Chapter V

Karnad's Dramaturgy: In Search of an Indian Theatre

Decolonization of the postcolonial Indian theatre covers a wider area. Decentring the European drama by exploring the indigenous thematic concepts constitutes only one aspect of the whole decolonizing project. It is also accomplished through the narrative techniques that the postcolonial dramatists employ in their dramatic performances. The inculcation of pre-colonial past in the forms of indigenous performance like rituals, myths, folktales, history, music, songs, dance, local settings, and oral style of story telling, turn out to be effective devices in dismantling the dominating forms of western dramaturgy. These incorporations make the postcolonial Indian theatre a site for articulating resistance by the once colonized subjects.

In the postcolonial context, the concept of performance itself resonates with its cultural overtones. It is often situated between the nation's present and its cultural past, as observed by Elin Diamond, in "Performance and Cultural Politics." According to Diamond, a performance is at once an embodied act performed by specific actors in specific sites, and a completed event framed in time and space into the storehouse of memory. It oscillates between the present and the past, as both "a doing thing and a thing done." A performance is, thus, bound by its culture and cultural politics. In this regard, Diamond observes:

> . . . it is impossible to write the pleasurable embodiments we call performance without tangling with the cultural stories, traditions, and political contestations that comprise our sense of history. (Goodman and Gay, 66)

Every performance comprises of and acknowledges the features and elements of previous performances, their cultural traditions, racial histories, memories and so on. It is impossible to isolate performance from the cultural traditions of the nation. In this light, performances like drama are cultural practices carried out by the nations to evolve their social life.

The incorporation of the myths, folklores and history into postcolonial theatre signals the reclamation of the nation's cultural past. The presence of the cultural past in the experience of the modern nation emphasizes the historicity of the nation. A nation is built on and strengthened by the myths and memories of the past. The role of these historical and cultural elements in strengthening the concept of nationalism is explained by Anthony D. Smith as "historical ethno-symbolism":

> For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has

been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern
nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of
myth.; memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national
identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation
becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new
challenges. (9)

The ethno-symbolic approach foregrounds the relevance and meaning of the
cultural past in the experience of the new nation. These pre-modern legacies
of myths, symbols, traditions and memories intervene in the historical
present of the nation and helps in strengthening the image of a unified
nation.

The cultural tradition of India as a nation is reflected in its essential
means of retrospective representations/narrations such as myths, folklores
and history. These are intrinsically linked to the performance traditions of
Indian culture. They also serve to evoke an ancient, premodern, and
pre-colonial past. Myths refer to the fictional narratives about divine and
heroic human agents belonging to the formative stages of Indian culture. The
mythic characters are embodied with powerful qualities with which the
Indian psyche has always been identified with and exerts its presence
through various means in the Indian world. Folktales constitute another set
of fictional narratives. They often allude to the magical world of humans and

animals belonging to particular regions. History denotes the oral and written records of lives, both premodern and modern. Their presence in postcolonial plays conveys ". . . the ubiquity of the past in the theatre of a new nation . . ." (Dharwadker, 168). Hence, all the three nation's retrospective narratives equip the postcolonial playwrights with powerful modes of resistant devices.

In the Indian context, the pre-modern past becomes a part of the lived experience for most of the Indians. The pre-modern past represented in the mythic narratives like the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata*, the rich regional folklores, the ancient customs and traditions, and the national history continue to exert its presence in the culture through oral, written and performative modes of transmission. They are not altogether fictitious: their existence goes beyond the frontiers of myths, as Dharwadker observes:

> In India, the pre-modern past is not in itself either merely "invented" or merely "imagined": as the accumulation of the complex political, religious, social, and cultural formations of three millennia, it has an archival, textual, and cultural existence independent of its modern uses. (169)

The pre-modern past becomes integral part of the general psyche and the ethos of the Indian populace.

In India, the epics the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana* form the most persistent sources for the contemporary writings. These epics are more than mere texts for the Indian people; they are the representation of the Indian tradition. The *Mahabharata*, the most conspicuous mythic text, is subjected to continual adaptations. The *Mahabharata* is identified with the cultural history and the identity of India as an imagined community. In this context, Dharwadker observes:

> At any given historical moment, the dissemination of the *Mahabharata* involves the full spectrum of indigenous cultural forms – oral and written, textual and performative, literary and philosophical and classical and folk, elite and popular. (175)

The *Mahabharata*, popularly considered the encyclopedia on the history of mankind, is in fact a narrative of the Indian life. As it rightly claims, it encapsulates the whole history and culture of India - classical and folk - in the form of an epic.

The prominence of the *Mahabharata* is embodied in its very title, which means "the great" or "complete" Bharata. Bharata, the ancient name for the Indian subcontinent, still retains its position in sharp contrast to the Europeanized name for the nation as "India." Hence, the epic the *Mahabharata* in a way overcomes its mythic nature to deal with the great history of Bharata (India). Across the whole of India we find references to

the incidents in the myths being linked to the different places. The "Sthala Puranas" regarding the cultural/historical importance of different places are available in abundance. The new developments in the archaeological evidence like the discovery of the lost city of Dwaraka of Lord Krishna referred to in the Epic, also validates its claim as a historic text.

The retrospective narratives from these epics and the diverse folklores form the most apparent source for most of the contemporary Indian playwrights. The prevalence of the myths, folktales, histories, and traditions in contemporary Indian theatre makes a good platform for the application of ethno-symbolism proposed by Smith. As strengthening devices of nationalism, their application can be deemed as a tool by the playwrights to reclaim the national identities lost because of the western dominance. They also serve as a technique to subvert the hegemonic western tradition of realistic drama.

In his plays, Girish Karnad employs the narratives of myth, folklore and the Indian history to evoke an ancient world that resonates with the contemporary world. In re-inscribing the past, Karnad also follows the pattern offered by his contemporaries to tap the rich sources offered by the *Mahabharata*. He uses the narrative of myth in three of his plays; *Yayati,*

Bali: The Sacrifice and *The Fire and the Rain*. When the ~~e~~Epic the *Mahabharata* forms the source of *Yayati* (Adiparva) and *The Fire and The Rain* (*Vana Parva*); *Yashodhara charite*, the thirteenth century Kannada epic, forms the basis for *Bali*: *The Sacrifice*. In these plays, Karnad moves away from the themes of heroic glorification and foregrounds the problems of moral indeterminacy, victimage, and injustice in the epic. There is a clear shift from heroic self-praise to ironic self-reflexivity in the plays where he questions the place of the past in the context of the new nation. Though based on myths, these plays evolve themselves to portray the contemporary dilemmas of human world.

Similar to the national myths, the folktales from the different regions of the nation also serve the purpose of the postcolonial playwrights. India is a land rich in written and oral tales, transmitted from generations to generations. A delve into the world of folklores enables the playwright to bring their traditions into their creations. The reincorporation of these tales into the postcolonial drama is a programmatic strategy used by the playwrights to resist western dominance. Karnad also employs folktales from different periods and regions/sources in his plays. His *Hayavadana* is based on a story from *Kathasaritasagara*, an ancient Sanskrit collection, whereas *Naga-Mandala* is based on two folktales that he had heard from A.K.Ramanujan. Another play that belongs to the category is *Flowers:*

A Monologue and its source is the legend of Veranna of Chitradurga region. Karnad uses myths and folktales not just to bring in the Indian culture and traditions; he rather uses them in a satiric way to expose the inequalities and injustice prevailing in Indian society. These satiric modes employ irony, invective and ridicule for the purpose of attack, a means of satiric self-criticism. It is a means of dismantling the residual hegemonic structures of the nation.

National history, both pre-modern and modern becomes a part of the postcolonial scheme of subversion. As a principal mode of retrospective representation, the national history signifies the oral and written records of lives and events the authenticity of which is documented and can be practically verifiable. This retrospective method adopted by the postcolonial dramatists facilitate in evaluating the relevance of the nation's remote past in the present situation.

Karnad employs the narratives from Indian history in three of his plays. His second play *Tughlaq* finds its primary source in *Tarikh- i Firoz Shahi* (1357), a chronicle history authored by Zia-ud-din Barani, a historian in Tughlaq's court. Tughlaq exemplifies the full hermeneutic complexity that a postcolonial play possesses in relation to its historiographic sources, its effect on viewers, and its application to modern Indian socio-political experience. Karnad's *Tale-Danda* is based on the twelfth century *Virasaiva*

movement in the Karnataka. It is a satire on the caste-ridden Indian society. It also implies the social situation of post-independence Indian society which is divided by pluralistic religious populace. His later play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is based on the diary records of Tipu Sultan which Karnad located at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. The play draws upon a range of historical sources to present convincing portraits of the main characters, but creates an imaginative plot. Though Tipu is portrayed in different dimensions, the heroic mode of representation is a potent strategy employed by Karnad for praising his anti-colonial stance. The heroic mode of representation adopts an idealistic, romantic, or sentimental stance for the purpose of celebration. Tipu's portrayal is in tune with the celebration of anti-colonial struggles in India.

Karnad's return to the past for his sources through myths, folktales and history echoes the relevance Diamond locates for the terminology of "re" in the context of performance: "'Re' acknowledges the pre-existing discursive field, the repetition – and the desire to repeat – within the performative present . . ." (Goodman and Gay, 67). Karnad's retrospective approach also signifies his desire to repeat the cultural past to reinscribe or reinvent the ideas, symbols, and gestures that shaped the national life. The historical ethno-symbolism

implicit in his retrospective approach also serves to accentuate the cultural history and its continuity in the theatres of the ———modern nation.

———

Karnad's employment of myths in his plays can be seen as a method of "canonical counter-discourse," as termed by Helen Tiffin in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. According to Tiffin, it is a process "in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for ———post-colonial purposes" (97100). It is a strategy in which the colonisers' texts are adopted and appropriated for alternative anti-colonial purposes. Gilbert and Tompkins further explain Tiffin's assumption in *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, practice, politics* as:

> . . . a process whereby the post-colonial writer unveils and dismantles the basic assumptions of a specific canonical text by developing a 'counter' text that preserves many of the identifying signifiers of the original while altering, often allegorically, it structures of power. (16)

Tiffin, along with Gilbert and Tompkins maintains that the counter-discourse focuses more on imposed canonical texts than on the pre-existing native master narratives like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. But Karnad's method includes a dismantling of the indigenous canonical

narratives. Karnad in a way constructs counter-discourses on native hegemonic texts. His method of revision of the mythological characters, the narratives and the contexts of the myths serves to dismantle the traditional hegemonies of the nation and to illuminate the injustices in them. More than mere inter-textuality, as Gilbert and Tompkins suggest regarding the use of native master narratives, Karnad employs a proper subversion of his source, the myths. It is in tune with the counter-discursive project which, ". . . actively works to destabilize the power structures of the originary text rather than simply to acknowledge its influence" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 16). Accordingly, myths from the *Mahabharata* are not an influence or a context in his plays, but they involve a proper deconstruction in the characters, actions, and intensions to alter the power structures implied in the original myths.

Karnad's first play Yayati is taken from Adiparva of the *Mahabharata*. In the original myth Yayati is a mighty and invincible king who has exchanged his curse with Pooru, his youngest son. Karnad's reworking of the myth makes Yayati, a self-centred patriarch who invites the curse as a result of his uncontrollable desire for Sharmishtha. His portrayal of Pooru is also far removed from the mythical figure. Pooru is a philosophical youth; but he is more a self-hating outsider who is distraught

by the questionable legitimacy of his birth. His acceptance of the curse is not mediated by obedience, but it is an attempt to overcome his feelings of unworthiness. The myth foregrounds the unfailing obedience of sons to their parents, especially to the father. In this regard, Dharwadker comments: "The epic does not question or criticize Yayati's motives when he demands that one of his sons assume the———— curse"– (CP 1, xv). But, Karnad's version questions the patriarch in Yayati and effects a transformation to him. In the *Mahabharata*, Yayati recognizes the nature of desire itself and realizes that fulfillment does not diminish or finish desire. He reaches the state of Brahman, a mental poise that goes beyond likes and dislikes. But in Karnad's play, it is the interrogation/accusations and subsequent suicide of Chitralekha that makes him realize the horrors of his own life and accepts his fate. Karnad makes a decisive shift in focus from Yayati to Pooru and the female characters.

The portrayal of the female characters, Devayani and Sharmishtha are also different from the myth. They are "sentient articulate, embittered women" who succeeds in subverting the male world built by Yayati, the patriarch. In the original myth Devayani is glorified and Sharmishtha is portrayed as a bewitching woman. But Karnad elevates the character of Sharmishtha by throwing light on the reasons behind her actions. It is the racial abuse she endured from Devayani that transformed her to an evil

character. She is transformed from an Asura princess to a slave and is denied of her status, family, and home. Karnad effectively throws light on the "colonial" suppression exerted by both Devayani and Yayati on Sharmishtha.

The character of Chitralekha, who is Karnad's invention, adds another dimension to the play; she raises the playwright's voice in questioning the patriarch in Yayati, who gambles with the life of his son Pooru. Unlike Pooru, Chitralekha rejects Yayati's authority over her and questions the injustice done by him. With his revision, Karnad humanizes the myth by deconstructing the structure of power to suit his postcolonial purpose. He gives a subversion of a patriarchal family by highlighting the flaws/selfishness of the patriarchal head and the assertion of the silenced groups - the women and the children. In this context, Dharwadker comments: "This chorus of unusual female voices, mixed in with the flawed male utterances, humanizes the myth and gives it ethical and, dialectical weight" (CP 1, xvii). Karnad links the myth to the contemporary times by questioning the element of emotional blackmail in family relations, and the interference of parents in children's lives and aspirations. He also questions racial discriminations through the play.

In *The Fire and ~~t~~The Rain*, Karnad deals with the myth of Yavakri that occurs in the *Vana Parva* in the *Mahabharata*. The myth is narrated to the *Pandavas* to convey the dangers of false / easy knowledge without wisdom and the evils resulting from lust, pride, jealousy and anger. The original myth deals with two friends, Raibhya and Bharadwaja who were renowned sages. Yavakri, Bharadawaja's son, shows a resentment to the world for not giving due respect for his father. Through *tapasya* he acquires absolute knowledge and molest Raibhya's daughter-in-law to fulfil his revenge. Enraged Raibhya invokes spirits and kill Yavakri and in turn invites a curse from Bharadwaja that he would be killed at the hands of his son. Paravasu's accidental killing of Raibhya makes the curse come true and he transfers the blame of parricide to Aravasu, his brother. Finally, through Aravasu's penance to the sun God, Yavakri, Bharadwaja, Raibhya are restored to life and makes Paravasu forget his evil deeds.

