha. Devayani doesn’t want Sharmishtha in the palace and asks her to leave the palace. But Yayati does not agree with it. He says in a decisive voice:

If it concerned somebody else, I would have agreed.... I have been winning over the hearts of various girls by my talks and my handsomeness. But today Sharmishtha has taken me by surprise. She has defeated me not with her looks or with her beauty but only with her talks. Should Bharata family be defeated like this? If I want to have peace, I will have to win her over.... I was feeling old. Sharmishtha has
enthused me and returned my youth to me. I cannot leave her.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite the on-going conflict between Devayani and Sharmishtha, Devayani does not order the latter to go away from the palace. Thus, she is the one who is responsible for Sharmishtha's presence in the palace. When the life of Yayati comes, instead of owning up her responsibility, Devayani leaves the palace. She refuses to yield and the result is the curse of premature old age on Yayati.

When Yayati learns that Shukracharya has cursed him with old age, he does not accept the responsibility of what he has done. He accuses Sharmishtha for this: "Old age... Old age! Old age before the nightfall? And what more later? Sharmishtha, Fiend, only you are the cause of this... This circumstance has arisen because you led me into it."\textsuperscript{19}

The curse demoralizes Yayati. He refuses to believe that his son, Puru, would be of any help in saving him from the curse: "on seeing me even my son spits fire. Would he try to save me from the curse? No, I myself should go. I should go and meet Shukracharya."\textsuperscript{20}

Sharmishtha tries to pacify Yayati by asking him to accept what has come his way:
Do not be angry. Nobody can escape old age. You have unnecessarily invited it prematurely. There is no hindrance. Now please accept the life of a hermit. I will also accompany you. I do not know the depth of your sorrow, but I can imagine.21

Yayati gets violent and refuses to accept old age. He remains adamant: “If I have to retain my identity then I should retain my youth, Sharmi. I should remain young.”22 Sitting on his bed he looks here and there like a mad man and looks for something on the bed. He says:

I am trying to hold back my past. I cannot believe that it was here that I used to have fun with my queens. I competed with time.... I enjoyed day and night the happiness and sadness of numberless queens. I found greater pleasure in their crying than in their laughing. That is why I intentionally irritated them.23

He goes to the extent of saying that Puru must be celebrating the occasion for it gives him an opportunity to assume the mantle of the King immediately. “Now he must he dancing with joy... He wanted this.... He hates me.... He must be dreaming about becoming a king.”24

When Puru comes back and informs that Yayati’s curse can be redeemed if some young person accepted his old age,
Yayati is jubilant. He fails to understand the seriousness of his actions and accuses Sharmishtha and Puru of not being happy in his happiness: "Why are you two silent? Why aren’t you two happy? I have crossed burning fire, aren’t you happy at this? Why don’t you speak?"\(^25\)

When Puru informs Yayati that nobody is ready to accept his old age, the latter does not believe it. Yayati thinks that all his subjects would come forward and readily accept his old age. It is Sharmishtha who brings him to his senses:

Why should they accept the result of your actions? Sins and good deeds are not money which can be given and taken back.... Do not beg any insane person or a hermit to transfer your curse to him. Let us quietly go to the forest.\(^26\)

Yayati cannot believe his ears and protests: "What do you mean? Should I kick this opportunity to seek redressal and again jump into the firepot? What kind of love is this? What kind of sympathy?"\(^27\) He feels very hurt when nobody comes forward to take upon himself the curse of old age. He is ready to give whatever one wants in return. He even proposes to take back his old age after five or six years. Everybody is at his wit’s end to make Yayati accept the responsibility for his action. Puru
also asks Yayati to accept his old age and go to the forest. At this, Yayati requests him:

Puru, do not ridicule me. I beg of you. Do not talk like this. It seems you can’t imagine the extent of my suffering. Do not laugh inhumanly. If old age had come to me in its normal course of time I would have had the patience to bear it.... This is a curse.... If somebody accepts my curse I would free him in five or six years.... He should not feel disheartened for that. I accept this curse, think.... Puru, I would be left with just one thing.... To go on and on. To return from such a path would be impossible. It is possible to take a path that is without light, Puru, but how to go on a dreamless path?28

Puru offers to accept the curse even though he tells Sharmishtha that Yayati is not worthy of her self-sacrificing love. Puru feels that he is not making a sacrifice:

Not pride but joy. I want to know the inner meaning of that. I want to know what the power was that gave birth to my ancestors. (60)

Suddenly Puru starts feeling weak and is about to fall when Sharmishtha helps him. When asked by Sharmishtha what has happened, Puru replies: ‘It is the curse, mother. It is the sorrow of new life.”29
Yayati succeeds in transferring his old age and his sins to Puru, but in the process he experiences shattering disillusionment and loss of faith. The argument that he puts forward is that his people need him as a king and therefore he is doing this. But to his own self, it is clear that this is not truth.

The final recognition of the horror of the situation comes to Yayati through Chitralekha, Puru’s young wife, who finds reality too much to bear and kills herself. She poisons herself in order to be relieved from the miserable condition in which she has been living.

She adds that old age as a curse has come to him at the right time, otherwise she would have cursed her husband and her luck like a mad person. Now she can curse her foolishness. When Puru asks for forgiveness, Chitralekha replies: “Do not talk like this. The fault was mine. I did not know about your greatness. I have never thought that I would get such reward.”

Puru wants her support for the responsibility he has undertaken. Chitralekha gladly extends her support. But when she sees the face of old Puru, she realizes what has fallen on her. He gets frightened and tells him: “Don’t come near me... Go away from here.... Do not touch me.” She curses herself
for not being as great as her husband, for turning her husband out. She requests Puru to reconsider his decision but to no avail. Even Yayati tries to console Chitralekha by saying "You are sensible. Get up, don’t cry."32

He advises Chitralekha to behave in a way as behaves the daughter-in-law of the Bharata family. He tries to console her by assuring her that he would soon take back the curse on himself: " promise you Chitralekha! I shall not keep Puru’s youth for many years. I will return it as soon as my goal is achieved."33 He asks her to accept the ‘old’ Puru happily for which sacrifice the Bharata family will always feel obliged to her. When Chitralekha refuses, he exercises his authority as her father-in-law and as a king, and orders her to obey him. When Chitralekha offers to leave the kingdom, he scolds her: 'Why did you marry? You have forgotten the pledges that you took having Fire god as a witness? You should follow him whether it is home or forest.'34 Chitralekha adds ironically: "You have forgotten one thing. I should follow him to his pyre also." This annoys Yayati and he rebukes Chitralekha for wishing death for her husband. Chitralekha, then, accuses him for her plight:

