Chapter Three

‘Writing the Postcolonial Present of Contemporary India: Intertextual Configuration of Thought in the Plays of Karnad’

"Karnad is a poet of drama. The use of history and mythology to tackle contemporary themes gives him the psychological distance to comment on our times.”


This chapter is an attempt to understand the theme-focused diachronic-synchronic approaches Karnad opts for in writing the postcolonial present of contemporary India. It takes into account how Karnad’s plays reflect a judicious mix of diachronic-synchronic approaches in their mediation through language and reality in foregrounding the contemporary Indian problematic. It posits, elucidates and argues how intertextual configuration of thought pervades his dramaturgy, plot-structures, characterization and dialogues. Select texts from among the plays of Karnad, taken up for critical readings and analyses, substantiate such a perception and position. From this perspective and in continuation of what has been stated in Chapter Two vis-à-vis theoretical insights impacting Karnad, a broader and deeper understanding and a further highlight of the theoretical framework of ‘intertextuality’ that consorts well with certain other new critical idioms such as temporalization, hybridity, dialogicity, Otherness and subalternity and readings done with a postcolonial eye would be relevant here.

It is done assuming that Karnad is a playwright who subscribes to the view that
literary texts connote meanings relationally through interdependent intertextualities. This assumption derives its strength through instantiations of how Karnad employs contexts such as history, myths, and folktales which are part of the cultural heritage of India in the course of moulding his main texts and how they are used as means of representing India in the postcolonial present. The playwright uses indigenous forms of performance like rituals, myths, folktales, history, music, songs, dance, local settings, and oral style of storytelling as effective devices to dismantle the dominating forms of western dramaturgy. From a postcolonial point of view, readers may appreciate how the concept of performance itself resonates with its cultural overtones in the living present. As Elin Diamond observes, 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” (6).

It is through such intersections that Karnad incorporates myths, folklores and history within the post colonial contemporaneous context that ‘signals the reclamation of the nation’s cultural past’ with critical revision. As Anthony D. Smith comments, “the presence of the cultural past in the experience of the modern nation emphasizes the historicity of the nation” (21). Here lies Karnad’s affinities with the process of ‘temporalization’ wherein he ensures that his texts as plays and performance serve as temporal agencies towards affirming certain modernist and postmodernist ethos with certain aesthetic implications. For instance, the spirit of nationalism gains its strength through myths and memories of the past. Subversions of hegemonic versions of truth vis-à-vis patriarchy and subalternization of women may be cited as another instance. The integration of these cultural elements foregrounds the relevance of living the past in the present moment in the ambience of coping with the challenges in the
historical present of a new nation. This is how Karnad configures the modernity of tradition and thought. Within this configuration, he presents his plots, characters, dialogues, and motifs through a number of intertextualities which foreground themes such as leadership and governance, subalternity and Otherness, and critiquing of contemporary issues such as casteism, communalism, and corruption.

The intertextualities intertwined in his plays veer around ‘temporalization’ that reflects a delicate balance between language and reality and a fine juxtaposing of politics and aesthetics. In his effort to use dramaturgy as an agency for change, he brings in tradition as a predominant co-text, and as co-text, tradition is part of intertextuality. An existential content within the matrix of tradition is the crux of his dramaturgy. Though the raw material for his stories comes from a variety of sources -- India's historical, ideological and mythological past, and its epic tradition, regional and pan-Indian folktales, his dramas as finished products embrace modern perspectives within a complex viewing intended to speak to a sophisticated and contemporary Indian urbane audience. As Julia Leslie notes, they "relocate the past in the emotional realities of India today" (51).

As this researcher is of the view that Karnad uses the processes of temporalization and intertextuality that accommodates certain other associated critical idioms so as to shape his plays as agents of showcasing certain modernist and postmodernist ethos, and as the textual referential readings and critical analyses in this chapter are done with reference to the abovementioned critical idioms, a brief note on these idioms would be relevant here. For the major input in this regard, the researcher owes a lot to A.S.Dasan’s reading of certain new critical idioms in two essays, one titled “The Postcolonial Riddles: A Contrapuntal Reading of the Relationality between Politics and Poetics”, published in *Littcrit – An Indian Response to Literature* (bi-
annual Journal) in 2014, and another titled “Plurality of Cultures and Contexts: New Critical Idioms for Hermeneutics Today”, published in Interdisciplinary Research Journal for Humanities (Tirunelveli) in 2015. These two papers are insightful reflections showcasing the cross-disciplinarity associated with today’s critical idioms, which is the basis and strength of contemporary critical theories.

‘Temporalization’, as a hermeneutical canon, sees both the literary word and the world as ‘temporal, rather than spatial, categories’. Whichever is the hermeneutical method one may use, it is useful to assume that a work of art ‘reflects the culture of the time in which it is created’. This is what the German term, ‘zeitgeist’, stands for in literary hermeneutics. Georg Hegel, to whom the term is attributed, averred that ‘no man can surpass his own time, for the spirit of his time is also his own spirit’. A profound awareness of zeitgeist helps us insist that literature is a vital record of life-situations across cultures with of course polyphonic glimpses of a number of honest indignations, moral contestations, and aesthetic implications. One cares for literature primarily because it has, as William Henry Hudson states, ‘its deep and lasting human significance’. Karnad’s writings indicate that he subscribes to such a value-perception.