———

Karnad's reworking of the myth in the play weaves closer connection between the principal characters. In his version, Raibhya and Bharadwaja are brothers and hence Yavakri, Paravasu and Arvasu are cousins. Hence, the jealously between brothers, the underlying theme of the *Mahabharata* itself, is explored here. In Karnad's play, Yavakri and Vishakha are not strangers. As previous lovers Karnad makes Vishakha more than a passive object to Yavakri's lust. Unlike in the real myth, Karnad imparts an

unambiguous intention to the principal character's action. Yavakri's sexual union with Vishakha is shown deliberate only to make Raibhya act so that he can avenge Raibhya:

> It was fortunate that you yielded. If you hadn't I would have had to take you by force . . . Your father-in-law will die, Vishkha. Let's see what your husband does then. Will he continue to hide like a bandicoot in his ritual world? Or will he commit sacrilege by stepping out to face me. (CP 2, 131)

His act is also aimed at disturbing the fire sacrifice of Paravasu. An element of intentionality is also seen in Raibhya's killing of Yavakri. Paravasu makes it clear after killing Raibhya. Unlike in the myth, Paravasu kills his father consciously to prevent him from disturbing his fire sacrifice:

> 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. I had to attend to him before he went any farther. (CP 2, 142)

 Unlike in the original myth, Raibhya is portrayed as jealous of his son Paravasu on his success. Paravasu's final betrayal of his brother by putting the blame of parricide on his head completes a series of evil acts performed by the mythical character of the original tale. The entire play deals with much violence like bloodshed, betrayal, jealousy, pride, false knowledge and anger.

Similar to Chitralekha in *Yayati*, Karnad invents a fictional character of Nittilai and infuses into the main thread of the tale. Like that of Chitralekha, Nittilai raises questions against the hegemonic world of the Brahmins. She is a soft-hearted girl and she stands in sharp contrast to the high-caste Brahmins and their rituals. She loves Aravasu because of his humanism and criticizes the secret manners of Brahmins. Through Nittilai, Karnad makes contrast between the Brahmin and the Sudra world. He exposes the race for power among the ascetic males Yavakri, Raibhya and Paravasu – a problem which is frighteningly contemporary – and emphasizes that Brahminism is not Godism. In this context, Dharwadker observes: "The play thus associates brahminism with mind-games, egocentrism, sterility, and ruthlessness, and shudra culture with love, compassion, freshness, and hope, although the contrast is not simplistic or absolute" (CP 2, xviii). Through this contrast, Karnad effectively subverts the hegemonic structure of the original myth. He subverts the popular hegemony underlying in the Indian society, the division and discrimination on the basis of caste.

Arvasu's character is extended in the myth by making him a lover of Nittilai and also as an actor. His function as an actor further complicates the treatment of Brahmanism: according to beliefs, acting is a profession assigned to Sudras. But, the accusation of parricide makes Arvasu an

outcaste and hence, an actor. The ending of the play retains the different treatment given to the myth by Karnad. When the myth offers the release and reunion through Arvasu's penance, the play conveys a complex ending. The fire sacrifice done to propitiate Lord Indra succeeds, in spite of the various desecrations of the *yajna* site. The reason for appearance of God is ambiguous: it may that the brilliant acting of Arvasu in the play-within-the play, or the humanity of Nittilai or the implied sacrifice of Paravasu in the *Yajna* as atonement for his sins. In contrast to the mythical ending of the various resurrections, the play ends with the "real life" sacrifice of Arvasu in choosing for the—————— Brahma Rakshasa's release, instead of Nittilai's rebirth. The final scene of the rainfall confirms the success of the *Yajna*.

Along with the myth of Yavakri, Karnad interfaces two more myths that account for the intertextuality in the play *The Fire and The Rain.* The play-within-the play itself deals with two myths: the myth concerning the origin of theatre and the famous myth of Indra and Vritra. The myth concerning the origin of drama is described through the words of the Actor Manager:

> Sirs, as is well known to you, Brahma, the Lord of All
> Creation extracted the requisite elements from the four Vedas
> and combined them into a fifth Veda and thus gave birth to the

art of Drama. He handed if over to his son, Lord Indra, the God of the Sskies. Lord India, in turn, passed on the art to Bharata, a human being, for the gods cannot indulge in pretence. (CP -2, 107)

Through the Actor Manager, Karnad smoothly infuses the myth regarding the origin of dramatic art. It creates a circumstance for revisiting, and celebrating, the myth of the divine origins of theatre.

The Indra-Vritra myth, which forms the play-within-the play, concerns with the theme of brother destroying brother through treachery. It reflects and emphasizes the betrayal of Paravasu. Revision is also done in the myth of Indra and Vritra. As Karnad explains in the notes to the play, Indra in the *Mahabharata* is:

> . . . anxious that Vishwarupa . . ., son of Tvastri, may dislodge him from his throne. He therefore destroys Vishwarupa treacherously. Tvastri then gives birth to another son, Vritra, by a female demon and tells him: 'Kill India.' Indra, unable to overcome the new enemy, again has to resort to ignominious trickery to survive. Having killed Vritra, he suffers from the guilt of Brahminicide. (CP 2, 296)

But, in the play, Vishwarupa and Vritra are portrayed as inseparable brothers and how the treacherous killing of Vishwarupa by Indra turns Vritra to a real

demon. It is reworked to emphasize the betrayal of Arvasu by Paravasu in the play. Hence, *The Fire and The Rain* forms the most complex play of Karnad in which various myths are incorporated in a revised form to deconstruct the supremacy of the Brahminical codes in the Indian society and to offer a subversion of the patriarchal society. Karnad has devised the techniques of canonical counter-discourse and intertextuality in the treatment of this play.

Bali: The Sacrifice makes use of the thirteenth century Kannada Epic, *Yashodhara charite*, which in turn can be traced back to two eleventh – and ninth-century Sanskrit epics. Karnad employs his method of realistic fictional elaboration in *Bali.* In this regard, Dharwadker observes:

> Karnad transforms the story of the dough figurine that comes alive at the moment of sacrifice into a mature philosophical exploration of love, jealousy, desire, betrayal, and violence between men and women who are bound by the ties of blood and marriage, or encounter each other in the perfect freedom of anonymity. (CP 1, xxxiii)

Karnad has effectively dramatized the myth of the Cock of Dough to bring out the idea that violence is pervasive and often masked by other actions and aspects.

Karnad makes alteration in the sources and invents sub-plots or tales intertwined into the main plot. It is a process, as Dharwadker observes, "of 'realistic' fictional elaboration" that Karnad employs in treatment of his plays (CP 1, xxxiii). Though these alterations do not serve as a counter-discursive pattern, they serve to emphasize Karnad's design to dismantle the hegemonies of the society. The plays dealing with folktales also incorporate this device. In *Hayavadana,* the main theme of incompteness, search for identity, hybridity, and so on are emphasized by the invented plot of Hayavadana. The story of Hayavadana supports the main plot throughout the play and it is in tune with all the qualities of a myth/folktale: fusion of animal and human world, supernatural intervention, and an aura of mystery. It tells the story of a beautiful princess falling in love with a white stallion ad their union results in the birth of Hayavadana, a horse-faced man. The hybrid identity of Hayavadana introduces and emphasizes the hybridity faced by the principal characters. Karnad chooses Mann's version of the tale, instead of the real version of *Vetal Panchavimshati* which had "incest" theme at its core. His version emphasizes the identity crisis and challenges the glib solutions offered in the original story (Puranas).

In *Flowers: A Monologue,* Karnad focuses on the legend of Veeranna of the Chitradurga region which became well known after T.R.Subbanna's novel, *Hamsageethe*. Subbanna's version of the tale focuses on the triangular contest between the priest (Veeranna), the temple singer (Venkatasubbayya) and the

chieftain. The novel is about the temple priest's passionate affair with the mistress who when caught challenges the God to display hair or accept his head. In his monologue, Karnad shifts his focus to a different direction.   In this regard, Dharwadker comments:

> Karnad preserves the core event of the *shivalinga* sprouting hair, but recasts the legend as a conflict between religious devotion and exotic love, undergirded by the priest's guilt of his daily betrayal of his wife. (CP 2, xxxii)

Hence, the original tale is elaborated by Karnad in the monologue to explore the conflicting relationship between the main characters. He always tries to give typically human characteristics/traits to the mythical or legendary figures, thereby naturalizing them in a realistic portrayal.

Karnad's realistic fictional elaboration of the source is not limited to myths and folktales; this can be clearly seen in his history plays too. Though Karnad adheres to the history given by Barani, in the portrayal of the characters and events in the play *Tughlaq*, the playwright's brilliance is evident in the incorporation of the episode of Aziz and Aazam. This episode is purely invented by Karnad to show the double of Tughlaq who shares/understands the vision of Tughlaq, though for foul use. He is the inverted/antithetical double of Tughlaq, who subverts all of Tughlaq's well-intentioned moves. In ————————*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Karnad

gives convincing portraits of the principal characters. But he creates an imaginative plot and resonant dialogue to contain their experience.

The dramatic techniques of Indian classical and folk theatre forms enjoy an important place in the postcolonial, contemporary plays. The notion of "traditional Indian theatre" covers both the classical Sanskrit theatre and the regional folk forms. The classical is associated with the more refined and sophisticated tradition that is linked to the urban life and folk is less privileged and is associated with the rural life. Hence, the terms, classical and folk, compliments and opposes each other and they are the modes of cultural transmission and preservation.

In the postcolonial stage, the traditional folk theatre forms gain a renewed relevance and prestige after a century long denigration as a crude indigenous form by the colonial and Indian urban elites. The reason for the new engagement of the dramatists with folk forms by is obvious: " . . . the category of "folk" brings into play the most complex range of ideological, political, socio-cultural, and aesthetic polarities in contemporary India" (Dharwadker, 311). The energy and vitality of the folk performance forms make them different from the other traditional forms. They facilitate the scheme of denaturalization in making the theatre antithetical to the conventional tradition:

> In terms of aesthetic form, the essentially stylized, antimodern,
> antirealistic, open-air, environmental qualities of folk
> performance constitute a form of "total theatre" antithetical
> to the seemingly regimented products of the enclosed
> proscenium   stage. (Dharwadker, 312)

The employment of both folk materials and the variety of its theatrical modes makes the theatre livelier and more interactive. Hence, the legacy of the folk theatre transforms to a powerful resource for the postcolonial dramatists. The Folk repertoire thus appears as a historical legacy as well as a powerful resource in the present.

As a representative of the postcolonial age, Karnad makes a self-conscious application of the native theatrical conventions. He embraces the elements of both Classical and folk traditions in his plays. Though they maintain peripheral distinctions, Karnad concludes that both the forms share common aesthetic principles: ". . . there was no difference between the folk and the classical drama: the aesthetic principles are the same" (Ahuja, *The Tribune*). Karnad defends his stand in exploring the rich sources of Indian folk traditions. His interest is not in the sheer imitation of the form of these indigenous traditions, but in an exploration of the human concerns through the traditional techniques:

The basic thing, I discovered, is that the subject of any play has to be the human spirit. Using folk as a mere aesthetic device — with no further exploration of what it is to be human — does not attract me. It is not the question of garnishing the plays with music, colour and dance — . . . Of course, folk forms do have certain intrinsic advantages. The folklorist framework subverts classical notions about our holy cows; through tongue-in-the cheek irony, folk tales make fun of rulers, priests, even gods — without offending even the puritans. (Ahuja, *The Tribune).*

The flexible nature of the folk forms facilitates effective performances. Hence, Karnad fully exploits the potentials of traditional theatres in all possible ways. He adapts the themes, structure, style, and narrative techniques of these native traditions to make his theatre more engaging.

Karnad adapts the structure of classical/folk drama in framing many of his plays. Most of his plays based on myths and folktales employ this indigenous structure. In his first play *Yayati*, the inner play of King Yayati's tale is introduced through the Sutradhara, the stage manager of the classical tradition. The structure of *Yayati* follows more convincingly the tradition of the Sanskrit drama rather than that of the folk drama. Except at the

beginning and the end of the play Sutradhara keeps away from the scene in tune with a classical Sanskrit play.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad uses a twelfth century folktale and employs the specific conventions of the Kannada folk theatre, *Yakshagana*. The structure of a traditional folk drama usually consists of a double frame: an outer rhetorical frame consisting of the Bhagavata (sutradhar) with one or two comic characters and an inner frame of a dramatized narrative. Accordingly, in *Hayavadana* the outer frame consists of the Bhagavata, the female chorus and the two comic actors who prepares to render the story of Padmini which forms the inner frame. But Karnad employs a self-conscious manipulation of the structure of the folk drama in *Hayavadana.* Unlike a traditional folk performance where the outer play frames the inner story, *Hayavadana* offers a complex structure. In this context, Dharwadker observes:

> While the action of folk theatre moves between a frame and the inner play, in *Hayavadana* there are two outer plays, both belonging to the historical present, which intersect unpredictably with each other and with the action of the inner play. (336)

The rendering of inner play of Padmini is disrupted by the frame of Hayavadana, the horse-faced man, who is in search of completeness. Thus,

there are two outer plays that intersect with the inner story. The play does not end with Padmini's tale: both the frames are infused in the end where Hayavadana, now a horse with a human voice, meets Padmini's son (morose) and both achieves completion. As rejected beings, Hayavadana and Padmini's son attains completion through each other. There is a complete merging of the outer and the inner plays in *Hayavadana*.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad repeats the folk structure of the outer frame and an inner play or the play-within-the play. Here also Karnad introduces a complex structure. The outer play consists of the fictional writer (Man), the Story and the Flames. The outer play introduced through the prologue consists of multiple frames: one about a fictional writer who can continue to survive only if he keeps awake for one whole night, another about the gathering of lamp flames in a village temple to exchange gossip about households and finally another frame about a *Story* and a song personified as a beautiful young woman in a colourful sari. Rani's tale narrated by the Story forms the inner play of *Naga-Mandala*. The structure of the inner play also has an added complication with the secondary story of Kurudava and her son Kappanna. Kappanna's hallucinations of a female spirit, his final abduction by her leaving the desolate, inconsolable blind mother are not fully explored by Karnad in the play. It is effectively blended into Rani's tale. Here also the play does not end with Rani's story.

It concludes with the alterations made by the Man. At the request of the Fflames, the writer improvises the ending of Rani's story by giving it a happy ending. Hence, Rani's tale is given double ending: the tragic end (the death of Naga) devised by the Story and the happy ending given by the Man.