You are the one who are taking him close to his pyre, not I: and then you advise me? Without
understanding my grief, you are lecturing me thus? What have you done? You got a foolish son. After transferring the burden of your sins on him, you are advising me how to conduct like a woman?"35

Chitrallekha holds Yayati responsible for pushing Puru towards death. Yayati tries to idealize Chitrallekha's sacrifice: "On one side is your life, and on the other side is the bright future of the whole country."36 He asks Chitrallekha to rise above petty considerations and be a great woman. But Chitrallekha does not yield to his argument: "Cowards and liars will always argue. With your arguments, you have woven a net around me."37

To come out of this net, Chitrallekha puts a proposal before Yayati. She would like Yayati to take the place of Puru in her life so that she can bear a child of the family:

When I accepted Puru as my husband I did not know him. I had chosen his youth.... The qualities that I had chosen in him are not present in him any longer but... but you still possess all those qualities.38

When Chitrallekha offers herself to Yayati, the latter is shocked. He accuses Chitrallekha of harbouring such low thoughts. But Chitrallekha cannot see any light in her future life. She tells Yayati: "Neither will you return Puru's youth nor will you
accept me!” Finding herself in such a sad plight, Chitralekha muses: “You have youth, Puru has got the sense of sacrifice. What am I to do here.” Chitralekha can think of only one solution to this problem, Suicide. However, after taking poison, Chitralekha is not willing to die. She behaves in an irresponsible manner: “Save me, Don’t let me die, Swaran, save me.... Save me. Swaran.... Swaran.”

Sharmishtha accuses Yayati of forcing Chitralekha to end her life:

You have destroyed her life. You didn’t listen to me. You had the desire to be young.... This is the foundation of your future life. One woman became a ghost, the second a mad person and the third a fallen woman.

When Yayati sees the dead body of Chitralekha he repents but says: “Daughter-in-law, even the fire of poison has not finished my desire to live.” Sharmishtha sarcastically calls Chitralekha’s death as “the first victory of Yayati’s new life!”

It is Chitralekha’s suicide that brings Yayati to his senses and he owns up responsibility for his actions:

The fear of sacrifice led me to sexual pleasures but this unnatural youth could not obtain that. Puru, take
back your youth. Be a good king. There could be no better lesson than Chitralekha’s death.\(^44\)

He proposes to Sharmishtha to accompany him to the forest before the nightfall: “We should wash our sins by doing penance in the forest. I have spent my youth in this city but will spend my old age in the forest.”\(^45\)

When Chitralekha dies, Puru is stunned but does not cry. It is only when he regains his youth that he repents for what he has done. In \textit{Yayati}, the characters like Yayati, Puru, Chitralekha, Sharmishtha and Devayani are incomplete and their situations are existential.

There are vital issues of contemporary relevance in Karnad’s plays. In this chapter, we discuss those issues playwise. The contemporary issues are religion and politics, chastity and identity crisis, Hindu-Muslim unity and amity. These issues are contemporary as well as existential in touch.

Girish Karnad’s play \textit{Tughlaq} is incomparable in depth and range. Based on historical facts, it is not just a political allegory but a tightly-knit drama about the failure of an idealistic ruler of the fourteenth century. Throughout the play, Tughlaq does not have a single moment of peace and rest as he is always suspicious of the motives of the people close to him.
How many imposters, betrayals, rebels and treacherous people prowled around him. Merely mouthing plentitudes, they never lent him any real support. The country's maladies which needed the solid support of not only the Amirs but also the popular pyramid was never there. The people thought him mad and the Amirs termed him tyrannical.

Tughlaq, however, is a formidable ruler who would not let anything or anybody come in his way of the pursuit of power. His answer to resistance is his sword. His unpopular schemes such as moving the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and making copper coins the acceptable currency create many foes for him. He calls those no "mad whims of a tyrant" but gives solid reasons such as Delhi being too near the border and Daulatabad being a city of Hindus turning into a bond between Hindus and Muslims. But this cuts no ice with either the people or the Amirs.

Tughlaq is an usurper, having come to the throne after getting his father and brother murdered during prayer time, and has blood on his hands at such a young age. The murky path to political power has been traversed by this power-politician, having committed heinous crimes of parricide and fratricide. Such questions are irrelevant for this ruthless man
and sharing of power is out of question. Dissent of course would be blasphemous in his kingdom. He would prefer to have only fawning sycophants around him.

Muhammad’s master stroke in power politics is yet to come. He persuades Sheikh Sahib to go as his envoy to meet Ain-ul-Mulk to dissuade him from marching to Delhi. The bait is that such a saintly person would not like to see Muslims slaughtered at the hands of fellow Muslims. The Sheikh, who resembles Tughlaq is given royal robes and is put on the royal elephant. The meeting is set near the plains of Kannauj. The enemy thinks, it is Tughlaq coming for peace talks. Tughlaq’s soldiers start the attack by hiding behind the hills. Sheikh Sahib is killed and Ain-ul-Mulk’s army rushes in the trap set by Tughlaq. Superb state craftsmanship is evident as two birds are killed with one stone. Both adversaries crushed—one is literally turned into a gory human porcupine because of arrows—the other Ain-ul-Mulk crushed with the generosity of pardon because he is able to detect a flaw in the solution found by Muhammad to the famous chess problem set by Al-Adli. As for the common soldiers, it was the ‘bloodiest massacre’ ever seen, says Ratan Singh, an eye-witness and ‘afront ranker’ in the platoon of Sheikh Sahib.
Shihab-ud-din and some Amirs of Delhi who hatch a conspiracy against Tughlaq are called for consultations. A "Long rope" is given to them in the form of asking for suggestions and being told about future plans. Muhammad kneels before them and asks them to take an oath on Koran to support him in his new measures. There is not an inkling about what the master strategist is planning to do. Undoubtedly, it is Ratan Singh, who has betrayed all of them. The Amirs are arrested and taken away. Muhammad himself stabs Shibad-ud-din repeatedly as if in a frenzy, orders all involved to be beheaded, their bodies stuffed with straw to be sent around his kingdom for all to see. But the smart politician that Tughlaq is, he knows how to turn the volatile situation which would follow to his advantage. He says:

Make a public announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and that the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by Shihab-ud-din who died a martyr's death defending him. The funeral will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair. Invite his father to it and see that he is treated with the respect due to the father of a loyal nobleman.46
To this, Barani replies, "Oh God! Aren't even the dead free from your politics?"  