A browsing of Pheng Cheah’s essay titled, “World against Globe: Toward a Normative Conception of World Literature”, helps this researcher assert that an ideal writer is an ideal critic who believes in ‘the normative conception and function of world literature’. To him, wording the world has a social function. The word and the world are understood as temporal, rather than spatial, categories. Their ‘permanence is premised on the persistence of time’ (1). With his pen ‘squatting between his finger and his thumb’, ‘snuggling as a gun’, to borrow the phrases from Seamus Heaney, the writer and the critic use the word as an active agency to confront the world made by capitalist globalization. From this point of view, neither the writer nor the critic, nor the reader,
can afford to indulge in nihilistic hermeneutics bordering on undecidability of meanings ad infinitum. Karnad is free from such indulgence.

Temporalization as an agency also sensitizes writers, critics and readers about the presence of culture as co-text within the core text. From the point of view, hermeneutics values in equal measure the affinities between instantiation of situation and culture and between language and reality striking a delicate balance. It helps us keep a safe distance from academic formalism, dilettante dabbling, and stagnating repetition of staple meanings. In the process, temporalization also ushers in Dionysian conceptualization of culture, comparative perspectives of world literatures, and cross-fertilization of worldviews. To a critic with a postcolonial eye or angst, it is a valuable tool in acknowledging the relevance of interstially (intertextuality), in negotiating multiple meanings, in foregrounding the third space encounter, and in celebrating multiculturalism. Karnad has no inhibitions or constrictions in seeing things with such a postcolonial eye.

It is in the light of temporalization that Karnad’s configuration of modernity becomes a vibrant multidimensional site that problematizes traditional notions and values alternative aesthetics. This is done through subversion of original myths and offering of counter-discourses and by contextualizing issues with contemporary consciousness and with certain philosophical moorings and modernist ethos. This is Karnad’s ways of critiquing and dismantling the impact of hegemony and celebrating complex viewing. Plot structures, characterization, and dialogues, all these are geared towards increasing the density of complex viewing through the process of temporalization.

‘Intertextuality’ is another hermeneutical idiom that highlights Karnad’s modernity of thought juxtaposed with tradition, myth, and history. Theorizing
‘intertextuality’, Julia Kristeva points out that ‘any signifying system or practice already consists of other modes of cultural signification’. ‘A literary text would implicate not only other verbal texts but also other modes of signification like food, fashion, local medicinal systems, metaphysical systems, traditional and conventional narratives like myths, literary texts, legends as well as literary conventions like genres, literary devices, and other symbolic structures’. A work of art possesses meaning relationally. Today’s poetics of interpretation demands that researchers and readers are aware of the fact that, as Graham Allen remarks, ‘works of literature are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature’. It means that meanings are relational and therefore all works of literature may be viewed as intertextual. To quote Allen, who has done a full-length book study on intertextuality with reference to Bakhtinian and Saussurean versions of intertextuality and that of Kristeva,

To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext. (1)

Intertextuality foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life. Kristeva avers that “authors do not create their texts from their own mind, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts”, and the text becomes “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text,” in which “several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (64). Intertextuality implies ‘a paradoxical nature of the discursive space that makes a text intelligible’. In fact, Bakhtin had long ago practised the art of ‘replacing the static
hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure’. In his conception of the literary word, a dynamic intersection of textual surfaces takes precedence over fixity (fixed meaning). The text is situated within history and society which are also viewed as co-texts into which the writer inserts himself in the course of ‘rewriting’ them. This is ‘diachrony’ transformed into ‘synchrony’. It eliminates the prospect of ending up with ‘abstraction’.

The ways he brings in dialogical discourse analysis, ambivalence, and polyphonic carnival as certain other aspects within the arena of intertextuality and hermeneutics demand a separate dissertation to be written. Karnad’s plays abound in intertextualities, both in terms of contrapuntality and juxtaposition.

**Hybridity** is a great path towards foregrounding liminality as enunciated by Homi K. Bhabha. As Jin Hee Han comments, “Bhabha’s luminance comes from his uncanny way of mining the complex power relationship involved in the production and consumption of discourses in the contemporary postcolonial world” (1). Exposing how power structures politicize ideas, meanings, and institutions which are never value-free categories because of politicization so as to ‘advance their agenda for social engineering’, Homi Bhabha proposes a rationale for responsible reading to deconstruct history, ‘right the exploitative past, and write the postcolonial future’ by re-reading texts and negotiating meanings within the matrices of ‘cultural differences’.