The use of the traditional structure of folk plays helps the postcolonial writers in several ways. The play's reflexive frames leave the individual author firmly outside the narratives. The narration is effectively done by the stock characters freeing the playwright as an outsider in the performance. In this context, Dharwadker comments:

> The frames also enable the playwrights to locate the performance (as distinct from the narrative of the inner play) in the historical and political present, and hence to create an ironic disjunction between the premodern narrative of the inner play and the ————post-colonial positioning of the outer.
>
> In its totality, the play then acquires an ineluctable contemporaneity. (328)

The framing of the play widens the scope of the playwright to locate the performance in the present by giving direct/indirect references to the contemporary.

In most of Karnad's plays, the outer frame helps in placing the play in a contemporary context. In *Hayavadana,* Karnad voices his comments and criticisms on contemporary politics, government and so on through the Bhagavata, the actors and Hayavadana. All the interactions between them refer to the present social situation. The Bhagavata admires the civic sense of Hayavadana when he prevents the actor's attempt to urinate on public road pointing it out as a public nuisance. Hayavadana's conversation with the Bhagavata is flooded with contemporary concerns:

> My personal life has naturally been blameless. So I took interest in the social life of the Nation – Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist Pattern of Society . . . —I have tried everything. (9)

Contemporaneity can also be seen in the reference to the National Anthem at the end of the inner play; Actor II's reference to Hayavadana's singing of the patriotic songs: "He was singing, *Jhanda Ooncha Rahe Hamara . . . Sare Jahan se Acchha Hindostan Hamara . . . Rise, Rise my Kannada Land.* Then *Vande Mataram . . .*" (64-65). Hayavadana's ironical comment is based on his attempt to rid off his human voice by singing patriotic songs:

> That's why I sing all these patriotic songs – and the National Anthem! That particularly! I have noticed that the people singing the National Anthem always seem to have ruined their voices – so I try. (69)

Hayavadana also comments on the presence of sentimentality in Indian life and literature, its misleading effects encouraging escapism and turning away from reality. These all work together in making the play strikingly contemporary. When Hayavadana makes ironic comment on the false patriotism of people, the Bhagavata makes direct criticism on the politics and political leaders of contemporary India through his concluding lines: "Give the rulers of our country success in all endeavours, and along with it, a little bit of sense" (71). The outer frame of the play is instrumental in placing the play in the "historical and political" context of the present. It also ~~in~~ gives the playwright an occasion to criticise the deterioration of the contemporary Indian politics.

In *Naga-Mandala* also the framing serves a similar purpose. Instead of placing the play in the political present, the outer frame of the play helps in highlighting the contemporary concerns in the play as well as in the stage performance. As it deals with a fictional playwright, his comments, observations, and so on are related to theatre. He is cursed to die, unless he can keep awake for one whole night. His strange curse is a result of his profession as a playwright:

> You have written plays. You have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who came trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs, –that all that abused

>   mass of sleep has turned against you and become the Curse
>
>   of Death. (CP I, 248)

The reference to playwrighting and staging of plays helps in linking them to the contemporary times. It also helps in criticising the bad playwrights/writers who punish their readers/audiences in the name of "creativity." The reference to audience is also seen after the rendering of Rani's tale by the Story. When the Flames (audience) are about to leave, the Man says: "These Flames are worse than my audience. Can't they wait till the story is over?" (CP I, 293). Hence, in *Naga-Mandala*, the outer frame helps in linking the play to the contemporary social/cultural situation. Thus, in both the plays the inner play is linked to the pre-modern world, while the outer frame is connected to the postcolonial world.

In *The Fire and The Rain* also Karnad employs the structure of a play-within-a play. The outer drama narrating the story of Yavakri, Paravasu and Arvasu is a contrast and complement to the inner play of Vritra and Indra. As the seven-year penance to appease the God Indra comes near its end, a troupe of actors arrives and seeks permission to enact a drama. The presence of Arvasu in both the frames, as a victim in the real actions of the outer play, and as an actor in the inner frame, links the two frames. As in other plays, both the frames get fused in the end as Arvasu get possessed by the mask of Vritra and starts desecrating the fire sacrifice

unexpectedly leading to rain. *The Fire and The Rain* is the most meta-theatrical play of Karnad; it tells the story of the origin of theatre and includes a play with in its outer frame.

Among the various devices used by Karnad to denaturalize his theatre and make it truly indigenous, the technique of Sutradhara of the Classical tradition or the Bhagavata of the *Yakshagana* tradition is of vital importance. The Sutradhara, the stage manager mentioned in Bharata's *Natya Sastras* literally means "thread holder;" he was employed in puppet theatre as well as in drama proper. Karnad employs the device of Sutradhara in his first play Yayati. In the prologue of the play, the Sutradhara is seen introducing himself and his functions in a performance:

> Good evening. I am the Sutradhara, which literally means 'the holder of strings' . . . In effect, I am the person who has conceived the structure here, whether of brick and mortar or of words. I have designed and consecrated the stage. I am responsible for the choice of the text. And here I am now, to introduce the performance and to ensure that it takes place without any hindrance. (5)

Karnad gives a vivid description of the origin and function of the Sutradhara as maintained in the Classical tradition. He is seen at the beginning and the

end of the play. The play ends in the classical tradition with the commentary by Sutradhara on the ending and the possible interpretation of the ending.

A more elaborated use of the Sutradhara is seen in *Hayavadana,* through the figure of the Bhagavata, a successor of the Sutradhara. In *Yakshagana* folk theatre, the Bhagavata is the commentator-narrator, who is the controller of stage actions, of musicians, of dancers and, of course, the storyteller. During the entire course of the play the Bhagavata is present on the stage with his band of musicians. The play begins as a typical *Yakshagana* play with the invocation of the presiding deity, Ganesha by the Bhagavata. He introduces "our actor" by the name Nata, which is in fact the Sanskrit word Nata, meaning an actor or dancer. Bhagavata's introduction of the various characters, his constant dialogue with the audience and comic exchanges with Nata at the beginning of the play correspond quite closely to the structure of a *Yakshagana* performance. He decides the time when the half-curtain must be brought in or withdrawn, symbolic of a God who decides the amount of illusion to be purveyed. The Bhagavata, who is a God-like omnipresence in the "theatre" of the play, is involved intimately with every character.

Karnad's use of the character of the Bhagavata contributes a lot to the achievement of the play. —He does not merely borrow this dramatic

technique from the *Yakshagana* tradition, but widens its scope. Karnad's Bhagavata is not just a commentator-narrator; he makes him one of the characters. In the play we see him as an actor in many situations. After the transposition of heads we see him consoling Kapila: "Kapila – Kapila… Don't grieve. It's fate, Kapila, and ..." (41). He is also shown talking to Kapila before Padmini reaches Kapila's hut and later to Devadatta when he comes in search of Padmini. Bhagavata also forms a character when Padmini, before committing *sati,* entrusts her child with him. This helps Karnad to achieve in the play what Mann achieves in the story through the third person narrator.

The Bhagavata in the play, in fact, indulges in the technique of cyclic narration. He cycles back from the present to the past, returns to the present again, builds tale within tale, delays climaxes and superimposes features of traditional narrations and oral literatures. Throughout the play, the Bhagavata acts as an omniscient narrator and throws light on the inner workings of the character's mind. There are many instances in the play when the Bhagavata speaks the voice of the characters. He effectively conveys Devadatta's agonized mind before they set out for the Ujjain trip. He says:

> Why do you tremble, heart? Why do you cringe like a
> touch-me-not bush through which a snake has passed? The sun

rests his head on the Ffortune Llady's flower. And the head is

bidding ——good-bye to the heart. (24-25)

The Bhagavata also shows a deeper knowledge of Padmini's character; her

desire for a "complete" man.   This is conveyed by his comment when

Padmini meets Kapila again:

> As I saw him change – I couldn't get rid of you. That's what
>
> Padmini must tell Kapila. She should say more, without
>
> concealing anything: 'Kapila, if that *rishi* had given –me to
>
> you,
>
> would I have gone back to Devadatta some day exactly like
>
> this?'   But she doesn't say anything. She remains
>
> quiet. (56)

This is a dramatic technique used by Karnad to make the dialogue and

situation more effective by revealing the inner psyche of his characters.

    While sketching the characterization of the play, Karnad does not

merely adopt the Bhagavata of the *Yakshagana* tradition.   Karnad's comic

character, Nata stated as "our actor," is an extension of *Hanumanyaka* of

Yakshagana plays (2).   The comic element of the play is provided by the

encounter between Nata and Hayavadana.   Karnad allows Hayavadana to

make many contemporary references to political and social issues, which the

Yakshagana comedians are similarly permitted to.

In *Naga-Mandala,* the Man and the Story serve the purpose of the Bhagavata or the Sutradhara. The Man introduces himself as a playwright who is cursed to die unless he can stay awake the whole night. Similar to the Bhagavata, he comments on several instances in the play: on the arrival of the bodiless flames, the oral tale about their secret gathering in a temple for gossiping, reveals to the audience the reason behind the performance of the play, summons the musicians, criticizes the loose ends in the story, improvises the tale rendered by the Story, and concludes the performance.

The Story, personified as a young woman in a sari, also exhibits the traits of the Sutradhara. In the prologue, she comments on the oral nature of folk tales in her conversation with the Man: "But what is the point of your listening to a story? You can't pass it on . . . You can't just listen to the story and leave it at that. You must tell it again to some one else" (CP I, 252). Act One begins with the Story addressing the audience with Rani's tale:

> A young girl. Her name . . . it doesn't matter. But she was
> an only daughter, so her parents called her Rani. Queen.
> Queen of the whole wide world. Queen of the long
> tresses. (CP I, 253)

The Story is the narrator of the inner play and plays the same role of Bhagavata in *Hayavadana*. She intervenes at several places in the inner

play. In the scene where Rani grinds the large root for preparation in the curry, she asks the Story: "Shall I pour it in" to which the Story replies in the affirmative (CP I, 265). It is the Story which makes a decisive shift in the play by advising Rani to pour the love potion to the ant-hill: "Rani, put it in that –ant-hill" (CP I, 266). The Story acts as a "string-holder" in the inner play and maintains a constant presence both in the inner play and in the outer play.

The Story also acts as a commentator-narrator like the Bhagavata. She narrates and explains the events in the play: "As you know, a cobra can assume any form it likes. That night, it entered the house through the bathroom drain and took the shape of –" Appanna (CP I, 267). It narrates the fight between Naga and the watch-animals, Naga's absence for many nights, his return and the bodily disparity between Naga and Appanna, Rani's reversal of status as a goddess, provides a conclusion to Naga's story on the demand of the Man, and so on. Throughout the play, the Man and the Story remain on the stage and help in the effective performance of the play.

The framing technique is also used in Karnad's history play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. The play is framed through Kirmani's attempts to write an objective history of the dead Tipu Sultan for the English. The scenes of Kirmani and Colin Mackenzie form the outer frame in which

Tipu's life and death are framed. Thus, the account of Tipu's life and dreams forms the inner play of the play. Though Karnad does not employ the device of the Bhagavata, the characters of Kirmani and Mackenzie act as choric characters throughout the play.   In this regard, Dharwadker comments:

> . . . Kirmani and Mackenzie serve as the chorus for a highly selective and reflexive history that unfolds cyclically, beginning with the day of Tipu's last battle and returning to it via crucial stages in his slide towards defeat and death. (CP 2, xxvi)

Kirmani's and Mackenzie's conversation occurs at Kirmani's house. The outer frame regarding the discussion on history writing, the "legend" of Tipu, the scene where his body is found, and so on are narrated by these two. For the rest of the play, they act as choric characters. Act One ends with the choric role by the two regarding the invasion of Mysore by English under Lord Cornwallis, the Nizam and the Marathas. In Act Two, they reappear together to comment on the defeat Tipu and the reunion of Tipu with his sons:

> Mackenzie: The defeat of Tipu was a personal triumph for Lord Cornwallis. The stigma of York town was washed off. The crown conferred on him the title of 'Marquis' . . .

> Kirmani: It was two years before Tipu's sons were restored to him. When they were reunited, the boys laid their heads on their father's feet and he, leaning forward, touched them on their necks. No words were spoken. (CP 2, 229)

They also narrate the passage of time and the events happened: "Lord Cornwallis was succeeded by Sir John Shore as the Governor General. Seven years of peace ensued . . ." (CP 2, 229). The play also ends with the observations and comments from them. Kirmani describes the last battle of Tipu where he was tragically betrayed by his own officers. Mackenzie narrates the achievement of the whites in defeating Tipu and about the sons of Tipu. Hence the play begins and ends with the narration of Kirmani and Mackenzie; the life and death of Tipu are framed by their narration. They act as distant observers and also as participants in the actions of the play.

Another important technique of the traditional theatre, half-curtain, is used by Karnad in *Hayavadana*. In traditional forms like *Yakshagana*, *Kathakali* and *Krishna Attam* half-curtain held by two stage hands are used instead of the conventional front curtains. In these traditional forms, the entry of a figure or the presentation of a terrible figure/sight is done with the help of curtains. Karnad makes use of this technique in the introduction

scene of Hayavadana to evoke as a mode of suspense. The stage directions in this are clear:

> Two stage hands enter and hold up a half-curtain, above six feet in height – the sort of curtain used in *Yakshagana* or *Kathakali*. The curtain masks the entry of Hayavadana, who comes and stands behind it . . . The curtain is lowered by about a foot. One sees Hayavadana's head, which is covered by a veil. At a sign from the Bhagavata, one of the stage-hands removes the veil, revealing a horse's head . . . The curtain is lowered a little ———more – just enough to show the head again. Again it ducks. Again the curtain is lowered. This goes on till the curtain is lowered right down to the floor. (5)

Curtains are also used to denote the end of an act or scene. At the end of the Act One, stage hands enter and hold "a white curtain in front of the frozen threesome while the Bhagavata and others relax and sip tea" (39). The same device is used in the presentation of some important scenes. The terrifying appearance of Goddess Kali before the transposition scene and her exit are presented with the help of half-curtains. Painted curtains carried by stage hands are used to convey the scene of Padmini's *Sati.* The stage directions describes: "The stage-hands lift the curtain, slowly, very slowly, as the song goes on. The curtain has a blazing fire painted on it. And as it is lifted, the flames seem to leap up" (63). The final scene also shows the same painted

curtain. The curtain is lowered and dropped and Padmini, Kapila and Devadatta are seen stepping forward to join the Bhagavata's final prayer. Hence the use of half-curtains of the indigenous theatre, which also acts as a denaturalizing device, helps in indigenising his theatre.