Subsequently Muhammad becomes even more cruel. Prayers are banned throughout the kingdom till Ghiyas-ud-din, the descendent of the Khalif would visit the kingdom. He orders Delhi to be vacated immediately. "Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now," he says.

It remains for Aziz, a Muslim Dhobi, who is masquerading as Vishnu Prasad, to gain wealth and position, to comment on power-politics working at other levels in Delhi as it has been before Tughlaq’s order: "Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world—Politics! My dear fellow that’s where our future is—politics! It’s a beautiful world—wealth, success, position, power—and yet it is full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head."

Seven years have passed since Delhi was forced to shift to Daulatabad. The meandering road to Daulatabad is littered with corpses, people have no food and instead eat burnt strips of skin and skins of dead horses, riots have broken out and in an ironic twist of circumstances, it is Aziz, the masquerader, the murderer and the villain who is sent to be appointed as an
army officer in Deccan by Muhammad because he claims to be his true disciple. It is power-politics, diplomacy or face-saving on Tughlaq's part because he had publicly fallen at the feet of Aziz masquerading as Ghiyas-ud-din welcomed him as a saint and called him a saviour.

In a final 'mad' decision, Tughlaq decides to shift the capital back to Delhi. Would this decision assure him of peace of mind, security and approbation he had been looking for? Or has the play of power-politics taken its toll as he is haunted by memories and has only frustration and disillusionment to look forward to? There are no answers because the play ends with Muhammad looking around dazed and frightened as though he can't comprehend where he is. Tughlaq as a visionary ruler failed in his mission and he remained a confused philosopher-ruler and was an incomplete personality, a divided self as well as a split-personality. His freedom of choice is existential as well as modern in approach.

In *Hayavadana*, Devadatta was always aware of the fatal attraction between his wife, Padmini and his best friend, Kapila. In the play, there are no realms to be won over, no kingdoms to be fought over. Rather it is the heart of a young maiden
Padmini, "the Shyama Nayika—born of Kalidasa’s description" which matters a lot in the play.

If Devadatta seems to have won in the beginning, his victory is only illusory. And Kapila’s efforts always continue. He has only to set eyes on Padmini before he goes weak-kneed. He feels that she needs ‘a man of steel’, for which he is qualified. He runs like errands for her, looks at her with ‘dog’s eyes’ and is totally devoted to her even in the presence of her husband who is his best friend.

Kapila is totally under Padmini’s spell throughout the trip, over-eager to please her; and runs off to get the fortunate lady’s flower, climbing a tree and swinging up its branch, brings a heap of flowers for her. Devadatta has noticed “the pleading in his eyes, stretching out its arms and asking for a favour.”

Devadatta, on finding the first suitable opportunity, sensing imminent psychological defeat, goes up to the Kali temple but instead of offering his arms, as he had earlier promised if he won over Padmini, cuts off his head as an offering to the Goddess. When Padmini and Kapila come back, Kapila goes to look for Devadatta, finds his headless body and in anguish, after giving a long speech full of protestations of
love and devotion for “my brother, my father, my friend” and commenting that Devadatta has “spurned” him in this world, he too cuts off his head. It may seem at first that it’s all genuine reaction to a very dear friend’s death but the real reason is given by Goddess Kali:

The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That fellow Devadatta—he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it—head to him and arms to me! Then because you insisted on going to the Rudra temple, he comes here and offers his head. Nobly too—wants to keep his word, he says—no other reason!52

The story, however, doesn’t end here. On Padmini’s entreaties, Goddess Kali grants her Devadatta and Kapila’s lives if she would rejoin their heads to their respective bodies and press the sword on their necks. In her excitement, however, she mixes up the heads so that Devadatta gets Kapila’s body and vice-versa. Both are highly amused and have a good laugh over their becoming ‘blood-relations’.

When Devadatta tries to convince him quoting the sacred texts, he snaps back: “Don’t tell me about your sacred texts. You can always twist them to suit your needs.”53 Arguments, bodily stepping between the husband and the wife, prepared to
"kick up a row in the streets" and the final ultimatum: "You will have to kill me before you really escape me."

This is indeed a new Kapila, confident, aggressive and could even be violent if straightforward politics fail him. The urge to possess, Padmini is powerful enough to make him go to any length. Forcefully, asserting his right to have what he thinks is rightfully his, he would stop at nothing.

However fates will act otherwise. The "three unfortunate beings" whose entire future hangs in balance, go to a great Rishi who rules in Devadatta’s favour by saying:

As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees so is the head among human limbs. Therefore, the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini.”

Kapila, broken-hearted, drags his feet away but it is only a diplomatic withdrawal. He knows; Padmini will come back to him and sooner rather than later. He has a kind of consolation as Padmini in aside says to him: "It’s my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I’m going with your body. Let that cheer you up” (p. 37).

Very soon, she tires of the fabulous body, of fabulous Devadatta and remembers with fondness “the unwashed
sweaty smell of Kapila.” She starts dreaming and fantasizing about him and their past life. One fine day when Devadatta has gone to Ujjain on the pretext of showing her child the witching fair of the dark forest, goes to meet Kapila asking the villagers, the pilgrims, the hunters, the tribesmen, the way to the forest. She meets Kapila and shows him the son claiming it was his son, “begotten of that body with the mole on the shoulder” (p. 55). Kapila resists first but this is what he has been hankering after. Kapila’s head is also to know what his body has already known. As Padmini puts it:

Your body bathed in a river, swam and danced in it. Shouldn’t your head know what river it was? What swim? Your head too must submerge in that river—the flow must rumple your hair—run its tongue in your ears and press your head to its bosom. Until that’s done you will continue to be incomplete.... My Kapila, my poor, poor Kapila! How needlessly you’ve tortured yourself. 57

When Devadatta finds them after “four or five days”, there has to be a fight to the finish. Living like “Pandavas and Draupadi” is impossible and so there is a bloody duel and it is understood by both that they have to die. Girish Karnad uses animal imagery when Devadatta says: ‘No grounds for friendship now. No question of mercy. We must fight like lions and kill like
cobras” (p. 61). The Bhagavata refers to it as a fight of “cocks in a pit”.