Bhabha’s categories of ‘hybridity and mimicry’ (a subtle form of protest against hegemonic fixity) are useful strategies in hermeneutics today as they serve as a collective agency to deconstruct absolutism and fixed signification of meaning and design a new world of ‘interstice’, a term he borrows from Emanuel Levinas, that means ‘third space’ or ‘in-between space’. A careful reading of his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), helps one understand Bhabha’s contention which revolves around his
realization that ‘history cannot be revised but can be re-inscribed from a new location’. The notion of ‘cultural difference’, as posited by Bhabha in his essay, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences”, published in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, edited B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin (1995), takes us to the third most important idiom, namely dialogicity. Hybridity also invigorates the art of complex viewing. Girish Karnad’s dramaturgy, for instance, foregrounding the feminine subaltern as subject of articulation appeals to readers and the audience by virtue of the ingredients of complex viewing he negotiates through hybridization of thought.

**Dialogicity** is a metaphor for celebrating differences. As an agency of hermeneutics, it foregrounds the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia and values language as ‘a nexus of voices’. As a canon, dialogicity implies that the question of ‘superiority and inferiority complexes’ is no more a value, condescending is grimaced, hegemony is thwarted, and listening to one another becomes a great and mutually benefitting value. The polyphonic dialogues Karnad ingrains within the structurality of his plays amplify dialogicity. These dialogues fine sites wherein such dialogicity that provides ample space for the articulation of voices silenced hitherto can be discerned.

**Otherness** is a great canon when we read literary texts with a postcolonial eye. In today’s world of complexities, conflicts and tensions, dialogicity ushers in Otherness as a modernist-sacred value. Historically speaking, the Other is a term that refers to all those subalterns whose voices have been smothered or marginalized across the spectrum of life vis-à-vis systems, polity, politics, and practices. Symbolically and metaphorically, Otherness is a way of putting the last as first and facilitating the subaltern and silenced voices to speak and articulate. Unfortunately, it remains as a utopian ideal as in reality it is nowhere practised to the satisfaction of the people who come under the category of the Other. It is a poetic strategy to celebrate the world of
subalterns who are victims of varied life-situations and experiences. As a hermeneutic idiom, it confronts hegemonic ideas of cultural identity and values the art of listening to the Other as a paramount strategy towards affirming the cultural identity of subalterns without hurting the aesthetics of inclusivity.

Otherness implies and affirms cultural differences, contextual diversities, and plural voices. It pleads for dialogicity, relationality, and interdependence implying that interpersonal and humanizing relations are surer and nobler paths towards social harmony and the triumph of truth. It embraces and accommodates all voices with a preference for silenced voices. As new agency towards hermeneutics, it liberates academics, critics, and others from fixity, exclusivity, condescendence, prejudices, abstractions and commoditization of cultural identities, saves them from hegemonic and exploitative tendencies, and propels them to appreciate other points of view in a concentric circle of dialogism. Otherness understands subalternity as a human predicament that means oppression and marginalization that denies the possibility of the powerless and voiceless poor to live with dignity. It is caused and perpetuated by the elite who are particular to keep their vested interests wet, green, and kicking.

Karnad believes that emancipation from this predicament is possible through ‘righting wrongs’ and ‘learning to learn from below’, to use the phrases of Spivak, which inspire us to cherish a gracious concern for the Other (Emmanuel Levinas). This is a process that involves conscientization, politics, collective action, and of course, poetics ushering a compassionate worldview and inclusive understanding of life.

As Krishna Singh observes in his essay, “Postcolonial Subalternization in the Plays of Karnad”, Karnad’s plays -- *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Nāga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Fire and the Rain* – may be counted as artistic sites wherein subalterns, especially women and low caste people subjected to patriarchy and caste-
hierarchy, voice their angst and articulate their identities by ‘speaking’, by shifting their position from the ‘margin’ and the ‘centre’. Karnad’s affinities with the Gramscian notion of subalternity and his deep-rooted humanism in depicting subordinate position in terms of class, gender, caste, race and culture are subtly implied in his approach to characterization and dialogue. His foregrounding the aesthetics of feminine subjectivity vis-à-vis gender issues and hegemony associated with patriarchy and his ethics of Otherness giving credence and value to the Other points of view are part of his cultural activism.

In the light of this broad theoretical framework, a modest attempt has been made to capture Karnad’s perception of modernity of tradition and thought under four domains of cultural enlightenment and modernist ethos vis-à-vis his writing the postcolonial present of contemporary India. They are:

1. Self-reflexive Mythification of Human Dilemmas: Existential Concerns and the Contemporary Indian Problematic;
2. Quest for Gender Justice: Man-Woman Relationship;
3. Dialogic Engagement with History: The Contemporary Indian Political Problematic, and
4. Foregrounding Egalitarian Goals: Religion, Caste, and Communalism as Barriers

Critical readings and analyses done here below expand these four domains by way of instantiation, elucidation, and commentaries and illustrate and examine the liminal space Karnad provides with a number of juxtaposed intertextualities. These four domains provide fourfold spaces – one, the physical space wherein settings are wrought, plot-episodes are textured, and characters play their enactment part, another, the psychological space wherein characters reveal their inner psyche, another, the
artistic or poetic space wherein the playwright negotiates his artistic or aesthetic statement which could acquire myriad levels of meaning propelling the reader to discern, and the other, the enlightening or rasa-aesthetic space wherein the reader or the audience appreciate the art-emotion ingrained in the myriad levels of meaning. The space available to the reader or the audience is a significant one as it provides scope for the audience to participate in the negotiation of meaning. These fourfold spaces highlight the human content of the play, and the human content is intersected with the use of manifold modern techniques involving a number of intertextualities such as myth, folktale, history, the Tiresias-type of third narrator, like Bhagawatha in *Hayavadana* and the Flames in *Nāga-Mandala*.