Yet another device of the folk tradition, "dolls" or "puppets," help Karnad to make his narrative more effective. Karnad employs the use of dolls in *Hayavadana*; they appear as a derivate of the traditional puppets. As inanimate objects, puppets are used in a play or performance. Though not necessarily a character in the play, puppets are used to convey different things. In *Hayavadana,* the androgynous dolls brought from *Ujjain* fair for the child becomes an apt device for Karnad to convey the passage of time and the gradual transformation of Devadatta's body. His transfiguration is communicated through the dolls' exchanges:

> Doll I: His palms! They were so rough, when he first brought
>
> us ——here. Like a labourer's. But now they are soft – sickly
>
> soft – like a young girl's . . .
>
> Doll II: His stomach. It was so tight and muscular. Now . . .
>
> Doll I: It's loose. (47)

The use of dolls also fulfils Karnad's purpose of revealing Padmini's suppressed longings for Kapila. The dolls report that in her reveries she perceives a man, not her husband, who "looks rougher and darker," who is

Kapila (49). Hence, the dolls serve the purpose of revealing the thought process of Padmini as well as the passage of time.

In the conventional forms, dolls are romantic figures and are often symbols of innocence. But Karnad's use of dolls conveys demystification of the concept. In the play, the two dolls are presented as lovely forms with evil tongue. They use vulgar language; they often interrupt the narrative by their fights and comments. By making the inanimate dolls talk, that too with an evil tongue, Karnad effectively conveys Brecht's process of defamiliarization and denaturalization of the theatre. Karnad consciously employ these dolls to show that in the second act of the play everything is fragmented, repetitious and —out-of-focus. This strategy of employing dolls has a dramatic purpose. It helps in the development of the plot.

Karnad employs an extensive use of miming in *Hayavadana*. Miming is used in the scene like "a cart-ride" to *Ujjain fair*, for knocking, Kapila's plucking of flowers for Padmini, picking up an axe, the child's whipping of Hayavadana, and so on. —This technique helps in the denaturalization of the conventional theatre. *Naga-Mandala* also uses a splendid use of miming technique. In the play, most of actions in the inner play of Rani are conveyed through miming. Appanna's locking of the doors, Rani's cooking, his bathing, eating, washing hands, mixing of paste of root

in the milk, Naga's miming of Cobra's head with his hand, and so on are some instances where mime is used as a theatrical technique. Its use helps in maintaining the simplicity of staging which is essential to the theatrical adaptation of the narrative. The technique is used by Karnad in other plays also.

Karnad employs the tradition of oral narration in his plays. In *Hayavadana,* the Bhagavata narrates the story of Padmini, Kapila and Devadatta, befitting the manner of a folk-tale:

> This is the city of Dharmapura, ruled by king Dharmasheela whose fame and empire have already reached the ends of the eight directions. Two youths who dwell in the city are our heroes. One is Devadatta . . . (1)

This oral structure of the narrative gives the play a distinctive indigenous style. Hayavadana's narration of his story is also in tune with the oral narrative form. Like a folk-tale, the play is a mixture of the human and non-humans, incomplete individuals, magnamious gods, vocal dolls and mute children. Karnad uses all these to create a queer magical world.

Naga-Mandala also follows an oral structure of narration. Act One begins with the Story narrating the tale of Rani perfectly like a folk-tale: "A young girl. Her name . . . it does not matter. But she was an only

daughter, so her parents called her Rani. Queen . . .” (CP I, 253). The play itself conveys

the nature of folk-tales. It has to be passed on from one person to another, as Karnad remarks:

> 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. (TCP I, 17314)

In the play the Story demands to the Man that the tale has to be passed on showing the oral method of transfer of folktales. The structure of the play shows the elasticity becoming of a folk-tale: the Story adds the missing links; the Man gives an alternative happy ending, and so on.

The device of supernatural/divine intervention is employed by Karnad in a number of plays. In *Hayavadana*, it is signified by the role played by goddess Kali. It becomes a device for Karnad to explore hidden motives of different characters. The goddess explains the real reasons for the sacrifices given by both the men. Devadatta promised to give his head to Rudra and arms to Kali in return for fulfilling his craving to marry Padmini. But instead he gives his head to Kali. The Goddess reveals that he had no other option and that the two men were lying to their last breaths. She points

out that Padmini told the truth because she is selfish. Padmini's act of mixing up heads is explained by Kali's words, "My dear daughter, there should be a limit even to—— honesty" (33). The goddess here identifies Padmini's attempt to get a complete man. The solution offered by the Goddess is no solution. Kali allows Padmini to carry on her mistake when she understands Padmini's "honesty." The transposition further complicates the problem. The bodies undergo transgression and the problem remains unsolved.

In *Flowers*, supernatural intervention is effected by the incident of the *Linga* sprouting hair to save the priest from disgrace. His lie about the hair of God is made true by the miraculous sprouting of hair by the *Shiva Linga*. But here also the basic problem remains unsolved. The priest prays for strength to face the humiliation and instead God saves him from humiliation. The solution offered by God, in fact intensifies the agony of the priest, as in the case of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila. The priest is fully aware that he has tainted himself: "Guilty of cruelty to the two women I loved" (CP 2, 260). He refuses to accept the burden of grace which god has placed upon his shoulder and revolts against god by committing suicide.

In *Fire and the Rain*, the appearance of Lord Indra in the final scene depicts the intervention of divine powers. After the play performed by

Arvasu and the actors, Indra appears and says that he is pleased with Arvasu. But here also the God does not act in the way humans demand. When Indra declares that he is pleased with Arvasu, he reacts: "Indra? But what do I have to do with Indra? I didn't seek Indra, or any other god. Yavakri did. Paravasu ——————did" (CP 2, 173). Gods are seen pleased not with those who seek for them. Karnad hints that God's plans are different from men's. It is reflected in Vritra's (Arvasu's) words in the play-within the play:

> They say gods should never be trusted . . . Indeed, it's said that when the gods speak to us, the meaning they attach to each word is quite different from the meaning we humans attach to it. Thus *their* side of their speech often denies what *our* side of their speech promises. (CP 2, 168)

This kind of portrayal of supernatural characters and the complex meanings they suggest makes Karnad's plays highly suggestive. Man's problems are his own. Gods cannot solve or give solution to human problems; it has to be devised by humans themselves.

The device of supernatural/divine intervention helps Karnad to assert a more serious issue. He hints that gods and goddess have no part in human sufferings. There are no readymade solutions for human problems. Man's problems are his own and will be solved only by human effort. Old

solutions cannot be applied to new situations; new situations need new solutions. Hence, the solutions offered by divine beings - *Kali, Shiva linga* and Lord *Indra* are portrayed as ineffective to solve human problems. Brechtian influence on Karnad is seen here: in Brecht too the problems of the world are raised, not solved. The inclusion of supernatural figures also helps in creating the Brechtian alienation effect in theatre performance.

Shape-lifting or the metamorphosis from one form to another is a remarkable device used by Karnad in his plays. Both *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* employs this technique. In *Hayavadana*, the most obvious case is the character of Hayavadana. In the beginning of the play he is presented as a horse-faced man, but towards the end of the play Hayavadana is changed into a complete horse with the intervention of Goddess Kali. Another instance is the story about the parents of Hayavadana. His father, a white stallion is said to have changed into a *Gandharva*, a celestial being. He was actually a celestial being cursed to become a horse due to some mis-behaviour. Shape-lifting is also used in the case of Hayavadana's mother, who was cursed to transform into a mare when she refused to follow her husband to heaven. Thus, the technique is effectively employed by Karnad in the play.

In *Naga-Mandala*, there are several instances of shape-lifting. The most obvious one is the case of Cobra turning into Naga. The King

Cobra assumes the form of Appanna to win Rani's love. In this regard, Pranav Joshipura remarks: "Shape lifting in Karnad is not merely a central structural strategy but a means of reviving the ancient and sacred function of drama as ritual" (Dodiya, 261). Karnad brilliantly links the device of shape-lifting to Indian ritualistic beliefs. The Story endorses this view: "As you know, a cobra can assume any form it likes" (CP 1, 267). In the prologue of the play, flames without wicks are shown taking human voices effecting certain kind of shape-lifting. The character of the Story is also represented as an example of this technique. One of the Flames tells the story of an old woman who knew a story and a song, but kept it inside her. At a perfect opportunity, the story and the song escapes and metamorphosis into a young woman in a beautiful sari. The story takes the form of the young woman and song becomes her colourful sari. Rani's elevation of status from a tainted woman to a living goddess can be seen as a special case of shape-lifting. Here, it is not "shape" lifting, but "status" lifting.

Another instance of metamorphosis is used in *Yayati*. The pronouncement of the curse and premature ageing of Puru is a case of shape-lifting. Puru is transformed from his prime youth to old-age and decrepitude. The transformation is intensified by describing the withered features of the "old" Puru. The artifice of metamorphosis is mythical, ritualistic and traditional and it lends an innovative form to the play.

Karnad employs the folk theatre techniques in his plays both as a weapon of resistance against the dominant colonial forms and as an effective tool for denaturalizing the realist modes of European theatre. He has applied the alienation effect of Brechtian theatre in the play through the innovative use of an indigenous Indian tradition. Hence, the alienation techniques propounded by Brecht helps in making the indigenous writers aware of the potentials of native forms.

The postcolonial inclusions of traditional enactments like rituals and carnivals serve not only in the preservation of indigenous tradition / history but also prove to be an effective strategy for maintaining the cultural difference from the European theatrical forms. Among the traditional enactments, rituals stand out as they are intricately linked to the indigenous culture. Their role is a vital one in the colonial world as they make explicit the native culture's ——pre-colonial reality. Ritualization of drama is in fact an indigenizing process adopted by postcolonial dramatists to enrich their plays with the native performative elements/devices. Their incorporations prove to be an effective means in the subordination of the cultural hegemony practiced by the colonizers. Ritualistic elements in the postcolonial plays are symbolic forms of resistance which help in overthrowing those cultural hegemonies.

The role of rituals in Indian theatre is a significant one. The long history of the coexistence of rituals and theatre in Indian devotional drama, dealing with mythical themes lends testimony to this. As the defining characteristic of the Indian community, ritual finds place in the postcolonial theatre. Like other postcolonial Indian playwrights, Karnad also incorporates ritualistic elements in his plays. Most of his plays based on myths and folktales employ extensive use of Indian rituals. He utilizes both the ways of the employment of rituals in postcolonial plays that Gilbert and Tompkins discuss. One is dramas which centre on a ritual and the other is plays which use rituals as a backdrop for the action. In the first type, rituals become the determining factor of the play's structure and style; so theatrical as well as ritual transformations are given prime importance in them. *The Fire and The Rain* is such a play which centres on ritual activity. Almost all other plays of Karnad belong to the second category where rituals serve as a backdrop of the action, but not central event/theme of the play.

In The *Fire and The Rain,* rituals become a central event. The play centres on the fundamental Indian ritual of the fire sacrifice that completely dominated the mode of thinking from the Vedic period. The *Yajna* or the fire sacrifice, as Karnad describes;

> . . . is performed on behalf of an individual householder, technically called the sacrificer, accompanied by his wife, but

> all the ritual acts are performed by priests, varying in number
> from one to sixteen and ultimately seventeen officiants in the
> full . . . sacrifice . . ." (CP 2, 293)

The sacrifice is in essence a periodic ritual performed on behalf of the sacrificer by which the universe is created. The sacrifices were offered in the beginning to Gods to bestow some favour or to ward off some danger. But, in the later stages it came to be performed to persuade the gods to grant what the sacrificer wanted to be done. Thus, fire sacrifices continued to be offered to god by kings and wealthy individuals (*Yajamana*) to attain the benefits like son, cattle, wealth, rains, longevity of life and so on.

The prologue of the play itself takes us to the fire sacrifice performed for rains: "It has not rained adequately for nearly ten years. Drought grips the land. A seven-year long fire sacrifice (*yajna*) is being held to propitiate Indra, the god of rains" (CP 2, 105). The stage directions give details of the sacrificial scene:

> Fire burns at the centre of step-like brick altars. There are
> several such altars, at all of which priests are offering oblations
> to the fire, while singing the prescribed hymns in unison. The
> priests are all dressed in long flowing seamless piece of cloth,
> and wear sacred threads. The king, who is the host, is
> similarly dressed but has his head covered. (CP 2, 105)

The fire sacrifice is done aiming at public welfare – to get rain. Karnad gives the exact details of the sacrificial scene where the Brahmins are tired of the seven years of continual *yajnas*: "These endless philosophical discussions, meta-physical speculations, debates. Every day!" (CP 2, 106). The onstage presentation of the sacrificial areas, the brick altars, the performance of rites and hymns, the final sacrifice of Paravasu are clearly staged. Though the plot of the play revolves around the myth of Yavakri, Paravasu, Arvasu and the invented link of Nittilai's story, *The Fire and the Rain* is engrossed in the ritualistic atmosphere of the *Yajna*. The clarity of the ritual presented on the stage increases the impact of the re-enactment of traditional practices.

Apart from the episode of fire sacrifice, the main plot – the myth of Yavakri, Paravasu and Arvasu with the invented strip of Nittila – is not free from ritual elements. The events like Yavakri's rigorous penance (*tapasya*) for universal knowledge is detailed by Andhaka:

> Ten years of rigorous penance. And still Lord Indra would not oblige. Finally, Yavakri stood in the middle of a circle of fire and started offering his limbs to the fire – first his fingers, then his eyes, then his entrails, his

> tongue, and at last, his heart – that's when the god
> appeared to him, restored him limbs, and granted him the
> boon. (CP 2, 115)

Yavakri's *tapasya* is not presented on stage, but the details are given. The play also gives the instance where Raibhya invoking the *kritya,* a male spirit. Raibhya's rites for invoking the *kritya* is given:

> Raibhya sits cross-legged and sinks into deep meditation . . .
> Raibhya opens his eyes, pulls out a strand of hair from
> his head and throws it to the ground. The Brahma Rakshasa
> appears. (CP2, 128)

The ritualistic invocation of the *kritya*, the *Brahma Rakshasa,* a condemned Brahmin spirit, Yavakri's *kamandalu* with consecrated water, the description of Raibhya's cremation, and performance of the rite of penitence and so on keep up the ritualistic atmosphere.

The myth of Indra and Vritra, which forms the play-within-the play, is performed at the interval of the sacrifice. The ritualistic mood prevails in the performance too. The final "sacrifice" of Paravasu in the burning pavilion refers to the actual, ancient practice of fire sacrifice. Karnad comments in the notes: ". . . the sacrifice was a sacrifice of the sacrificer himself and then successively   of   increasing   remote   substitutes   .   .   ." (CP 2, 293). The final scene of the appearance of Lord Indra completes the

total effect of the ritualistic atmosphere in the play as rain pours as a result of the sacrifice. The abundance of ritualistic acts in the play increases the impact of the style of the performance.