Padmini commits sati leaving her son to the care of the tribesmen giving them the impression that it is Kapila’s son. She tells the Bhagavata that the son is to be taken to Revered Brahmin, Vidyasagar of Dharmapura when he is five and to be told that it is Devadatta’s son.

Hayavadana comes to an end with all the three major characters being dead but Padmini has the last word:

They burned, lived, fought, embraced and died. I stood silent. If I’d said, “Yes, I will live with you both” perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I couldn’t say it.... You would have had to share not only me but your bodies as well.. You could have only lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you to death.58

Tale-Danda, is fascinating although it is based on a historical incident which took place in the twelfth century but the issues it raises are extremely relevant in contemporary society. Unlike Tughlaq, here it is a group of people, the upper-caste Brahmins and the ruling class nobility which along with King Bijjala’s son, Sovideva. There is terrible bloodshed at the end of the play in kalyan so that the whole city is drowned in a
sea of blood. The Hindi translation of Tale-Danda is appropriately called Rakt Kalyan. Probably the stakes are higher in this play. In view of the defenders of the system, on stake is not just one kingdom but a whole set of two thousand-year-old values supporting the caste system. As the caste in India is derived from birth alone, it is a closed system. The caste cannot be transferred from one class to another class or be gained as a reward for the highest merit or bestowed as an honorary title by even the most powerful monarch. The essential features of the caste system such as hierarchy, restrictions on marriage and food and hereditary occupation are challenged and flouted by Basavanna, and his followers in Tale-Danda. This is just not acceptable to the conservative elements of the society and the confrontation can only lead to disaster.

Thus the quest for completeness continues to allude the characters of Yayati, Tughlaq and Hayavadana. Even in Tale-Danda the meaninglessness of life assumes the shape of frustration and the divisive forces overpowers the functioning of a smooth sailing throughout the play.

Apart from it, Girish Karnad has genuine existential concerns. He has portrayed urgent human predicament, freedom of choice, selfhood, search for identity, isolation,
frustration and failures. He is very conscious to restore the
dignity of man on the whole human relationship.

_Naga-Mandala_ can be called a play with a difference. It
exposes effectively the hollowness and injustice of patriarchal
family system. In _Naga-Mandala_ the context is female-oriented.
The narrator character is a female. The flames who assemble at
the temple at night are all female characters. The subplot—
Kurudavva and kappanna story is dominated by a woman,
Kurudavva. But the approach of society to her problem is a
serious indictment against the existing system that completely
ignores her when she is looking for her lost son and is seeking
help from everyone. She is called a mad woman. This unwritten
judgement of the society provides it a safe excuse to turn a deaf
ear to her problem. Even the main plot centres round the
feminist issues—the emancipation of a bride, Rani from
subjugation of her husband, Appanna.

But, at the same time it is different from the common
feminist writings in the sense that it does not advocate any 'ism'
as the feminist does. It does not offer any alternative system. It
does not reject the husband or men in the life of women. It
seeks only reform in man's attitude. The most important
difference is that in _Naga-Mandala_ individuals are subservient to
society and family. So the final judgement goes in favour of the continuation of the existing family system.

Appanna and Rani are married at a very early age. When Rani became young, Appanna took her to his home. He has an illicit relationship with a concubine. He continues with it and ignores his wife. He neither talks to her nor spends his night with her. She is thus forced to live all alone in his house daydreaming or weeping. He only comes to have his bath and lunch and then goes out after locking the door from outside. So we see that Rani is victimized for no fault. She is innocent of her biological needs but certainly she wants love and care and time of her husband. She says to Kurudavva:

I am so frightened at night, I can’t sleep a wink. At home. I sleep between Father and Mother. But here alone—Kurudavva, can you help me please? Will you please send word to my parents that I am, like this, here? Will you ask them to free and take me home? I would jump into a well—if only I could—.59

Even after this, Rani is so meek that she does not question his spending nights elsewhere or quarrels with him over his relation with a concubine. When she wants to plead she fumbles for words: “Listen—I feel—frightened—alone at night” (p. 7). Appanna either does not talk to her or speaks in
monosyllables, mostly imperative sentences like, "Do as you are told, you understand?" (p 7). It is the cold indifference of Appanna that tortures Rani. He does not beat her or ill-treat her in literal terms but on two occasions he beats Rani. First when Rani goes out to pour the aphorodisiac root mixed curry into the ant-hill. He asks Rani from the bathroom what is bothering the dog. She does not reply. When she comes in, Appanna slaps her hard. Rani collapses to the floor and he goes out leaving her there and locks the door from outside. She is not allowed to talk to any one even to Kurudavva. May be he does not trust the fidelity of a women as has been his experience with his kept. This creates suspicion in his mind leading to communication gap between them. In fact, she is treated not worth keeping communication.

Though reconciliation is achieved at the end, social judiciary's approach to Rani is no better. The partiality of the Panch is exposed. Rani is put to trail to prove her chastity. But no one questions Appanna for his extra-marital relationship with a harlot. Why has he not given the right of a wife to Rani? The Elders doing justice do not bother to ask this question. The play brings out this glaring discrepancy in our social as well as legal system. The gender bias is an important issue addressed
in the play. The very system of trial for women is inhuman. The Elder III says:

The traditional test in our Village Court has been to take the oath while holding a red-hot iron in the hand. Occasionally, the accused has chosen to plunge the hand in boiling oil. But you insist on swearing by the King Cobra.  

The second time, he beats her and abuses her when he discovers that she is pregnant. Since he has never slept with her and that she has committed adultery. This infuriates him and he pushes, kicks and abuses her:

Appanna: Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in and you yet managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your Sari off?

Rani: I swear to you I haven't done anything wrong!"  

And it is here that she first willingly commits disobedience to her husband, he drags her out and tries to throw a huge stone at her. But the snake hisses and the throws it to him. Rani, at once, gets in and bolts the door behind her. He demands her to open the door but she refuses. This is her first disobedience in an abnormal situation to escape his wrath. Otherwise she is carved out as a docile women. It can also be seen as her
defiance and protest. But on the whole she is a conformist character and is not revolting. However, she does want any change. Since she has not matured enough to revolt, she realises the change through supernatural intervention. Naga with a magical power to assume any form or shape plays crucial role in bringing about the reconciliation. She successfully undergoes the snake ordeal. The Cobra slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood over her head. This immediately gives her a divine status.