1. **Self-Reflexive Mythification of Human Dilemmas: Existential Concerns and the Contemporary Indian Problematic:**

Three plays -- *Yayati, Bali: The Sacrifice,* and *The Fire and the Rain* -- may be taken for analyses here with cross-references to certain other plays. *Yayati* and *The Fire and the Rain* have the *Mahabharata* epic as their source, and *Yashodhara Charite,* Janna’s 13th century Kannada epic serves as the matrix for *Bali.* Like *the Ramayana,* these cultural texts are perennial sources of inspiration for writing the contemporary India. Instead of glorifying, the playwright focuses on problematizing heroism and highlights his perception of the dilemmas of the contemporary world vis-à-vis moral indeterminacy and the Indian problematic. An ironic mode of self-reflexivity becomes a programmatic strategy to historicize the present in the light of India’s cultural past. Critiquing injustices, inequalities and residual hangovers of colonial and neo-colonial hegemony, Karnad aesthetically measures the contemporary Indian problematic through mythification of India’s ethno-symbolism. In the process, there is not only reconceptualization and contextualization that reflects the playwright’s
anti-colonial stances but also his ideational and romantic affinities with alternative
aesthetics. This is how his sense of Otherness becomes tenable and tangible. It
provides scope for a counter-discourse in the sense Helen Tiffin means in the book,
*The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft *et all*.

The counter-discourse Karnad brings in revolves around altering, often
allegorically, the native original cultural text such as texts mentioned above, which
serve as outer frame for his dramatic presentation of the predicament of
contemporary social situations, subverting original hegemonic narratives, re-visiting
and revising mythological characters, dismantling and deconstructing power-
structures, critiquing injustices associated with traditional hegemonies, and
decolonizing the mind of the reader by critical insiderism vis-à-vis injustices
involved and artistically implied romantic illuminations and provocations. Varied
cultural texts may serve as outer frames but contemporaneity is the major concern of
the writer in almost all the plays. The rich heterogeneity and vast energy of
postcolonial discourses facilitate the artist to ingrain a number of intertextualities
which have mythical, historical and political overtones and which contribute to the
density of his complex viewing.

In *Yayati*, as O.P. Budholia discusses at length in his essay, “Myth as the
Structure of Meanings: An Interpretation of Girish Karnad’s *Yayati*” (2009), projecting
‘the conditionings of human behaviour and the claims of the conflicting identities’ (46)
becomes a major preoccupation for Karnad within the structural plan of *Yayati*. The
story telling is done with the help of a myth on human behaviour which has its
reference to the cultural dialectics of India’s past. By going beyond the exchange of
age-paradigm between the father and son as it is in the original myth, Karnad’s
modernity of thought lies in his artistic focus on fixing the responsibility for human
actions. U.R. Ananthamurthy compliments Karnad for shaping *Yayati* as a ‘self-consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility’, moulding it into a complex modern tragedy that reflects the tensions of the educated contemporary urban Indian caught up in the contradictions of time.

Karnad’s deviation from the original version of the story in the *Mahabharata*, especially with regard to his approach to the characterization of Puru, the youngest son who agrees to give his youth to his father, is a conscious one. To Karnad, Puru’s passivity with no heroism in it is not appealing. He is shown as one incapable of comprehending the predicament he is in and the plight of Chitralekha, his newly wedded wife. Therefore, Karnad is particular to mould Chitralekha, the female character, as the one who could convey what true heroism is, what it means to be rational, logical, and tenable. In a way, she becomes the spokesperson not only for Puru but also for the angst of the contemporary urban Indian youth vis-à-vis authority of elders viewed as hegemony. Karnad’s blending of the serious and tragic forms of the dramatic motifs with the Indic theory of *bhavas* (emotions) and his mode of symbolization reveal a diachronic-synchronic ‘suggestive pattern of the mythic world ‘rebounding the possibilities of manifold meanings of the myth’. Elaborating her analysis of the structurality of the plot-structure of the play, Budholia comments:

The anthropic principles, genetical problems, heritability concerns, racial distinctions and philosophical references are made applicable to the structural plan of this play. Karnad ignores the sensibility of singular mode and thus creates the effects of plurality while decoding the linguistic meanings of the myth and brings them into being through various characters in dramatic action. The dramatist knows it well that the emotional history and the anthropological rationality can hardly be ignored for making the judicious assessment of the
anthropic principles of literature, the anthropocentric concerns and the anthropogenic realities. Our ability to see and to perceive is that our moral progression depends on analyzing the psychological, linguistic and anthropological motifs and at the same time to make their application to the morals of human life. (47)

Karnad’s musings through _Yayati_ may have nailed him to the past but his quest for arriving at rationality to connote multilayers of meanings relevant to existential situations of contemporary India is perennial. _Yayati_ is a fine illustration to show how Karnad was deft at using myth linking it to rationality, emotional and thinking and semiotic and semantic levels which yield to the mythical effect of connoting multilayers of meanings. In his dramaturgy, it is myth that remains ‘an ever fresh text for the resolution and dissolution of conflict’ (Budholia, 47). Its linguistic properties and suggestive meanings imply the immense and immeasurable range of human thought and culture.