Ritual elements are also seen in other plays of Karnad more as a mood setter and as a backdrop of the action. Rituals, in this context, "supports the action in such a play and tends to be used as part of a larger recuperation of tradition/history . . ." (Gilbert and Tompkins, 73). Ritual here is an incidental activity. An instance is offered by *Hayavadana* which employs an extensive use of Indian/Hindu rituals. It follows the *Yakshagana* tradition of theatre, where a play starts and ends with rituals: the preliminary invocation of Gods and the concluding thanks giving or apologizing for any omissions. Following this frame, *Hayavadana* begins with the invocation of God *Ganesha*, the elephant-headed God who is the patron deity and the destroyer of obstacles: "At the beginning of the performance, a mask of Ganesha is brought on stage and kept on the chair. Pooja is done" (1). Lord Ganesha occupies a significant place in the Indian tradition and is worshipped at the beginning of every auspicious work. M.L.Varadpande, in *Traditions of Indian Theatre,* traces the pivotal role played by Lord Ganesha:

As Vighneshvara, he is the god whom the pious Hindu invokes when he begins all sacrifices and religious ceremonies, all

addresses even to superior gods, all serious composition in writing, and all worldly affairs of moment. (72)

As the God of intellect and the remover of obstacles, Ganesha is worshipped as "Mangalamoorthy," who makes every human endeavours a success. *Hayavadana* ends with the concluding prayer of Lord Ganesha for the successful completion of the play: "Unfathomable indeed is the mercy of the Eelephant-headed Ganesha. He fulfils the desires of all –" (71).

Hayavadana abounds with ritual acts in which most Indians, irrespective of caste and religion, indulges. Padmini's reference to touching of others' feet in respect is an important ritual act followed in India. It is done to pay respect to the elders. Padmini in the introductory scene refers to this practice to   Kapila: ". . . I've touched everyone's feet in this house some time or the other, but no one's ever touched mine? You will?" (18). Padmini's acts of biting her tongue and slapping on the cheeks in repentance shows her ritualistic behaviour. Her reference to Devadatta as "my saffron, my marriage-thread, my deity" underlines ritualistic observance of husband as God incarnate (21). Padmini's act of *Sati* also signals the ritualistic practice. Though portrayed in tune with the tradition, Padmini's acts are

described in a satiric mode. Her "ritualistic worship" of Devadatta, sati and so on are mocked at here.

Karnad also refers to the Indian ritualistic worships and sacrifices in *Hayavadana*. Indian ritualistic superstitions are mocked at through Hayavadana's attempts to accomplish completeness:

> Banaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar, Gaya, Kedarnath – not only those but the *Dargah* of Khwaja Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of Our Virgin Mary – I've tried them all. Magicians, mendicants, Maharishis, fakirs, saints and sadhus . . . I've covered them all. (9)

Devadatta's pledge to offer his head to Lord Rudra and arms to goddess Kali reminds of ancient Indian rituals of offering sacrifices to Gods for their accomplishment of desires. Indians still continue this practice of offering to God, though not human sacrifices. The reference to poojas and *mangalarati* in Kali temple, the presence of Goddess Kali, rishies, pundits, and temples enhances the ritualistic atmosphere of the play.

Ritual elements reappear in Karnad's next play *Naga-Mandala*. In framing the supernatural plot of the play, Karnad successfully uses the rituals that lingers around Cobra or snake worship in India. Snakes or Nagas enjoys a prominent role in Hindu mythology and is associated with several

Gods like Vishnu (Ananda), Shiva – who wears it around his neck – and the concepts like ——Naga-raja, worshipped by the Hindus for ages. In South India, many houses have their own shrine called the "sarpakavu" which is often a grove reserved for snakes, consisting of trees. These are festooned with creepers and are situated in a corner of the garden. The ritualistic worship of the *sarpakavu* and *Nagas* are employed by Karnad in *Naga-mMandala*. Rani's trial episode to prove her innocence by holding the king cobra of the ant-hill gives an instance of the age-old Indian ritual. Rani's success at the trial and her elevation to the level of a goddess signals the divinity that is attached to the worship of the *Nagas* in Indian culture. Nagas are capable of assuming any shape and form, as the Story comments in the play. The supernatural powers associated with Cobras in Hindus beliefs are highlighted by Karnad in the play.

Snakes are also the symbols of human maleness and strength. Nagas are sometimes portrayed as handsome men, or as half-man and half-snake, the top half using the torso of a man, the loser half a coiled snake. In the play, Karnad uses this concept to portray Naga as a passionate lover who cures Rani of her frigidity and serves in her empowerment. Hence, through the character of Naga, Karnad employs the ritualistic worships of snakes in south India and differentiates the play from Western tradition. His serves as a technique of indigenization of his theatre.

The play also gives instances of Indian beliefs. Rani's refusal to refer to Cobra (snake) at night resonate a popular Indian belief. Rani says: "Shh! Don't mention it. They say if you mention it by name at night, it comes into the house" (CP 1, 273). Appanna's act of searching for an untouchable to bury the dead dog, Rani's snake ordeal, her other choices like taking "the oath while holding a red-hot iron in the hand. . . to plunge the hand in boiling oil" reflect the ritualistic practices of rural India (CP 1, 288). Karnad also refers to the ritualistic practices of India in cremating the dead Cobra. Rani refers to Naga as one who has gifted their son (a father figure). The ritualistic acts of Hindu cremations are included by Karnad through Rani:

> A cobra. It has to be ritually cremated . . . When we cremate
>
> this snake, the fire should be lit by our son . . . And every year on
>
> this day, our son should perform the rituals to commemorate
>
> its death. (CP 1, 297-98)

These ritualistic observances are followed in India at the death of one's father/parents. In the play, Karnad uses it to illuminate the fact that *Naga* is the true father of Rani's child and also to emphasize her realization of the fact.

In *Bali: The Sacrifice,* Karnad draws attention to the ritualistic sacrifices practiced in India even today. The concept of *Bali*, the sacrifice, is deep-

rooted in the history of Indian civilization. Its presence is there right from the Vedic period, where the fire sacrifices conducted by the Brahmins included the slaughter of animals as an offering to the Gods. Though the Brahmins stopped the blood sacrifice of animals, it is still prevailing in different parts of the country, especially in remote areas. However, the sacrifices, though substituted by miniature figurines of dough, are widespread in the country even today. Karnad comments on this popular practice of the intentional violence in the notes to the play:

> Miniature figurines, made of dough, were substituted for live animals, a practice that continues to this day . . . Although no animals were slaughtered and no meet consumed, these figure of
>
> dough, mimicking the forms of real animals, clearly carried the original violent impulse within them. (CP 1, 316)

Though the act of violence is replaced, intentional violence continues which is no less dehumanizing. Thus, ritualistic practices of various sacrifices still prevail in India.

In the play, Karnad uses this ritualistic observance of sacrifices, both of animals (Queen Mother) and of the dough cock (King). Sacrifices are made both for pleasing gods, and as an atonement of sins. In *Bali*, the Queen Mother represents the older world that pursues with the sacrifices of

animals to please her goddess. Hence, she rears animals for sacrificing: "The animals are graded according to the occasion. Poultry is offered at daily rites. Sheep, goats for the more important rituals. Then buffalo" (CP 1, 212). The reference to greater extent of slaughter of animals as sacrifice at the king's birth refers to this ritualistic practice: "They say when you were born, every inch of the earth for miles around was soaked in blood" (CP 1, 213). These kinds of ritual sacrifices still prevail in India.

The sacrifice of dough figurines for atonement prevails in the present-day India. This symbolic form of sacrifice is widespread. It is based on the belief that our sins will be pardoned by the ritualistic sacrifice. The Queen Mother's and the king's proposal to sacrifice the dough cock as an atonement for the Queen's sin is in tune with this. The King says: "This is the offering. A sacrifice of dough. A substitute for a live fowl" (CP 1, 226). He explains its preference: "There's no blood . . . It's a small thing: A symbolic gesture . . ." (CP1, 227). The inclusion of ritualistic sacrifices of the Indian culture helps in bringing in the cultural difference. It also serves to question these age-old practices of India.

Karnad's monologue, *Flowers* is fully decked with Indian ritualistic practices. The plot is centred on the temple priest and this makes the use of ritual more relevant. Karnad provides with vivid details regarding the

ritualistic worship of *Shiva,* his idol. The Indian tradition of worshiping the idols: decorating it with flowers, the endless oblations of milk, ghee and oil through the centuries, the offerings of coconuts to the *linga* are referred to by Karnad. He gives details about the basic ritual requirement: ". . . jawsticks, and camphor and the placement of wicks in different silver plates for the ———— *aarati*" (CP 2, 244). He continues the rituals observed by the priest for his worship:

> I have a dip in the tank, and in the wet *dhoti,* sit down in the sanctum surrounded by basket of flowers . . . *malligai,   sevanti,   chendu,   hoovu,   sampigai,*   and *kanakambara*. (CP 2, 244)

The reference to desecration of the idol, by performing *pooja* with the already used flowers, once on the idol and then on Ranganayaki hints to the ritualistic practice in worshipping an idol.

————

The monologue gives details about the rituals that are performed by devotees in a temple. After the pooja is over and the prayers are done, the devotee (here chieftain), "accepts a single flower as God's *prasada*, presses it to his eyes, stick it behind his right ear" (CP 2, 244). In the case of woman devotees the flower or prasada, is used to "tuck it in the knot of her hair" (CP 2, 253). The priest's act of breaking the coconuts as offering is also described: "I crack every one of the coconuts myself and return the

halves as *prasada*, with a petal or two and sandal paste in it" (CP 2, 245). In *Flowers*, Karnad has painted the scenario of the Indian world of rituals and traditions. The Indian way of paying great reverence for sadhus, priests and pooja, the superstitious beliefs regarding the priest as a God after the miracle, the concept of *pati-parameshwar* followed by the priest's wife, the reference to ritualistic seclusion of women during menstrual periods, and so on are mentioned by Karnad to give the monologue a definite Indian atmosphere.

Karnad's other plays like *Yayati* and *Tale-Danda* also include ritualistic elements, though rituals here appear as "a backdrop for the action" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 72-73). *Yayati* deals with a mythic tale and hence, Hindu rituals appear now and then. Yayati's marriage with Devayani was a result of his unconscious act of holding her by her right hand: "Sir, I am a maiden. And you have held me by my right hand" (13). This refers to the Indian ritual of holding the bride's right hand during wedding; an act signaling the acceptance of the girls as a wife. The ritual reiterates in another scene where Sharmishtha is held by right hand by Yayati: "Sir, you are holding my right hand. And I am a princes" (21). The same ritual is underlined when Yayati fails to prevent Chitralekha from consuming the poison: "He rushes forward and grabs her hand. Then recoils in horror" (66). It is revealed in Yayati's words: "I couldn't catch

hold of her hand. She was like my daughter and yet, I didn't dare . . ." (67).

The ritualistic connotation behind holding a woman's right hand prevents

Yayati from saving Chitralekha. Chitralekha's act of performing *arati* at

Pooru, to welcome the transformed Pooru into her heart refers to the Hindu

ritual of arati done with the lamps. The stage directions give the details:

"Chitralekha takes the lamp to his face and moves it in a circle in front of it,

performing an arati" (57). This act is widespread in contemporary India too

when women perform the *arati* to welcome on special occasions, like

marriage, guests entering home, and so on. Devayani's act of tearing the

marriage thread and removing jewellery as she decides to end the marriage

with Yayati conveys the ritual practice associated with the end of a

marriage: ". . . she tears the marriage thread from around her neck and flings

it on the floor . . . Devayani snatches out other pieces of jewellery she is

wearing and throws —————————them out" (31). In Hindu tradition,

women are not allowed to wear the marriage thread and ornaments after the

death of their husbands. Hence, her act of tearing the marriage thread is

ritualistic and is symbolic of the end of her married life with Yayati.

     Karnad's *Tale-Danda* is based on the pre-modern history of

Indian society which was highly ritualistic. Though the play deals

with *sharanas,* a group of progressive people who spurned ritualistic

worship, elements of ritualistic acts are evident in the course of the

play. The death scene of Sambashiva Shastri (Jagadeva's father) in the beginning of the play conveys the ritualistic acts done at a dead person: "Put it on the floor, fold its legs, otherwise it won't fit on the bier . . . Send for the bamboos and rope . . . Your mother. Attend to her hair. Her head has to be shaved" (CP 2, 13). The rituals performed for the dead are also described in Scene Four like the sweeping of the floor, the application of cow dung for purifying, and the reference to the disposal of all the things used for the ritual: "Not the wood, not the pots, not the left-overs. Burn what you can. Consign the rest to the river. Everything should be disposed of" (CP 2, 40). These are the actual rites performed at the death of a Hindu Brahmin.

In *Tale-Danda,* the ritual act of touching the elder's feet is referred to in Scene Five, where Sheelavantha, the groom is advised to get blessing from Basavanna by touching his feet, a common act in India. He also touches Kakkayya's feet to get blessed. The play also employs the act of performing arati, as used by Damodara Bhatta:

> Damodara Bhatta does *arati* before the linga. Mother and son
> stand and fold their hands. The priest steps out of the room,
> extends the *arati* towards the two. They spread their palms to

receive the warmth of the flame and put a few coins in the plate. (CP 2, 14)

Karnad here provides with exact description the ritualistic performance of an *arati* in the worship of idols which is widespread in India. It is also seen in the queen's efforts to arrange for an *arati* to welcome the king Bijjala: "You shouldn't rush in like this – without arati or saffron-water to cast out the evil eye" (CP2, 17). These are usual ritualistic practices followed every where in India.

The play also gives instances of village rituals: the possession of ———spirits / God by an old woman who is worshipped by many like Lalitamba, the bride's mother. The "saintly" woman referred to is Haralayya's mother. ———Lalita tells: "Every full moon night, Goddess Dyamavva of the Banyan Tree speaks. Through his mother" (CP2, 48). She also mentions the prophesy of the Goddess: "Rivers of blood will flow if the marriage takes place, she said, human limbs will rot in the streets. This is not any stranger – this is Sheela's own grandmother speaking!" (CP 2, 49). Lalitamba also refers to the superstitions and rituals in which Indians immerse in:

But ten years ago he found a Pashupata Guru. For moths he immersed himself in ash, shouted loudly and danced. And the family had to put up with it.   Then one day he discovered the

Buddha. Wanted to give away all our worldly possessions to a monastery, until I threatened to jump into a well. And now, forgive me, he is a *sharana*. And that's all that counts. (CP 2, 49)

Hence, ritualistic elements abound in most of Karnad plays. The employment of rituals can be seen both as indigenizing method and as an effective tool of resistance against conventions of European drama.