Elder I: Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate. Don’t grieve that you judged her wrongly and treated her badly. That’s how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. 62

One may wonder if this judgement is for Rani, a common woman or for a divine Rani. In this way, Naga as a deity fulfills her desires which she does not express openly. She grows up mentally and is cured of her fragility. What a feminist strives to achieve through open revolt and confrontation Rani achieves in the play through Naga, a supernatural totem or a cultural leader. Rani’s story expresses the female point of view about her needs, problems and experiences within the patriarchal institution. Her story also mocks exaggerated male claims and
ambitions to control female sexuality and virtue. However, before the larger claims of the family and community each one surrenders his or her individual claims to pave the way for a happy ending. We can thus witness the quest for completeness in the characters of Rani as an incomplete wife and Appanna as an incomplete husband. The quest makes Rani's life ladden with difficulties and predicaments for which her husband and society are responsible. But her sufferings are existential in touch.

*The Fire and the Rain* is the sixth successful drama of Girish Karnad. It is based on mythology, for which the dramatist has relied heavily on an episode in the *Mahabharatha*. *The Fire and the Rain* is the translation of his kannada play *Agni Mattu Male*.

The dramatist has used various devices like-slokas, mask, wind instruments, drums, music, curtains, flashback technique, light, mock elements, the play-within-a play, the presence of Gods, demonic souls, supernatural elements, fire etc. - very effectively. They not only add to charm of the play, but they also add to the total effect of the play. These devices are instrumental in creating an atmosphere suitable for a mythological play.
The plot of the play is not as simple as that of Karnad’s earlier plays. It is picked from the *Vana Parva*, i.e. the Forest Canto, of the *Mahabharata*. Raibhya’s elder son, paravasu, is invited by the King to be the Chief Priest of the Royal Fire Sacrifice, which is to be held for seven years, to bring rain. Paravasu’s younger brother, Arvasu, is simpleton and is easily befooled by everyone. Arvasu is in love with a hunter girl, Nittilai. While their cousin, Yavakri, in an attempt to take revenge with Raibhya and goes to forest and performs ten years of penance and pleases Indra. Indra grants him the boon of Universal Knowledge. While Raibhya, Paravasu, Yavakri, the three intellectuals, are busy with establishing supremacy over others, Arvasu, in the end, is successful in bringing rain. There are the sub-plots of the Brahma Rakshasa, Nittilai, and Vishakha which make the play interesting.

It is significant to note that the title of the play is suggestive as well as symbolic. In the *Shata Patha* it is said that fire creates smoke, smoke makes clouds, and clouds bring rain.

The whole play surrounds around the sanctity of yagña. According to the Vedic belief, Yagña is the holy instrument for the meeting Gods with men on this earth. Yagña is called as the
soul of the Vedic religion. The Bhagavad Gita advises thirteen different types of Yagñas.

Selfless task is the best Karma and, therefore, it tells one should act constantly without having any expectations of any reward. Karma, i.e.the best of action, creates Yagña, Karma is created by Nature, and Nature is created by the Almighty. So, the God exists right within Yagña.

From technical point of view the noble feature of the play is that it is all flashback. The present duration of the play is confined only to the Prologue and the Epilogue. This seems to be Girish Karnad’s technical innovation which is something new. This not only sustain the interest of readers, but also draws attention. Of course, there are dramas which are written partially in flashback, but it is innovation in *The Fire and the Rain* though in novels it is possible. We must not limit it, and should understand its significance. The new feature seems to be borne out of Girish Karnad’s access to the Western Theatre and theory, and that of his knowledge of the traditional theatre and ancient literature at home. The dramatist has made it innovative as well as imaginative. Karnad has freed himself as a dramatist from the traditional framework of drama and becomes a genuine and original playwright.
The play which, initially, looks very complex, presents the main theme of man's urge to establish supremacy over others, which is aired by ambition, competitiveness, jealousy, and finally by revenge. Yavakri wants to establish himself as superior to others because, according to him:

The time has come to show the world what is my father's son is capable of. This is my moment.63

Yavakari is very ambitious. Right from his childhood he achieves what he craves to be. Andhaka says:

Master, let him go to the jungle. You don't know your son. I do. I brought him up on this lap of mine. He will succeed in anything he tries, you mark my words.64

Raibhya, too, is ambitious. He, instead of getting pride of fathering a son who is invited and honoured to be the Chief Priest of the Royal Fire Sacrifice, was himself ambitious of getting the invitation from the king to become the Chief Priest. But the king thinks of his old age and invites Paravasu. At this, Raibhya is furious and says:

So you measured my life-span, did you-you and your king? Tested the strength of my life-line? Well, the sacrifice is almost over and I'm
still here. Still here. Alive and kicking. Tell the King I shall outlive my sons. I shall live long enough to feed their dead souls.65

This outburst is obvious when Vishakha, her daughter-in-law, utters:

Something died inside your father the day the King invited you to be the Chief Priest. He has been dying up like a dead tree since then.....There’s his sense of being humiliated by you.66

Of course, no one can deny Raibhya’s scholarship and his knowledge. In fact, he should be the first person to have invited for the Fire Sacrifice. But, if he is not invited and his son gets the chance, why should he feel that he is being humiliated or insulted? His son has only surpassed him? In fact, he should become happy that his son has proved equal to him, like the father, like the son. In the end, his ambition invites his death by the hand of his son, Paravasu.

Even Paravasu is ambitious to the extent of using his wife’s body for his means. Vishakha says:

Nothing was too shameful, too degrading, even too painful. Shame died in me. And I yielded. I let my body be turned inside out as he did his
own. I had a sense he was leading me to something. Mystical? Spiritual? We never talked. Only the sense pervaded the air.....Then one day he received the invitation from the king. To be the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice. And he left.67

The chief reason behind Paravasu's all these actions is that he wanted to be immortal. Moreover, Paravasu accepts the invitation of becoming the Chief Priest of the Royal Fire Sacrifice not because he wants to use his Divine Knowledge in bringing rain and helping the common people. But he treats Yagña as an instrument of his gratification:

I went because the fire sacrifice is a formal rite: Structured. It involves no emotional acrobatics from the participants. The process itself will bring Indra to me. And if anything goes wrong, there's nothing the gods can do about it. It has to be set right by a man. By me. That's why when the moment comes I shall confront Indra in silence. As an equal.68

It is very clear that Paravasu is ambitious and wants to challenge Indra and to be equal with God. This is indeed a human weakness. How can a man compare, challenge, and confront a God? We have to accept the superiority of God. If we
don't, what is the difference between man and God? Then what is the importance of God? Moreover, Paravasu comes to his father's hermitage, and thus "deliberately defying gods" by "Wilful transgression of the rules". At which, Raibhya explodes:

The Chief Priest of the royal sacrifice sneaks out at night, crawls home, his face covered like a leper, and you think the god won't know? They won't retaliate?"69

Thus, the protagonist in the Fire Sacrifice, i.e., the Chief Priest, Paravasu, doesn't have faith in the Yagna. He considers it as a formal structured ritual. So, the protagonist doesn't involve emotionally and spiritually, then how can this sacrifice be successful? How is it going to rain as rain is symbolic of humaneness, generosity and compassion.