Karnad takes liberty with the myth borrowed from the “Adiparva” of the _Mahabharata_ and alters it to weave complex dimensions into the plot. In Karnad’s _Yayati_, Yayati’s patriarchy and his desire to satiate carnal pleasures through illicit relationship are projected major issues, and these are issues the contemporary audience/readers grapple with too. In terms of the structurality of the play, Karnad brings in, at the outset, Sutradhara, the ‘holder of strings’, to familiarize the audience/readers with the tradition of Sanskrit drama. In tune with Sanskrit drama and Bharata’s dramatic principles, he ensures that the secular mode of the art of drama, namely drama as ‘the mirror of the doings of the world’, prevails. The metaphor of ‘Sanjivini Vidya’ (the art of reviving the dead) ingrained in the text, introducing the theme of the play, is a double-edged one, standing, on the one hand, for “the sentiment of fear and the
quenchless lust for the fulfilment of desire” (Bhudolia, 47) that prompts man to transgress moral and social norms, and for ‘intertwining the Yayati myth with that of Devayani and Kacha’, on the other, by which readers are informed about the failure of Devayani to reach a conjugal alliance with Kacha who declines the marriage proposal by virtue of his commitment to the mastering of the art of ‘Sanjivini Vidya’. The mutual curses they imprecate upon each other and the intertextual configuration ensured by Karnad make readers understand the flow of events in the play and the multiple meanings embedded in it. The conflicting conditions impacting the triangle relationships -- between the queen (Devayani) and the king (Yayati), between the queen and the slave (Sharmishtha), and between the king and the slave -- and the dialogic engagements wrought in suggest the complex viewing of human emotions revolving around extramarital relationships and ‘psychogenic traits of women’s psyche’ and the nature of the passion of polyandry. The contemporary existential content is reflected in Karnad’s perceptions on human sexuality in the midst of interactions between man and woman and in the light of the transference of coded meanings within the dramatic syntax.

Besides focusing on a psychoanalytical portrayal of the king’s predicament, that even a king like Yayati, a scion of Bharata dynasty of Kshatriya background, can be swayed by the infatuating spell of a woman brought into his life outside the societal conjugal norms because of his ‘youth-bursting passion’ which only reflects his patriarchal but pathetic state of mind, Karnad ingrains a contrapuntal placing of the roles of the two women – Sharmishtha and Devayani -- in terms of binary emotions. Sharmishtha represents the woman of nature, the fulfilment of carnal desire, and Devayani, the woman of culture, symbolizing nobility and triumph over the fear of
death. The woman of nature, according to Manu, is capable of enticing men. To quote Manu,

Woman’s love is intoxicating draught of the three worlds: while wine only clouds when it is drunk, woman robs the understanding, if she is but looked on; and so she has infatuated the highest of the gods and wise men. (qtd. in Jonathan Jakob Meyer 502).

The two binary aesthetic sentiments represented by these two women signify the conflicting tensions within human nature. They stand for the bhavas latent in human nature. The emotion that seeks carnal pleasure stretches to the extent of causing decimation of the discriminating ability of the human mind as signified in the person of Yayati, and the emotion that relates to the culture of nobility expresses aversion and rage against the carnal desire that means lust. It may look like an expression of jealousy when Devayani calls Sharmishtha, ‘a treacherous hyena’ or ‘a reptile’ but the predicament she is in can be perceived in her confessional articulation before Sharmishtha:

I will not be able to sleep a wink while his hands caress your body. (33).

But, Sharmishtha is not a corpse, dead to her emotion. Her attitude is summed up in her statement that reveals her sentiment of attachment:

I was your slave. My eyes have no lids now. I live staring at you, unflinching like the fish. No, like the gods. No more a corpse, its eyes wide open. As the king crawls into your bed night after night, I want you to remember I am there, hovering around. (11)

The mythification done by Kanad extends its layers of meanings through the arrival of Puru, son of Yayati, along with his newly wedded wife, Chitralehka, a ‘new woman’ character which is not in the original myth. Revolting against the infidelity of
her husband, Devayani departs from the king’s palace. On coming to know of the infidelity of the king, Shukracharya, father of Devayani, curses Yayati, and the curse robs him of his youth binding him to stagnating decrepitude associated with old age. Puru, without taking into account the emotions of Chitralekha, obliges to be a victim of ‘rank perversion’, to cite a phrase from the dialogue of Sharmishtha, by accepting to be the sacrificial lamb just to facilitate his father to keep up the charm of youth and passion. This willingness on the part of Puru to pass on his youth and passion to his father and bear the brunt of his father’s decrepitude stands in sharp contrast to the biological emotions and the conjugal rights Chitralekha, the new woman from Karnad’s perspective, wishes to exercise. She protests and questions her father-in-law’s caprice:

I was keen to become your daughter-in-law. But so were you to accept me as one. Even apart from my family, because of my accomplishments, because of what I am and now you want me to meekly yield to your demands. (62).