The body of the colonized subject has always been at once an object of the colonizer's fascination and repulsion, and in effect possession. Though constructed as the Other, the colonizers ironically desire to possess them. These ambivalent feelings are echoed in the portrayal of some characters in Karnad. Kapila is the finest instance of this. His portrayal is in tune with Boehmer's definition of the colonized body. He is cast as "corporeal, carnal, untamed, instinctual, raw and therefore also open to mastery, available for use . . ." (Cited in Gilbert and Tompkins, 203). The conception of the colonized black body as a potent symbol of strength and sexuality is reflected here. The sexuality of Kapila's body is conveyed through Padmini's words:

How he climbs – like an ape … and what an ethereal shape!

Such a broad back – like an ocean with muscles ripping across

it – And then that small, feminine waist which looks so

helpless … he is a Celestial Being reborn as a hunter… how

his body sways, his limbs curve – it's a dance almost … No

woman could resist ——him. (25-26)

Devadatta, his master, envies Kapila's strong body and desires to possess it.

Padmini, on the other hand, urges for it as an object of sexual desire.

Through transposition, both Devadatta and Padmini robes/exploits Kapila's

strong body, while Kapila, the person is discarded. Kapila is portrayed as

inferior to Devadatta in class and caste. This kind of representation denies

the colonized subject any humanity.

The colonized body as a potent symbol of sexuality is also underlined

in the portrayal of Sharmishtha in *Yayati*. Boechmer's definition is also

applicable in the case of Sharmishtha. She is portrayed as a sensual woman.

She is corporeal, carnal, untamed, and raw. Hence, Yayati urges to master

her (Yayati-colonizer). Yayati's attraction towards Sharmishtha is a result of

her sexuality and he desires to conquer her: ". . . I feel bewitched by her . . . I

have never felt so entranced by a woman" (30). But a re-construction of the

postcolonial body is effected by Karnad in *Yayati* through Sharmishtha. She

uses her body (colonized by Devayani and Yayati) as a weapon to achieve

her aim (revenge): "Yes I got him into bed with me. That was my revenge

on you. After all, as a slave what weapon did I have but my body?" (29).

Here a——— re-inscription of the colonized body is effected. The long

humiliated and tortured body of Sharmishtha as a slave is bestowed with a voice through her body.

A similar portrayal of the degraded body is offered through the character of the Mahout in *Bali: The Sacrifice*. He is another representative of the lower strata who is untamed and raw and carnal. Though not handsome, the mahout is a manly figure who is skilled in handling women. His heavenly voice together with the raw nature attracted the Queen. But a transformation is also seen in his character portrayal. The mahout raises his voice when the Queen tries to bribe him with her jewels to hide her:

> That's your estimate of every lower-caste man, isn't it?
> He's a good lay and all he wants is a piece of gold. I am an
> elephant keeper, madam, not a fence, selling stolen
> jewellery. (CP 1, 200)

The play gives a re-inscription of mahout's character. He moves from the slot of a slave to attain a definite voice: "Enough, I say. I've had enough. I won't put up with any more. The insults. The abuses – no more. I've had enough" (CP 1, 237). He moves away from the position of an under-dog and defends his master, the King.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, which is centered on the ritual of fire sacrifice, body of Arvasu becomes a potent force. As an actor of the play at

the sacrificial site, Arvasu's body transforms into a ritual body. It becomes a site for the reception of Vritra (spirit) similar to the African tradition. The impersonization of spirits in rituals is also common in Indian tradition (*Velichapad* in Hindu temples, tribal gods entering the human body are examples). Arvasu is portrayed as "possessed" with the spirit of Vritra in the play with-in-the play.

Masks, a part of costumes, play a vital role in postcolonial plays. It helps in denaturalizing the western stage and bringing in the native flavour to the performances. Traditionally masks are associated with ritual performances and the masked performer is animated by the spirits or gods. Such a masked ritual performance is portrayed by Arvasu in the play *The Fire and The Rain*. Karnad keeps in tune with the traditions followed by his contemporaries like Soyinka in the employment of mask in the play. The mask of Vritra, the demon which Arvasu wears, takes control over him or Arvasu becomes possessed by the mask of Vritra. He is warned by the Actor-Manager before the play:

> This is the mask of Vritra the demon. Now surrender to the mask. Surrender and pour life into it. But remember, once you bring a mask to life you have to keep a tight control over it, otherwise it'll try to take over. (CP 2, 165)

His warnings come to be true as Arvasu become possessed by Vritra's mask.
He turns violent, chase and attack Indra (Actor-Manager) and even sets fire
to the real sacrificial pavilion. The Actor-Manager cries out: It's the mask –
it's the mask come alive. Restrain him – or there'll be chaos" (CP 2, 171).
The complete transformation of Arvasu is conveyed in the words of the
guard: "But he is not human, Sir. His feet don't touch the ground. He flies
in the smoke like a Rakshasa – he disappears in the flames –" (CP 2, 171).
In *The Fire and The Rain,* Karnad employ the use of mask more in the
tradition of the African plays, where the masks of Gods like Ogun are used.
Masking is used as a weapon against the western influences and as an
assertion of traditional ritualized religious practices.

Masking in *Hayavadana* is used more on the basis of its practical and
utilitarian use. It is to project the personalities of different characters. In the
beginning of the play, Devadatta is presented as wearing a pale-coloured
mask and Kapila with a dark mask, suggesting their social status (Brahmin
and Sudra). In the post-transposition scene their masks are exchanged to
facilitate the exchange of heads. Regarding the use of mask in *Hayavadana*,
Karnad has admitted that the practical use necessitated it. His regret in using
the foreign techniques resonates in an interview with K. Rajendran: "Even in
Hayavadana, it is a mistake to use mask. It is better done without mask"

(Subramanian, 95). He later felt that it should have done without masks as the use of mask is not an Indian convention.

In Indian traditional theatres masks are used to portray the complex characters like Narasimha, Hanuman and so on, where using mask is a part of the costume (vesam). The same is the case with the portrayal of animals. This Indian technique is employed by Karnad in using mask for other characters like Hayavadana (mask of a horse), Ganesha (elephant headed mask), and Goddess Kali with a terrifying mask. In the portrayal of the complex characters, masks are part of the costume or *vesham*. This helps in the easy conveying of things. But in *Hayavadana*, the central characters Devadatta and Kapila use masks which is in fact a foreign influence.

Costumes that frame the postcolonial body is an important factor of the postcolonial plays. More than mere clothing for the actors, costumes are instrumental in setting the general mood of the play and, therefore, they are powerful signifiers. They perform a complex part in the theatre's semiotic system and help in the subversion of the colonial status. They are instrumental in emphasizing the cultural difference. They can effect a subversion of power inherent in the colonizers' dress codes. Costumes play an important role in plays which employ rituals. Ritual clothing carries with it various unspoken authorities or powers which are specific to a native

culture. The ritual costume like that of the priest or the witch doctor or the chief is the visual paradigm erased by the colonial hierarchy.

Costumes play a vital role in the plays of Karnad. As his plays are more based on myths, folktales and Indian history, costumes used are typically Indian. More than effecting a subversion of the colonial status, they help in foregrounding the cultural difference of Indians from the colonizers/Westerners. Though Karnad does not enter into a description of the costumes in his stage directions, most of his characters are portrayed in typically Indian way befitting their role in the play. Hence in the history plays, characters of Tughlaq and Tipu Sultan use costumes befitting the Sultans. *Tughlaq* uses the costumes of the Sultanate period (fourteenth century) and Tipu is given the royal robes of a Sultan. *Tale-Danda* depicts King Bijjala in royal costumes. Karnad's characters are given appropriate dress displaying their status in society. Costumes in Karnad's plays also help in conveying the period of action, character's social status, their culture and cultural difference. They help in setting the general mood of the play.

Costumes also serve to make the cultural difference evident in the plays. Most of the characters use typically Indian costumes which suits their station of life. Though there is no direct description of the costumes, Karnad refers to the different dress codes casually in most of the plays. In his first

play, *Yayati* there is a reference to the exchange of blouses between Devayani and Sharmishtha; in *Naga-Mandala*, the Story is presented as a young woman in a colourful "sari." There is a reference in the later part of the play through Appanna: "Who did you go to with your sari off?" (CP 1, 284). This implies the traditional costume of Rani In *Bali*: *The Sacrifice* there is reference to the Queen's "pallu" and blouse and in *Tale-Danda* the king insults Sovideva by ordering for him sari and a blouse. In *Flowers: A Monologue,* Karnad gives a description of Ranganayaki in more vivid terms. The priest gives the details of her "pallu", sari, and so on. Karnad also refers to the "dhoti" worn by the priest, the traditional dress of Indian male. In *The* Fire and The Rain, Karnad gives a description of the priests at the fire sacrifice (*Yajna)*: "The priests are all dressed in long flowing seamless piece of cloth, and wear sacred ————threads. The king who is the host, is similarly dressed but has his head covered" (CP 2, 105). The ritual costume of the priests is the visual paradigm of retrieved power structures usurped or erased by the colonial hierarchy. Hence, the use of ritual costumes serves as a powerful tool for Karnad's postcolonial plays.

In *Wedding Album* Karnad employs, modern costumes to give a visual impact of acculturation in the age a globalization. As the play portrays the contemporary globalized India, costumes are given accordingly. Hence, Rohit in some scenes is shown as wearing a full suit with a tie and a

jacket. Most of the characters are portrayed as smartly dressed; for instance, Pratibha Khan. Since the play tells the story of a Hindu Wedding, traditional costumes are also mentioned such as silk saris for the wedding, dhoti for the son-in-law and so on. The central character Vidula is presented as wearing Salwar Kameez with shawl, the casual dress of any Indian woman.

In Karnad's plays costumes facilitate in setting the general mood of the play. It helps the playwright's purpose to convey the period of action, to portray the effective picture of the people in the age he is presenting. It also helps in portraying the unique cultural identity of India and in maintaining the cultural difference from the dominant tradition. In Karnad's plays costumes are not used in the subversion of the colonial hegemony by using cross-cultural dressing. But, they help in establishing the cultural difference of his theatre from the European forms.

Dance, as a remarkable cultural expression, has a prominent place in postcolonial drama. It is a powerful form of visual inscription which welcomes the audience's attention to the performing body, thereby centralizing the corporeality of the native performer. A unique expression of a particular culture, dance forms effectively establish the cultural context and challenge the dominant colonial forms. In this context, Gilbert and

Tompkins ————— ~~o~~observe: "In a way dance, recuperates post-colonial subjectivity by centralizing traditional, non-verbal forms of self-representation" (239). As a visual act, dance is encoded with the specific element of the native culture which helps in establishing the subjectivity of the postcolonial people. It also helps in encoding identity of the postcolonial people.

The communicative power and the subversive potential of the native dance forms facilitate its use in the postcolonial theatre. The use of hybridized forms of native dance (with Western forms) in the postcolonial theatres helps in expressing the pluralistic identity of the postcolonial people. Dance, hence, forms an essential part of the semiotics of the postcolonial theatre/drama. It helps in representing the individual and cultural identity. Dance also forms a powerful, alienating device in the hands of the postcolonial dramatists.

Karnad employs the native device of dance in most of the plays which centres on myths / folktales. As these plays help in the vivid presentation of cultural identity, the use of dance forms becomes inevitable. Karnad's use of dance in his plays in fact gives him a denaturalizing device; it functions as an alienating device in the Breachtian sense. Hence in *Hayavadana*, Devadatta and Padmini are seen dancing with joy after the

transposition scene where the crisis is solved in favour of Devadatta. The visual impact of their dance denaturalizes the play. In the later part of the play, final fight of Kapila and Devadatta is presented as a stylized dance. The presence of dance movement enforces the total effect of the play. In *Naga-Mandala*, the physical union of Naga and Rani is presented through a dance: the Flames surround them with singing and dancing and Rani and Naga are shown joining them. Here also dance serves as a denaturalizing device.

In *Bali: The Sacrifice* Karnad employs the use of dance to present the transformation in the character of the Queen Mother. The refusal of the Queen to the sacrifice of dough results in the appearance of Queen Mother as a transformed figure. The stage directions describe the details: "She is energetic ebullient, a dancing, spectral figure, not the person we have seen earlier" (CP 1, 230). The more the Queen refuses to the ritual, the more she becomes violent in her appearance. Hence, here dance serves the purpose for transformation.

In the play *The Fire and The Rain*, Karnad employs dance in the portrayal Arvasu's role as an actor. He is shown dancing before the Actor-Manager so as to impress him: "But Arvasu has started dancing. Initially the Actor Manager is only half-interested. But slowly as Arvasu

dances, his eyes light up. He keeps the beat" (CP 2, 158). This is the same impact that dance produces on the audience.

The ritual transformation of the postcolonial body is conveyed through dancing. In this context, Gilbert and Tompkins observes: "In many cases, transformation of the post-colonial body are theatricalised through rhythmic movement such as dance, which brings into focus the performing body" (237). In the play, Arvasu's ritual transformation / possession at the staging of the play is conveyed through dancing. The wearing of the ritual mask of Vritra and the drums make him possess the spirit. The stage directions describe meticulously:

> Slowly, Arvasu puts on the mask: There is a roar of drums and then a sudden silence. Arvasu gives a wild roar and jumps up. He dances violently. The audience responds with enthusiasm. (CP 2, 166)

The possession of the spirit is conveyed through dance. Arvasu's violent dancing can be seen as an instance for "a mode of empowerment for oppressed characters" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 240). In the play, Arvasu is portrayed as an oppressed character devoid of a strong voice. Rejected and humiliated privately and publicly, he raises his voice through his role in the play-within-the play. Through his dance/act Arvasu confronts his brother Paravasu and exposes his betrayal. It is through the play and the violent

dancing that Paravasu becomes conscious of his evil acts. ⸺The communicative potential of dance in performance is effectively used by Karnad in the play.

In Karnad's theatre dance serves two purposes: it helps to bring the cultural difference evident in the performance and also serves as a denaturalizing device. The remarkable potential of the dance forms to bring in an alienation effect encourages Karnad in the use of dance in his plays: "Situated within a dramatic text, dance often denaturalizes theatre's signifying dance often denaturalizes theatre's signifying practices by disrupting narrative sequence and or genre" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 239). Though Karnad was attracted by the Brechtian techniques of alienation in the beginning, he returns to the potential offered by the indigenous forms to attain the same end. Hence, his employment of dance, song, and music can be seen in this light.