It is very surprising to note that the mythical God Indra is also an ambitious God and people on earth follow God's acts. Therefore, he says:

I am Indra, the King of the God. Should not I then be Supreme in the three worlds? Should not Brahma, the Father of All Creation, who gave me birth, have ensured that I stood unrivalled in all these domains?"70
Competition and jealousy are results of ambition. When Yavakri seduces Vishakha, Raibhya, in an extempore reaction, tells Vishakha to:

Go and tell your lover I accepted this challenge.71

He invokes a Brahma Rakshasa, a demon soul, to kill Yavakri. Thus, a scholar like Raibhya also goes to the extent of planning the death of Yavakri. Raibhya is so scared of Yavakri's act of seducing Vishakha that he takes up the challenge and is ready to die of he failed in his attempt. He says:

I shall invoke the 'kritya' and send a Brahma Rakshasa, a demon sould. Let Yavakri save himself. He need only go and hide in his father's hermitage.....Let Yavakri cover in there like a dog. If he steps out, he will be dead. Tell him this too-that if he can manage to stay alive for another twenty-four hours, I, Raibhya, shall accept defeat and enter fire.72

Incidentally events crop up and, as a result, Yavakri dies.

Even Paravasu kills Raibhya, his father, knowingly, because:

He deserved to die. He killed Yavakri to disturb me in the last stages of the sacrifice.
Not to punish Yavakri, but to be even with me.\textsuperscript{73}

Paravasu was tired of Raibhya's competitiveness and jealousy which may not disturb him further during the sacrifice. So, he kills his father before his wife, Vishakha as witness, yet he speaks untruth to Arvasu: "I mistook him for a wild animal."\textsuperscript{74}

Thus, competition and rivalry arising out of ambition results in the death of two characters. Although we can not brand the play as a 'Morality play', yet there is an element of morality which is involved. There is a personification of justice that a character personifies. Such sense can be perceived in the Western Drama. Yavakri also suffers from the weaknesses of ambition, revenge, and lust. Raibhya is also a victim of ambition and jealousy. Paravasu, too, is ambitious. While Vishakha betrays Yavakri, while marrying Paravasu, and yet succumbs to Yavakri's sexual advances willfully. So, she is morally and physically corrupt. Thus, all the characters, except Arvasu, suffer from some weakness. The dramatist has meted out poetic justice. Yavakri, Raibhya, and Nittilai die, while Paravasu has to face a tremendous internal conflict. While Arvasu, who is pure and acts without self-interest, remains
alive in the end who brings rain. He, in the real sense, has acquired the true knowledge of humanity who is a symbol of 'Control of passions, serenity, objectivity'.

Nittilai plays a very crucial role in the drama. She is neither a chorus, nor a mouthpiece of dramatist, nor a Sutradhar narrating some plot. Sometimes she acts like a little, innocent, playful girl, while, sometimes, she behaves like a mature lady, busy in solving problems. Sometimes, she asks the mindful questions, and sometimes she throws light on various social issues. It is she who exposes the caste consciousness of high caste people in the society and as a hunter girl, she is loud in commenting on the selfish and lustful behaviour of high caste men:

> These high-caste men are glad enough to bed our women but not to wed them.75

She does not leave even God of high-caste people when she says:

> Why are the Brahmins so secretive about everything? (p. 76)

She further supports her argument by saying:

> Then how does everyone know what happened in a remote corner of the jungle-miles away from the nearest prying eye?76
When she knows that Indra has pleased and granted him the boon of the Universal Knowledge, she questions at Yavakri’s integrity:

Actually, I want to ask Yavakari two questions. Can he make it rain? And then, can he tell when he is going to die?....Just two. What is the point of any knowledge, if you can’t save dying children and if you can’t predict your moment of death.77

In spite of everything her immortal and casteless love for Arvasu wins the sympathy and admiration of readers. Really, Nittilai is Girish Karnad’s fantastic and artistic projection in the play.

Conflict is an inevitable part of drama either it is internal or external. No conflict, no drama. The Fire and the Rain too witness this aspect, between the heart and soul of the protagonist. Arvasu, who is so much badly treated by the society that he doubts his own existence:

I am dying of thirst. But there’s no water. Then I peer into a huge well. There’s water there, but it has my reflection in it. I stare at it. And the reflection snarls: “Why are you starting, wretch? Go away.” So I say: ‘You exist because I stare. You wouldn’t be there if I went away.’ It says: ‘You think so, do you, you swollen-
headed doll of flesh? I’ll show you’. And the reflection leaps out of the water. Gouges my eyes out. Chews up my face in its jaws. I scream, but I have no face....It keeps on returning, that nightmare, so that now I’m not all sure it’s me standing here and not my reflection.78

Even Paravasu has to face tremendous conflict when, in the play, he sees Indra murdering Vishwarupa treacherously. He jumps to his feet and cries:

No. No. Wrong! That’s wrong!....He saw a face by the altar. Whose face was it? The face of my dead father? Or of my brother, who is a simpleton, yet knows everything? Or was it my own face?79

While Yavakri is not sure enough that even after ten years of rigorous penance when he has acquired Universal Knowledge. He says:

One would expect the appearance of a God to be a shattering experience. Concrete. Indubitable. Almost physical. But though I think Indra came to me several times, I was never certain....And when the God disappeared, nothing was left behind to prove he had ever been there.80
When he was asked how he decided that he has acquired Universal Knowledge, he replies:

I have no clear recollection how I arrived at conclusion—some knowledge, but probably little wisdom. I know now what can't be achieved. That itself is wisdom....I think I have some mystical powers I hadn't before. Mastered a few secret arts. Got a few mantras at my finger-tips.81

Even Raibhya curses himself, for fathering such sons.