Her genuine sentiments of subjectivity, her sense of objectivity and fairness, her rightful feelings for possessiveness towards her husband who has become incapable of fulfilling her sexual desire, and her awareness of the plight she is in, her own future as a happily married wife being blighted, propel her to generate a number of questions vis-à-vis her identity. The existential angst she endures forces her to refute the crafty insinuation of Yayati asking her to “rise above trivialities” (65). She is neither prepared nor willing to be a ‘superhuman’ in the sense Yayati asks for. Instead, she questions his patriarchy and cowardice and asks for the fulfillment of her marital privilege to have a seed planted in her womb, meaning that such a thing can happen only if Yayati indulges in an act of fornication. Her ferocity is conveyed in the following lines:
Chitralekha: “You have taken over your son’s youth. It follows that you should accept everything that comes attached to it”.

Yayati: “Whore! Are you inviting to fornication?”

Chitralekha: “Oh, come, sir; these are trite considerations. We have to be superhuman. Nothing like this has ever happened before. Nothing like this is likely to…” (66).

The layers of meaning Karnad conveys within the aesthetics of dramatic art vis-à-vis the family and social conflicts dealt with are manifold. The linguistic signs and signifiers, the dramatic leitmotifs, forms and techniques he integrates reiterate multiple connotations. The meaning that Chitralehka, as an Indian new woman, attuned to Indic legacies of conjugality, is ‘demanding and her demands ought to be fulfilled’ is foregrounded well within the realm of tenable rationality. But, the point is not that she is ‘foolish’ in suggesting fornication for a desired end but it is that she expresses her disgust over what has happened, and by doing so, she moves beyond ‘the id-ego-super-ego’ matrix and even beyond the biological or instinctual necessities associated with human sexual urges measuring up to the standards a new Indian woman stands for. The contrapuntality of meaning can also be extended to the realm of certain other intertextualities such as cultural imperatives pertaining to the socialization process of sex and aggression and idealistic principles of Indic tradition associated with conjugality and married life. In Karnad’s subversive aesthetics of art, Chitralekha goes beyond the rigid perspectives and forms of ‘patriivrata’ (committed to be a chaste and dutiful wife) and acts like a typical Karnadian female protagonist. Her stance not only belittles and benumbs the patriarchal and egoistic positioning of Yayati but also stands in contrast to the stance of Puru whose inaction caused by old
age is not acceptable to Chitralekha. As she is about to consume a vial of poison and
die, a move that means an act of self-pathos and desperation, she avers:

What else is there for me to do? You have your youth. Prince Pooru has his old
age. Where do I fit in. (66)

Her audacity, crystal clear in her articulation, is part of the poetic aesthetics of
Karnad where the female becomes an agency of subjectivity and forms part of
alternative aesthetics. Karnad subtly exposes the hypocrisy of the patriarchy through
Chitralekha, the new woman, which practises one law for itself and another for a
woman, curbing her desires and asking her to practise ‘pativrata’. Commenting on
how choice and the consequence of choices are projected as disassociated phenomena
in the plays of Karnad, C.N. Ramachandran states: “The worst sufferers are women . . .
. who are caught up in a whirlpool of Hindu patriarchy, and are sucked down
helplessly” (28). The characterization of Chitralekha throws more light on the male-
gendered bias and hegemony indulged in by Yayati.

Sharmishtha’s remark that “a woman dead”, meaning Chitralekha, “another
gone mad”, meaning Devayani, “and a third is in danger of her life (Sharmishtha)” (68)
defines the space Karnad provides for Otherness as an agency of articulation against the
sort of hypocrisy women have to deal with in the name of patriarchy. Sharmishtha is
quite realistic and passes enough and more hints to suggest how the licentiousness of
Yayati to indulge in sexuality to satiate his desire is detrimental to the status and
dignity of others, in this case, all women. She cautions him about the futility of
‘competing with time’ (50), hinting how his shameless ways of beating aging ruin the
queen and other young women whom he is fond of for his sensuous exploits. She even
goes to the extent of demoralising and urging Yayati to think of a life hermitage in the
forest and shows her willingness to accompany him to the forest. Her presence in the
play has its postcolonial significance from the point of view her boldness to poke at Yayati’s acts of hegemony and weaknesses and even tease Devayani for her arrogance that goes with her racist sense of superiority. Her story, one of friendship with Devayani turned into slavery, destined to be at the service of Devayani at the palace, which has a co-text in her grudge against Devayani and her father who seals her fate to slavery for the harm she meant to Devayani, can also be interpreted as a story that tends to be a Calibanic cry for so many freedoms, cry against the modern or postmodern man’s angst to be ‘ageless’ and to be licentious and cry against the modern or postmodern woman’s angst to be ‘condescending’ by virtue of being or feeling superior. She ‘speaks’ and is assertive enough to react against being branded as “a famished dog gazing at the moon believing it to be a round roti” (21). Karnad’s subversion of the original myth has its focus in giving a new meaning and sensitizing the modern generation as the issues and concerns he deals with are relevant even today.