Music and songs, the most profound signifiers of a culture, acquire an important place in postcolonial theatre. The use of the indigenous songs and music facilitates the process of cultural recognition on the part of the audience: "Generally used as part of a larger project of indigenizing foreign theater forms, music provides a means of expression that spoken dialogue cannot replace" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 196). Its use affirms the continued

prominence of oral traditions and helps to break the bonds of conventional representation. The cultural specificity of indigenous music and songs establishes its place as the prominent tool of resistance.

Karnad employs a skilful use of music and songs in his plays. While music plays an important role in most of the plays, songs are used in the plays like *Hayavadana, Bali: The Sacrifice* and *Tale-Danda.* In *Hayavadana,* songs are sung by both the Bhagavata and the female chorus. The Bhagavata invokes Lord Ganesha by his song and his songs also helps in the narration of the story. The songs of female chorus, on the other hand, are instrumental in bringing forth the repressed feelings of Padmini. The play *Bali: The Sacrifice*, begins and ends with songs. There are six songs in the play sung by the Queen, the King, and a singer and they reflect the Indian tradition, culture, beliefs, superstitions, wishes, and hopes. The first and the last song, sung by the Queen, are philosophical in nature. They clearly state that there are two worlds: one is lit up by the Sun and the other is hidden in the shade. In the same way human soul is split into two, one that adores the blood and gore; and the other adheres to non-violence. Thus, they discuss the central theme in the play: the conflict of beliefs. The King's and the singer's songs are narrative in nature and add to the narration of the play: the King's song hints at the coupling of the Queen and the Mahout, while the songs of the singer narrate the past events in the play. All the songs create a unique mood for the play.

In *Tale-Danda,* Karnad the uses the author's translations of free verses from A. K. Ramanujan's *Speaking of Siva* (1973)*,* a brilliant Kannada collection, regarding the socio-religious movement of *Virasaiva.* Hence, the songs of Basavanna in the play are addressed to Lord Shiva and are philosophical in quality. In almost all the plays music and musical instruments are employed to give the plays a unique Indian flavour. Music and songs form the vocal expression of solidarity and resistance in theatre and Karnad makes a meticulous use of these in his plays. The mnemonic functions of songs and music amply demonstrate their positions as powerful "linguistic" signifiers (Gilbert and Tompkins, 194). The employment of music and songs in Karnad also serves the purpose of denaturalizing the conventional theatre to attain an alienation effect. Their presence denaturalizes the action and enhances the general mood of the play.

Karnad's theatre often betrays certain foreign influences which makes him a truly postcolonial playwright. His plays, both in content and form, reflect the influences Brecht's Epic Theatre, Shakespeare, elements of Greek theatre and so on. Though Karnad, does not make a conscious exploration of these foreign elements, his exposure to the Western world often finds place in his works. The Epic theatre propounded by Brecht has in fact revolutionized the popular concept of theatre. ―The "non-Aristotelian"

theatre of Brecht opposes the concept of drama as "mimesis" or imitation, the process of empathy with the central characters, "the willing-suspension of disbelief " suggested by Coleridge and so on. The new narrative theatre of Brecht has used many innovative techniques, which has resulted more in the separation of the dramatic elements than in making it an organically fused work of art.

Karnad in his early years seems very much influenced by the mode of theatre practiced by Brecht. Brecht aims at kindling the intellect of the audience rather than their emotions. He tries to break away the elements of illusion and empathy by his theatrical alternative of Alienation or Estrangement (*Verfremdung*).   Brecht observes in "On Experimental theatre":

> If the intercourse between stage and public were to occur on the basis of sympathetic understanding, then at any given moment the spectator could have seen only as much as the hero saw with whom he was joined in sympathetic understanding. (271)

The device of alienation facilitates the better comprehension of reality as it is. Estranging the audience from the performance helps in creating varied interpretations on the part of the spectator. It "turns the spectator into an observer, but/arouses his capacity for

action/forces him to take⸺⸻ decisions" (Qtd in Thomson and

Sacks, 189). It encourages audience participation. In Brecht's

theatre, "the puzzles of the world are not solved but shown" (Qtd in

Thomson and Sacks, 189). The contradictions it offers must be taken

beyond the walls of the theatre for critical analysis. Thus, the aim of

epic theatre is to "examine" human problems, not just to stimulate

emotions.

The non-Aristotelian theatre exemplified by Brecht had a great

influence on Karnad in his formative years. Karnad has

followed/adapted Brecht's model of the dialectical theatre. He wants

his audience to think rather than just to empathize with his characters.

He seems to adapt Brecht's method of treating his themes as parables

or as historically distant parallels to contemporary issues and events.

The indirect method of referring to the topical events gives a cunning

yet interesting approach to the playwright. Though Karnad accepts

the influence of Brecht in his theatre practice, he explains that

Brechtian techniques only serves to help his generation of dramatists

realize what could be done with the design of traditional theatre:

> The theatrical conventions Brecht was reacting against …
>
> were never part of the traditional Indian theatre. There was
>
> therefore no question of arriving at an 'alienation' effect by

using Brechtian artifice. What he did was to sensitize us to the potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques available in our own theatre. (TP, Karnad, 14)

Hence, Karnad has applied the alienation effect of Brechtian theatre in his plays through the innovative use of indigenous Indian tradition. He uses a variety of narrative techniques to bring in the alienation / estrangement effect in his plays. They are the traditional actor-narrator figure of the Bhagavata (*Hayavadana*), the Man and the Story (*Naga-Mandala*), the use of music, song, chorus, dance, masks, half-curtains, and so on.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad uses the Bhagavata device of *Yakshagana* to bring in the alienation effect of the Epic theatre. As a traditional narrator he narrates the story, but uses the Brechtian technique of referring to the disturbance at the outset. While introducing the sub-plot of the play, the Bhagavata makes many remarks in the typical fashion of the Epic theatre. He says to Nata, the actor:

> There is nothing to be afraid of here. I am here. The musicians are here. And there is our large-hearted audience. It may that they fall asleep during a play sometimes. But they are ever alert when someone is in trouble. (3)

This Brechtian technique enables Karnad to remind the audience that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself. He later tells Hayavadana, "We have a play to perform today, you know" (6).

The Epic theatre calls for the participation of the audience and also invites the audience to make judgments on the situation. This feature can be seen in Karnad's play where the Bhagavata seeks a solution for the problem after transposition:

> What indeed is the solution to this problem, which holds the entire future of these three unfortunate beings … Haste would be disastrous. So there's a break of ten minutes now. Please have some tea, ponder over this situation and come back with your own solution (39).

Karnad here uses the typical technique of the Epic theatre and allows the audience participation. The Bhagavata and the others having tea is shown on the stage which adds to the alienation effect of the play.

In *Naga-Mandala*, the alienation effect is introduced through the roles played by the Man and the Story. They act as narrators similar to the device of Bhagavata. They analyse the action and comment on it. The alternative endings offered in the play, one by the Story and the other by the Man, adds to the alienation effect in the play. The ending offered by the

Story does not appeal to the reason of its spectator (Man). The Man argues that the "present ending just doesn't work", and that Appanna "will spend the rest of his days in misery" (CP 1, 294). Hence, Karnad tries to kindle the reason of his audience rather than just to evoke their emotions.

Karnad follows Brechtian methods to evoke social / political issues in an indirect way. Though not overtly propagandist, much of the epic drama is devoted to the expression of social and political ideas and ideals. In the same fashion, Karnad uses the traditional devices to expose the social and political issues. The notable features of the epic drama are the use of a chorus and music. In *Naga-Mandala* all the songs are sung by the Flames, while in *Hayavadana* the songs are sung by the female chorus. This helps in denaturalizing the drama. Both *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* employ an array of denaturalizing / defamiliarizing devices to bring in the alienation effect. Instead of adhering to the western devices, Karnad makes an efficient use of the traditional narrative techniques to break the aura of illusion of the conventional theatre. The influence of Brecht is quite evident, but Karnad has tried to indigenize the Brechtian alienation by using the native techniques. As Karnad maintains, there is no question of arriving at an alienation effect by using Brechtian artifice: the traditional Indian theatre itself is an example of non-Aristotitian denaturalized theatre.

Other than Brechtian theatre, Karnad's plays betray the influence of Shakespeare. Some of his plays resonate with Shakespearean situations. In *Hayavadana* we get a glimpse of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Shakespearean echoes are heard in the scene when Devadatta bids good-bye to Padmini and Kapila before the transposition. He says: "Good-bye, Kapila. Good-bye Padmini" (28). These lines remind us of Ophelia's last words in *Hamlet* as she says: "Good night, ladies, good night. Sweet ladies, good night, good night" (Act IV, Scene V, 72-73). These references are not intentionally made by Karnad; it is in fact the result of his western influences.

In *Tughlaq* there is another parallel to *Hamlet*. Tughlaq is portrayed as ascended to the throne by murdering his father and brother at the time of prayer. The plot made by the Aamirs and Shihab-ud-din to kill Tughlaq is also designed at the hour of prayer. In *Hamlet* we see a similar situation when Hamlet plans to kill King Claudius to avenge his father's murder. Hamlet gets a golden opportunity to take revenge when Claudius bent on his knees to pray (repent for his crime). But Hamlet does not kill Claudius as death at the holy act of prayer takes one to heaven. That will not help him to succeed in his revenge. In *Tughlaq*, the Aamir's plot to kill Tughlaq at prayer time also fails. Though there are slight variations, the two situations are comparable.

P. Dhanavel observes parallel between Karnad's *The Fire and The Rain* and Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Both the plays deal with the universal theme of conflict between brothers: Prospero–/–Antonio and Arvasu–/–Paravasu. The plays also foreground the theme of forgiveness over revenge as conveyed by Shakespeare's Prospero and Karnad's Arvasu, and also the purity and true love represented by Miranda and Nittilai. A more visible parallel can be traced in the characters of Ariel and Brahma Rakshasa. Both are enslaved and exploited by their masters; Ariel by Prospero and Brahma Rakshasa by Raibhya. After a long period of torments and waiting they find their ultimate release and freedom. Hence, both the plays offer similar concerns like forgiveness, universal love and humanity.

Certain elements of Greek theatre are also adopted by Karnad in his plays. The uses of masks and chorus are examples. *Hayavadana* makes efficient use of masks. The device of chorus is employed in *Hayavadana* (female chorus) *Naga-mandala* (Flames), *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (Kirmani and Mackenzie). The employing of the female chorus in *Hayavadana* is the result of his western influence. The female chorus in the play helps in revealing the repressed feelings of Padmini's mind. It also helps in the narrative strategy of the play. The influence of Ibsen's plays can also be traced in Karnad. He portrays the conflicts of women's world and depicts an evolution of women characters. Most of Karnad's female

characters undergo transformation and they emphasize the importance of women empowerment. These are comparable to Ibsen's plays.

Although Karnad shows the western influences, especially in his earlier plays, there is also a conscious effort on his part to break away from the shadows of the West. He repents at the use of mask in *Hayavadana* as it is a western tradition. He states: "The only thing that I learnt from there was that the West had nothing for us. I think the western society being individualistic, western plays are hinged around individuals, while we in India define ourselves in relational terms" (Ahuja, *The Tribune*). He adopts the western techniques, but employs them in his theatre through indigenous narrative forms/techniques.

Karnad deals with contemporary concerns of technology and globalization in his latest plays – *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*. In *Broken Images*, Karnad uses technology, a consequence of globalization, to create the doppelganger in the form of a television image to interrogate the integrity of Manjula. He uses technology to create the same image of Manjula and not a mask:

> The point is it's got to be the same person! It's written like that. That's why it's called Bimba, it's the image.

> I wanted to see if it could be done, and done
> effectively. (Kumar, *Deccan Herald*)

The technology in fact offered Karnad an effective device to achieve his aim. In the play, Karnad gives a vivid description of the television studio, in fact an advanced studio of the modern times.

In *Wedding Album* Karnad gives a clear picture of the contemporary globalized India well equipped with the Internet. The globalization of the media has resulted in the transformation of the world into a "global village." It is shown as facilitating modern match/marriage fixing; it also results in misleading the youth. Karnad suggests to neo-colonialism or global neo-imperialism through the episode of Vidula and the foreign lover in the cyber-café. The foreigner acts as a colonizer who colonizes the body of the Oriental "Other;" (Vidula). There is a reference to race (darkie) in their conversation. The cyber café is described in detail to give a picture of the globalised India. Both in *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*, Karnad uses technology as a device/technique to convey/fulfil his artistic needs. add

Karnad has employed an appropriate approach, style and form of the theatre suitable for the postcolonial Indian space. He has maintained

his distinction both in the thematic selection and in the narrative techniques. To Karnad there is no real tradition of a theatre for India, as the classical tradition is too remote and the raw folk tradition is inadequate:

> Seen in terms of a tradition, I think we have no theatre. I have been trying to create a tradition of my own — as has Tendulkar . . . It appears that today each one of us has to define his or her own tradition before any great tradition gets evolved eventually. (Ahuja, *The Tribune*).

Accordingly, Karnad has woven a unique narrative structure of his own for his theatre. His approach to theatre is consistent with Indian cultural traditions. But it is suitable to the social situation of contemporary India. It is entertaining, aesthetically satisfying and is closer to the consciousness of Indian people. Karnad's theatre is the visual paradigm of the postcolonial Indian identity.

C   on

Postcolonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon. It engages in a dialectical relationship between the "grafted" European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to (re)create an independent native identity. A return to or a rediscovery an absolute pre-colonial purity is practically unfeasible. This is because culture is porous and heterogenous. In a colonial situation social formation are conditioned by colonial domination. So it is also impossible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implications in the context of European colonial enterprise. The possible way out is to accept the marginal space as sites of "resistance" or of "survival" and try to subvert the centrality of colonial hierarchy of power relations.

Such an acceptance and celebration of the marginal space are effected in literature by the responses made by the once colonized communities. The most remarkable renovation of this marginal space into an effective site of resistance is offered by the postcolonial theatre. As the most effective public form of arts, theatre serves as a visual paradigm for the powerful portrayal of resistance strategies. It involves a radical dismantling of the European theatrical codes by the incorporation of indigenous performance forms. This

has resulted in a postcolonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant theatrical practices. It is in no way continuations or simple adaptations of the dominant European traditions. Rather, it is an alternative hybrid discourse, aimed entirely at gaining a new literary space that ensures an effective articulation of the cultural resistance and the construction of the postcolonial identity.