A society aspires to attain certain ideals and goals and imposes some restrictions upon herself for maximum welfare of human being. Gradually, such ideals and goals are established as the value system of that society. Values are such equipments of any society which help in attaining spiritual and material betterment of its people smoothly. While some people try to defend and nourish these values others pose challenge before them. They try to manipulate the situation for their personal cause. So, the conflict begins. This conflict between these two groups goes on for generation to generation. Those who fight for defending those values are considered to be the heroes of the society. The story of their struggle, suffering and sacrifice for such values turn into myths of that society or race.
When writers depict the myths and legends of the society in their works, the conflict between good and evil finds expression in them. Fortunately, in India, each state has a rich regional language and a well established literary tradition. So far as English is concerned it is not the language of a particular state in India but the language of upper-middle-class or of creamy layer of Indian society. Most of the Indian writers in English belong to this class. But their inherited Indian cultural background establish social values and they remain in a state of dilemma. Girish Karnad says that the Indian middle class aspires "to 'look' like its British counterpart". He writes—

....The social values of this class were shaped by English education it had received and by the need to work with British in trade and administration.82

Indian writers in English appear to be radical but show little change at heart. Some of them are busy in multiplying their money by cultural smuggling and present a distorted image of Indian culture and society in the market of the Western world. But none of them has courage to accept the truth that they feel in regional languages and write in English. So, their works are, to use the term of Plato like imitations of imitations. But those
writers who write in regional languages and then translate their own work into English are in a better position. They achieve success in their depiction of grass-root reality had a great appeal to the audience. *The Fire and the Rain*, a mythical play, reflects the drama of God and heaven on the earth. The characters display the crisis of faith, an act of jealously, ambition and rivalry which cultivate the existential situations in which they are trapped. As a result, they appear like an outsider, absurd, lonely and isolated. In such situations, Girish Karnad becomes an existential playwright.

Karnad has raised several basic questions related to the crisis of human values in the society. Individual's relations with individual, family, society and state have been examined. In *Naga-Mandala* the relationship between Rani and Appanna is typical one. This play has successfully depicted that Rani is acceptable either as a slave by her husband or as a 'whore' by society or as a goddess by her husband and society both, but not as a human being. The dramatist raises numerous questions regarding the issues of crisis of human values. According to Kurudavva, Appanna “keeps his wife locked up like a caged bird”. Appanna spends his night and day with a “harlot”. It is a burning problem of faithlessness of a husband towards his
wife. While “there is no one to talk to” Rani, Appanna enjoy his time with the prostitute. Rani cannot laugh or even weep. It is a dramatisation of helplessness, misery and isolation of Rani which is existential in treatment. She is “bored to death”. When Rani makes Appana aware of her pregnancy he is shocked. He does not want to see Rani for a moment in his house. He says, “I am not my father’s son, if I don’t abort that bastard! Smash it into dust!” (p. 33). When he fails in the throwing huge stone on her due to cobra’s arrival, he challenges her to meet to Village Elders. Realising her pain cobra in the form of Appana wants to remove her tension. At this Rani stops him saying:

   Why are you humiliating me like this? Why don’t you kill me instead? I would have killed myself. But there’s not even a rope in this house for me to use” (p. 33).

Indirectly, Karnad has hinted at the condition of millions of modern house-wives in India who spend their entire life surrounded by four walls and do what they are asked to do. In their life, there is no herbal ‘root’, as in case of Rani, to try on their husbands. They get joy out of trifles of their life. In case of Rani even these trifles are absent. It is only the unbelievable magic love of the Cobra that keeps Rani’s life worth living.
The concept of chastity is gender biased and that women care more for chastity than men. In Ben Johnson’s *Volpone*, there is an incident similar to that in *Naga-Mandala*. Carvino has a very beautiful wife called Celia. 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.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad creates a different female character in Padmini. Her husband Devedatta is a learned and intellectual young man. But Padmini is not completely satisfied with him. She is attracted towards powerful body of Kapila, the son of a blacksmith and close friend of her husband, Devedatta. Her split-personality indicates her possessive nature. When Devedatta and Kapila both chop their heads in the Kali temple and the head of Devedatta is joined on the body of Kapila and that of Kapila on Devedatta’s body, Padmini accepts the earlier one as her husband. She feels satisfied after getting the body of Kapila and head of Devadatta in one. Her remark is full of joy when she says, “Fabulous body, fabulous brain-fabulous Devedatta”. When her baby is born, Padmini’s wish is that he should be brought up in the forest for few years and then he
should be sent to Devedatta's father, Vidyasagar. Her plan is that her son should have a healthy body and a brilliant mind together. She wants to develop him as a child of her own dream. This nature of Padmini indicates her possessive nature as she tries to impose her own wishes on the child for her wish-fulfilment. When we think of the son of Padmini and the example of Hayavadana, who is also a neglected child, we remember the remarks of Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh who says that the problem lies in the lack of sensitivity in the parents. He says that "we enjoy sex and the child drops in between". What can we expect from such unwelcomed and accidental children? Such a child, who is deprived of affection and proper care, gives to the society what he receives from parents. Such children feel themselves alienated. Hayavadana, bearing the head of a horse and body of a man, is unable to identify himself. He does not find any place and role in the society. He wants to take "interest in the social life of the Nation" but he has no society of his own, for he is not a complete man. The Bhagavata blesses him that he may "become successful" in his "search for completeness" but this search is never complete. So such individuals, for whom there is no place in the society and who fight their own way all alone, seldom bother about society
when they get success in their life. If some young man like Kappanna bears the responsibility of his blind mother, Kurudavva like Srawan Kumar he is praised by the society but if he is attracted towards a dream girl, he is declared mad.

In Karnad's Tughlaq, we can find the symptoms of disintegration prevailing in the society. The head of the state is unable to control it. He has lost his feelings in human values. He wants to create his own world of dreams or another Utopia. For him, if dream comes first, it must be fulfilled and it hardly matters how many sacrifices are to be made for it. The Sultan, who should take care of the public welfare, gives an order to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and every citizen has to obey the command. How many sick, weak and old men and women or young children suffer and die on the way is not a matter of concern of the Sultan. For him powers, success and authority are everything that he has to achieve at any cost. He himself prepares plots of murder for safeguarding his crown. When Muhammad's stepmother says that the Kingdom has turned into "a kitchen of death" and asks him if he has his "share of futile deaths", Muhammad shouts:
No, they were not futile. They gave me what I wanted: power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself.