In the Mahabharata, Yayati understands the nature of desire itself and realizes that ‘fulfilment neither diminishes nor eliminates desire’. But, in the play, Karnad makes Yayati confront the horrifying consequences of not being able to relinquish desire. It is against this backdrop, the role played by Chitralekha becomes crucial and relevant to the dramatic purpose of Karnad. It is her bold stance that forces Yayati to develop a sense of guilt, erase the venal particles of his lower self, and elevate himself to the stature of a man of culture and nobility on par with his status as a king. As a consequence, he gives up his kingship and passes that right to his son, Puru who regains his youth and power of desire. This is Karnad’s intertextual and aesthetic way of storytelling wherein he integrates and problematizes a contemporaneous issue such as the one related to human conjugality and sexuality wrought into the play, Yayati.
If the reality of being a woman, despite the fact she comes from a noble class, makes Chitralekha suffer humiliation and endure marginalization in the name of ‘pativrata’, which means enormous pain imposed upon her sensitivities and sensibilities, the futility of having been born a woman haunts Swarnalatha, the maid servant of Chitralekha. As another co-text, the story of Swarnalatha is portrayed as one of double predicament, enduring the fact that she belongs to a low caste and enduring patiently the inevitability of the subculture of patriarchy that accuses her of having had an affair with a Brahmin boy before her marriage, accused by her own husband, who feels ‘jilted’ and who has no basis to allege against and condemn her to such a humiliating experience. The Swarnalatha episode problematizes the irrationality and the absurdity of expecting women to be innocent and yet haplessly and meekly surrender to hegemony as if chastity and virginity were rules meant for women only. The male-gendered patriarchy indulged in by Yayati, or even by the husband of Swarnalatha shows that men are never called into question when they transgress. Karnad is particular to expose such hypocrisy. The condition of women seldom gets altered even if she belongs to a higher social order in terms of class, or caste, or race, and the plight of a low caste woman means double oppression in Indian society.

_Bali: the Sacrifice_ is a play where multiperspectival viewing of the ideological spaces on the question of viability of practising non-violence becomes the prima focus. The moral imperative of non-violence, according to Jain ascetic thought, is that causing no injury to any living creature is the basis of _dharma_. Certain other related concepts such as religion, faith and beliefs, and attitudes and behavior get also problematized in the process. In the midst of conflicting beliefs and practices, the play sustains dialogicity with sufficient space for ‘negotiation of the third space’, to use a phrase of Homi K.Bhabha, and hybridization of thought vis-à-vis perceptions on
violence. The encounter between the Queen and the Mahout. If Shakespeare views
the world where everyone has a role to play, Karnad sees the world as a giant
‘negotiation-table’ where interpersonal interactions on ideas and ideological spaces
could take place on contemporary concerns and issues. While acknowledging a
Gandhian view that the value of *ahimsa* (non-violence) is crucial to the cultural and
political survival of India, Karnad objectifies his stance by implying that there are
other views and values too. Projection of one ideology or perspective as the only
view, to the exclusion of other views, is not tenable to him. The author, characters,
and the audience – all are involved in the process of negotiation vis-à-vis the question
of non-violence. It is important to note that in the play, unlike in the original epic in
Kannada, no character has an individual name. The King, the Queen, the Queen
Mother and the Mahout are all representatives associated with certain “temperamental
and contextual ideologies suited to the specific scenes where they make their
appearance” (Sumita Roy 2). Dialogicity on the question of violence and non-violence
is the major focus of Karnad.

The crux of the matter in the play is whether animal sacrifice to propitiate gods
by way of religious rituals and devotional practices constitutes an act of violence. The
King’s adherence to Jainism, influenced by his conjugal communion with the Queen
professing Jainism that values compassion as a supreme value, is now in conflict with
that of his Hindu faith by birth, and by extension, with his Queen-mother’s Hinduism
and Vedic belief that gods’ benignity could be obtained by rituals and offering of
sacrifices. Jainism prevents any kind of animal sacrifice as it means violence. But, his
Queen-mother is fine with killing of animals or birds and offering them as sacrifice as
part of her family’s religious ritual from which, from her point of view, her son cannot
deviate. The Queen-mother’s argument is:
You're treating my goddess as though she were a cheap, tribal spirit . . . You were not born a Jain. You were born my son. But you betrayed me and my faith. Instead of choosing the woman and bringing her to your faith, you chose hers.