The question of culture and cultural difference of the postcolonial societies emphasize the relevance of the concepts like nation and nationalism. A nation and its unique culture turn out to be instrumental for the postcolonial playwrights to reclaim their identity lost in the vagorics of European colonization. Hence nation and its strengthening structures like myths, folklores, legends and history reiterate its presence in the dramas of the postcolonial dramatists. They help in foregrounding the cultural difference as wells as in developing resistance strategies for the dramatists.

The postcolonial hybridity and resistance leave clear manifestations in plays of Girish Karnad. Karnad breaks the conventions of dominant theatrical traditions and secures a distinct place in the theatrical space. He revitalizes the Indian theatrical space by reviving the cultural past of the nation. There is always a cultural "return" seen in his plays effected through the incorporation of indigenous practices into western theatrical forms. But,

there is no complete recreation of the traditional models intended. Hence, for Karnad theatre has meant both traditional indigenous performance, and theatre that the colonialists brought with them from the metropolitan centre. It is a hybrid or syncretic form, fit to convey the dual existence of the postcolonial mind. It is an interfusional theatre that truly represents the ambivalence of the postcolonial mind.

Karnad evolves as a spokesman of postcolonial social experience. His literary engagement with postcolonial and intercultural paradigm rationalizes our understanding of narratives and narrative engagement with the contemporary issues of socio-political importance. His plays seriously reconsider the prominent issues of postcolonialism like nation and nationalism, culture and cultural difference, articulation and resistance, history and historiography. They serve to challenge the dominance of the Western traditions and subvert them with concepts of hybridity, cultural fusion, difference, heterogeneity and syncreticism.

An exploration of the concepts of nation and narrative shows the conflicting nature of nations in the contemporary times. The conventional approach of defining nations in terms of the possession of a common language, race, religion, culture or descent, a distinct territory, and so on, seems insufficient in the constitution of a modern nationality. A nation is

proved to be a "soul" or a "spiritual principle" beyond the divisions of language, race, religion, culture, territory, and so on. It is a rich legacy of memories, a valuable heritage, and a shared history passed on from generations to generations. The nation is thus an intermediate between an object and an idea: it fluctuates between a manifest form and a conceptual form.

Nations are found to be both new and historical. They are often caught between the historians' perspective of the objective modernity of nations and the nationalists' perspective of their subjective antiquity. The "new" entity of modern nation-state is grounded on centuries old cultural systems and the nations are found to be cultural artefacts of a particular kind. Modern theorist like Bhabha, Anderson, Timothy Brennan and so on, foregrounds the relevance of cultural antiquity in the concept of the nation. When Bhabha emphasize the "cultural temporality" of the nation, Anderson sees nations as "cultural artifacts."

Literary narratives share an intrinsic relation with the concept of the nation. The conflicting situation of the modern nations and the ambivalence is reiterated in the ambivalence of its narratives also. Bhabha regards nation as analogous to narration. He identifies nation as a cultural elaboration where nation itself is a form of narrative which holds culture as its predominant force. This narrative of the nation uses its culture as a tool both

for both subversion and revival. Hence, the nation's narrative plays a vital role in the creation of the nation. Literature complements the political movements that lead to the creation of the nation. The structure of the narrative finds a parallel in the political structure of the nation.

The concepts of nation and culture attain an unprecedented prominence in the postcolonial literary space where literature itself is a political discourse which is anchored on the analogous structures of nation and culture. The relation between the nation and the narrative constitutes the central concerns of the postcolonial world: nation, culture, hybridity, hybridized space in nation, culture and politics, centre and margins, alienation from native culture, quest for identity, cultural Othering, unhomliness, and so on. The narratives show that writers of the postcolonial world have appropriated the language and the discourse of the masters, gaining strength from their marginality and hybridity. The nation and its narratives find a significant position in the postcolonial literary space. The ambivalent existence of the nation and the narrative it represents in the postcolonial space makes the relationship between them problematic. Postcolonialism holds nationalism as an inseparable part of its theory and the narratives of the postcolonial writers reveal the nation-centredness of the postcolonial world.

There is an essential correlation between the nation's narratives and its function as a tool of resistance. The investigation into the postcolonial dramatic space reveals the methods used by the dramatists to effect a cultural resistance to the dominant traditions of the European models. They incorporate a variety of languages, native narrative techniques and styles into the conventional mode and make their narratives powerful tools of resistance. These incorporations of indigenous techniques can be seen as a form "cultural resistance" on the part of dramatists: "culture [is] used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure" (Duncombe, 5). Thus, the dramatists convert the "free space" offered by cultural resistance for developing alternative theatrical practices. Their appropriation of the free literary space is an alternative and counter-hegemonic use of the theatre and the language. This tendency is especially remarkable in nations with a history of cultural antiquity and colonial legacy: the essentially postcolonial new ———nation-states.

The postcolonial theatre is the paradigm of cultural resistance visually enacted through the elements of everyday practice. Hence, the elements of national life like rituals, carnivals, indigenous traditions, music, songs, dance, and so on become the part of resistance, visually conveyed to subvert the conventional theatre. The postcolonial inclusions of traditional

enactments such as rituals and carnivals, indigenous music and dance, contribute to the hybrid form of theatre. The explicit difference of these traditional elements from the western realist forms makes the postcolonial dramatists use them to construct their cultural identity. The practitioners' use of these elements is an oblique form of politics: "a politics that doesn't look like politics," where culture is used to attain the desired results: the construction of identity (Duncombe, 82). Hybridity becomes the defining feature of the postcolonial dramatic genres.

The postcolonial theatre is identified as a kind of theatrical interculturalism as it holds hybridity as the predominant trait. Interculturalism in theatre evolves around the world due to varied reasons. Whereas the revival of the Western realist theatre leads to the intercultural trends in Europe and Japan, colonization and subsequent decolonization encourages it in the Third World countries. Intercultural theatres facilitate in the creation of a "universal language of —theatre" (Pavis, 38). Hence, theatrical interculturalism, like the postcolonial theatre, can become a form of resistance against standardization and Europeanization of super productions. It can generate a search for new identities in culture, aesthetics and politics.

Postcoloniality, hybridity and interculturalsim find their finest manifestation in the plays of Girish Karnad. Karnad's postcoloniality lies in his extraordinary manipulation of the conventional theatrical tradition and making it a strikingly hybrid form of theatre by his incorporation of the Indian native elements. He retains the use of the dominant theatre language, and many thematic and structural concepts of the western tradition. But he transforms them beautifully to represent the experience of the Indian psyche. A thematic analysis of Karnad's plays based on myths and folktales reveals the fact that Karnad very convincingly gives voice to the ambiguous concerns of the postcolonial age. Thus, the conflicting themes like the existential questions and conflicts of modern man, incompleteness, hybridity, unhomliness, alienation, search for identity, gender placement, metaphysical dualism, and so on manifest through different characters and situations in his plays. Existential alienation, incompleteness, and search for identity engage him in *Yayati* (Yayati and Pooru), and *Hayavadana* (Hayavadana, Devadatta and Kapila). Karnad deals with the basic human conflicts in *Bali: The Sacrifice* (conflict between Jainism and Hinduism)*, The Fire and T̶the Rain* (between Brahmanism and Sudra world), and *Flowers: A Monologue* (spiritual love ad erotic love).

Karnad attempts to question and subvert the national/conventional hegemonic structures through the themes of his plays. He impressively

exposes the hegemonic structures of the nation like patriarchy in the plays like *Yayati,* ————*Naga-Mandala* and *Flowers: A Monologue.* In some of his plays, Karnad demystifies the concept of chastity, a concept that facilitates the patriarchal oppression of women. Characters like Padmini of *Hayavadana,* Rani of —————*Naga-Mandala,* the Queen of *Bali: The Sacrifice,* Vishaka of *The Fire and The Rain* deflate this age-old concept. These plays celebrate female sexuality from a woman's point of view. Most of his plays reveal a transformation which empowers women characters. His female characters are portrayed as liberated women who posseses a distinct voice of their own: Chitralekha, Devayani and Sharmishtha of *Yayati*, Padmini of *Hayavadana,* the Queen of *Bali: The Sacrifice,* and Vishaka of *The Fire and The Rain* get empowered through the defiance of convention. Karnad exhibits a remarkable insight into the struggles of the women's world.

Karnad addresses the humans concerns and conflicts of contemporary times through the context of the past. The problems of contemporary India like sexual freedom, communal discrimination, quest for political power, exploitation, and poverty are discussed through the patterns and symbols from the mythic contexts. Human conflicts find a powerful expression in the myths and folktales that Karnad employs in his plays. He analyses the present day problems of human beings in terms of the patterns and structures of the myths, folktales.

A thematic analysis of Karnad's plays based on history and contemporary issues reveals how he constructs a cultural identity or a meaning of the past/history by connecting it to the present. In terms of thematic engagement, Karnad's history plays too effectively handle the alienation and identity crisis that individuals experience in the postcolonial world. These concerns echo in the words and deeds of his characters in plays like *Tughlaq* (Tughlaq and his subjects), *Tale-Danda* (the *sharanas*) and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (Tipu). Karnad is seen as contemporizing Indian history and drawing striking parallel between the premodern/modern history and contemporary India. *Tughlaq*, which deals with the history of the idealist and the tyrant ruler, Muhammad ud Din Tughlaq, is a reflection of

Indian political scene in the post-independent times. *Tale-Danda* recasts the twelfth century reform movement, *Veerashaivam*, in Karnataka, as a discussion of the political situation in India in the 1990s. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, written at the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, deals with the themes of anti-colonial resistance under Tipu Sultan. Karnad's project of contemporizing history is also seen in his treatment of religious conflict in the ancient history to reflect the present internal conflicts of communalism in India as a nation. Hence, the plays reconsider the issues like, casteism, classism, —————— inter-religious conflict, intra-religious conflict, and so on. Karnad makes a perfect technique of dealing with the present through the historic narratives of the past.

Karnad makes a shift of interest from the past to the present— and deals directly with the contemporary concerns of the globalized India. In his recent plays like *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album,* Karnad deals with the concerns of the contemporary world without referring back to the past. *Broken Images* explores the question of language, an important aspect of postcolonial plays and discusses the conflict between English and native/regional languages in postcolonial India. *Wedding Album* presents the true picture of the contemporary globalised India and portrays the transition of the society in the new age of global culture. The plays provide critical insights into the postcoloniality of Karnad's theatre.

Karnad's dramaturgy is a search for the postcolonial Indian theatre. An analysis of the literary techniques and devices in Karnad's plays throws light on the complex dramatic structure that he weaves out of divergent traditions. Karnad utilizes the power structures of the nation like myths, folktales and history: here is god's plenty in his dramaturgical oeuvre; it includes the traditional enactments like rituals; the techniques of *Yakshagana*, the folk theatre of Karnataka; the puppet theatre of ancient India; folk conventions like half-curtains, songs and dancing, oral style of narration, and so on. The plays also highlight the Western influences on him: masks, miming, chorus, Brechtian, Shakespearean and Greek elements. The Brechtian techniques of alienation, defamiliaration and historicization are employed by Karnad through the devices of the indigenous theatrical traditions. The coexistence of these conflicting traditions in Karnad's theatre makes it an example for theatrical interculturalism. Karnad does not make his interculturalism an explicit one. The Eurocentric/western elements are incorporated and beautifully blended into the indigenous forms making his theatre a uniquely hybrid one.

The hybrid nature of theatre reveals Karnad's politics as a postcolonial playwright. The politics of a writer manifests not only in the content but also in the techniques he explores to represent the content.

Karnad's employment of retrospective narratives of the nations - myths, folktales and history- and the native theatrical techniques can be interpreted as his strategy to bring in the native culture to subvert the dominant western theatrical tradition. His careful incorporation of the indigenous narrative elements into the Eurocentric dramatic form also serves as tool of resistance against the dominant traditions. These blending of different forms make Karnad's theatre truly syncretic, interfusional and hence, postcolonial.

Karnad proves himself as a true postcolonial playwright both in terms of themes and techniques. Whether in themes or in narrative techniques, a perfect blend of the two conflicting traditions are seen reflecting his hybridity. Regarding his thematic engagement, Karnad has embraced the Western concepts like existentialism and alienation along with the abundance of native themes like casteism, inter-religious and intra-religious conflicts on the one hand, and has also dealt with universals themes like racism, sexism, patriarchy, women empowerment and so on, on the other. In terms of narrative techniques, Karnad makes a conscious mingling of native and western theatrical traditions appropriate to his postcolonial enterprise.

An analysis of his plays reveals that Karnad attempts to subvert and challenge the national/conventional hegemonies through his themes and techniques. The situations and the characters in his plays radically question

the native hegemonic power structures like casteism, conflicts of faith, chastity, and unequal treatment of women. His plays help to re-inscribe the place of the subaltern and attempt to perceive history from their angle. He also tries to subvert the dominance of the European theatrical traditions through an incorporation of indigenous elements/techniques in his narrative structure. He attempts a linguistic mediation of his cultural identity in the postcolonial context. The extent of mediation is o fully realized in the English version of his plays. He negotiates the postcolonial identity at once through the verbal and visual texts of his plays. His mastery as a playwright is reflected in harvessing both the texts: verbal and visual. Karnad reacts against both forms of hegemonic structures: Indian and Western. Since the postcoloniality in India encompasses the subversion of both the hegemonies, Karnad's dramatic art places him as a true postcolonial Indian playwright.

Karnad attempts to create a counter- theatrical practice through the unique form of his theatre. His theatrical practice subverts and resists the western Eurocentric concepts of culture and traditions. It also aims at subverting the Indian elitist historiography which completely erases the space and the voice of the Ssubalterns. Karnad tries to re-inscribe these spaces through the re-visions of ancient myths in meta-narratives, and lends voice and meaning to the Ssubaltern. Karnad's attempt can be seen as a search for an alternative concept of theatre and counter- culture through his

critical engagements with concepts of nation, nationalism, history, narrative, culture and counter culture. His theatre makes a remarkable intervention in the socio-political life of contemporary India. The whole question of postcoloniality and postcolonial project in his plays, particularly his subversion of the western hegemonic discourses and their claim to superiority, elevates his theatre as a radical medium of enlightenment and entertainment. His theatre is a perfect synthesis of his politics and aesthetics which manifests itself at several levels. Karnad's dramatic art is the visual paradigm of a quest for postcolon   ty.

Works Consulted

Acharekar, Janhavi. "Of love and conflict." *The Hindu.* 15 Apr 2007.

http:// www.thehindu.com/mag/2007/04/15/stories/2007041500140500.htm

Ahearne, Jeremy. *Michael de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

Ahmed, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso, 1992.