If this is the reply of the Sultan who can save his Kingdom? Karnad has hinted at the history of partition of India, when leaders divided the country and threw it in violence and bloodshed to acquire power, strength, recognition and position. But such disintegration is fatal and suicidal to both, the individual (King) as well as the society (Kingdom). In Tughlaq it is evident when Muhammad himself is caught in the same trap. When Barani suggests him to retire from his throne, Muhammad replies:

.... I have often thought of that myself to give up this futile see-saw struggle and go to Macca. Sit here by the Kabba and search for the peace Daulatabad has not given me, what bliss! But it isn't that easy. It isn't as leaving the patient in the wilderness because there is no cure for his disease. Don't you see—this patient, sacked by fever and crazed by the fear of the enveloping vultures can't be separated from me? I could have done something if the vultures weren't so close....

This is what happens to a kingdom and king when human values are lost in the society. Muhammad himself has turned
his empire into a desert and is afraid of the vultures that envelop him.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Appanna is dominated by animal passion. He devotes his entire day and night to the prostitute. But there is no sense of guilt or remorse in his mind like any animals. It is a tragedy of modern people who have gone materialistic and insensitive to human emotions.

In *Hayavadana*, no one takes the proper care of the children. Hayavadana is left alone after the dispute between his parents. Similarly the child of Padmini is also left alone in the end. They are deprived of the love and affection that a child gets in a joint family. What can we expect from such children who are doomed to be alienated just after their birth?

One more reason for the crisis of human values is that our country is passing through process of industrialization and is still a developing country. Industrialization has dehumanised the man. Man working with machines, spending most of his time in factories and industrial plants has been gradually dehumanised. His main thrust is only production. He never bothers about the means through which the production is achieved. He can destroy greenary of forest to get coal. He can turn the Ganges and the Yamuna into sewage. He can cut throat
of fellow being for a small piece of land or for a few hundred rupees or to satisfy his animal appetite. He will get, what he wants to possess at any cost. In *Hayavadana*, Padmini gets what she wants to possess i.e. the head of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. Their sacrifice is not a sacrifice before mother Kali (because the temple is abandoned) but before the possessive power of Padmini who has a strong hold over the life of both the friends. In *Naga-Mandala*, Appanna does not allow Rani even to talk to anybody. He wants to possess her as a material property. In *Tughlaq* Muhammad wants to get power, authority and name at any cost.

Girish Karnad has, successfully dealt with the theme of crisis of human values in society. It is because that his plays are humanistic and sensitive in approach. In *Naga-Mandala*, Appanna is back to Rani, owing to fear that she is a goddess. We do not know what will happen to him in future and will he love her in fear or worship her? In *Hayavadana*, the child is left alone and we do not know the fate he is going to meet. In *Tughlaq*, Muhammad opens his eyes and “looks around dazed and frightened as though he cannot comprehend where he is”. So almost all plays by Karnad are open-ended and the riddle of man is not solved. Rather he presents a sense of shock and fear
about the future because we notice in *Naga-Mandala* that there are herbal roots that can change the venom of a Cobra into love but there is none that can change the brutal and poisonous mind and heart of man.

The play *Naga-Mandala* as the name suggests revolves around a woman and a serpent. This play is based on a folk tale and it is interesting to observe that the serpent forms an important ingredient in most narratives all over the world. Snake myths are found extensively in Brahmanism, Buddhist, Lamaistic and Javanese writings.

Snake worship is still practised in the southern states in India such as Kerala, Karnataka and Madras. The play *Naga-Mandala* presents a world of fantasy. It has the ingredients present in dreams of every individual. The action begins in an abandoned temple. The fantasy is enhanced by the arrival of the flames who talk. Their talk brings out intimate details of the households they inhabit. Their talk is tinged with eroticism and this again serves as a precursor to the events that follow. Finally the story and the song disguised as a young woman and her sari make their appearance and contribute to the finishing touches of the fantasy world.
Rani enters her wedded life like most girls with a lot of expectation but is shocked by Appanna’s neglect. Marriage is a milestone in a person’s life and since it presents a hostile environment her mind indulges in dreams in order to calm her troubled self. She, like a hurt child, dreams of a fairy land which can be reached only after crossing seven seas and seven isles. And in a magic garden brings out an earlier pleasant state which is known in psychology as Regression.

Rani’s further encounters with her husband leave her disappointed and her dreams about her parents recur more frequently. They comfort her and now a new dimension enters her dream content. She dreams of a male deer which asks her to come away with her. But she is afraid to accept her invitation and he replies: “I am not a stag, I am a prince.” According to Karnad, “The position of Rani in the story of Naga-Mandala can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles—as a stranger during the day and as lover at night. Inevitably, the pattern of relationships, she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be something of a fiction. The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into.”
Many of these narrated tales here talk about the nature of tales. The story of the flames comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general: they have an existence of their own independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener. Seen thus, the status of a tale becomes akin to that of a daughter, for traditionally a daughter too is not meant to be kept at home too long, but has to be passed on. This identity adds poignant and ironic undertones to the relationship of the teller to the tales.

*Tale-Danda* is borrowed by Karnad from an important historical movement that took place in the city of Kalyan in 1168 A.D. The movement was started by a group of poets, philosophers, mystics and social revolutionaries which wanted to revolutionise the society as well as change the age old practices of the evils of caste system. It resulted in an age of creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment which was unmatched in the history of Kannada. They used the language of common man, instead of Sanskrit and told people about god in the language which they could understand. They even went to the extent of condemning idolatry and temple worship. They wanted to bring about a complete change and believed in the principle of movement and progress of human
concerns and opposed any kind of static situation. Even in that age they believed in the equality of sexes as well as committed hard work. Because of their commitment to oppose caste system they were humiliated and the anger and displeasure of the orthodox community came down heavily on them. Finally, the movement ended in terror and bloodshed. It is the story of caste-war and power-politics which brought disaster to mankind and the common man suffered a lot. Bloodshed and terror ruled the scenario and confused a man who feels himself deserted, isolated and deceived. His sufferings are existential in touch.

In brief, we can assess that characters in *Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, The Fire and The Rain* and *Tale-Danda* are victimed by their personal as well as social problems which create hurdles in their lives and they remain incomplete in some or other ways. They pine for completeness but it becomes a difficult dream in their lives which make them miserable, tortured, and exploited, isolated and captivated. They feel the sense of strangeness, outsiderism in their lives and truly becomes a sufferer of existential predicaments. Karnad as a playwright has beautifully carved them out as the existential characters.
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