(98)

The ideological dialogic confrontation is again triangulated with the Queen Mother on one side, the Queen – wife on another, and the King himself, on the other side, having the predicament of negotiating between the two. The Queen-Mother is a staunch believer in animal sacrifice and has a range of animals and poultry in the shed for varied occasions of religious rituals and rites. In terms of his emotions, he sees in his mother’s scathing use of the word, ‘betrayal’, wherein it is implied that values such as loyalty and family traditions are being crushed, but in terms of his self-imposed obligations to his wife’s faith and his love for his spouse, he sees killing animals even for devotional rituals and practices involves violence, and therefore, it should be shunned. His predicament is reiterated by the discomfiture the Queen-wife expresses on the bleat of sheep taken at night for animal sacrifice:

I’m afraid … of the thatched roof there. It is the shed in which your mother keeps her animals. … All these years I’ve been pretending that it does not exist. That I couldn’t hear the bleat of sheep being taken out at night. (95)

The king vacillates, caught between two ideological spaces represented by his mother and his wife. He is in a state of perpetual confusion struggling to arrive at the right or middle path.

The resolution comes through the Queen and the Mahout encounter, another climatic event placed as another site, a co-text, within the main text, a sign that signifies intertextuality and complex and multiperspectival viewing and negotiates another ideological space. The Queen, unable to beget a son through her husband to continue
the royal legacy, opts for a sexual encounter with the Mahout, the elephant-keeper for
the palace. The Queen is not bothered about the lowly status or the humble caste
background of the Mahout. To the Queen, he becomes a symbol of female liberation,
liberating her from the ridicule of being branded as a barren woman or from the
giggling of the palace maids. A barren woman, bereft of her sexual creativity, is looked
down in Indian society even today. Enchanted by the heavenly voice of the Mahout, she
moves in the thick of the night towards a ruined temple where the deity is absent and
where the Mahout resides. For the moment, the Mahout becomes her deity and she feels
elated that her female sexual creativity blossoms forth in the presence of the Mahout.
Her feminine psyche is bold and assertive enough to see no sinfulness in her act of
having a sexual encounter with the Mahout whom she sees as her savior and savior of
the royal throne.

After the impact of the mishap in her womb and the consequent failure to
successfully deliver the child by virtue of the union with her husband, the womb of
time takes a different turn her life. It cajoles her to lean towards the Mahout and makes
her see it as a God-inspired opportunity to conceive and deliver a baby for the royal
family. In her mind, to quote Shalini Umachandran, 'the Mahout is not merely the
reason for her transgression'. He represents ‘a listening, logical God’. The fresh
pregnancy induces her to be clever enough to manoeuvre with the royal patriarchy and
argue her case to her advantage. Elated by the prospect of childbirth by virtue of her
union with the Mahout, she reveals her sense of pride to her husband:

Can you men even imagine what it feels like? To pretend you are unaware of
their gaze as they scrutinize the roundness of your belly, the stain on your thigh!
Line after line of carrion crows, watching, waiting, ready to caw at the palm full
of blood that spurted. And spurt it did—every month—every bloody month.

How I hated myself when that happened. (211)

She is not ashamed of such an act as it facilitates her to beget a child for the prolongation of the kingdom. In fact, it makes her convince her husband to disband the shed meant for the animals so as to ensure that no bali is thought of by way of propitiation because of her encounter with the mahout or in view of anticipating the smooth arrival of the child from the womb of time.

Yet, she professes her love and loyalty to her husband, the King:

Queen (suddenly laughs, tousles her hair): “Yes, I can. For you. You could have taken another wife. You didn’t”.

King: “Of course I didn’t”.

Queen: “Sometimes I wished you had”.

King: “You did”.

Queen: “Yes, purely for bearing children. Then I could make love to you— for its own sake—to make love. You don’t know how I have pined for that. And now I can look forward to it” (211).

The negotiating table Karnad places in this play holds a mirror to modernist ethos that highlights the view that holding on to one particular ideology has little relevance. Multiple points of view are negotiated and accommodated. Though the Queen-mother opines that the Queen has committed the sin of adultery, violating her conjugal fidelity, and therefore, the Queen has to offer a sacrifice to propitiate family gods and right the wrongs done to the family, the Queen has no remorse or guilt-feeling of any kind for the encounter. In another conversation with her husband, the Queen says:

Because I didn’t plan it. It happened. And it was beautiful. (235)

This is her way of confronting hegemony coming from the family side.

In a review of the text of the play, Shalini Umachandran notes,

_Bali_ is a puzzling play that doesn't follow a beginning-middle-end format. It's the kind that thrives on layers of subtleties that makes you want to sit down and sort out the zillions of thoughts it stirs up. (*The Hindu* 2004).

With due sensitivity to the Gandhian concept of non-violence, Karnad provides multiple spaces to accommodate varied ways of looking at the concept and mediates meanings by juxtaposing astutely the idea of infidelity with that of non-violence. One of the philosophical and phenomenological connotations implied in the text is that, as Shalini adds, ‘violence is just beneath the surface, and that thought, intention and action are not so different after all’. By dramatizing the myth of the Cock of Dough, Karnad brings out the idea that ‘violence is pervasive and often masked by other actions and aspects’. Karnad’s own note to the play, a method A.K.Ramanujan used to follow quite often vis-à-vis his translated texts, is quite plain and it serves as a co-text and clue to reiterate such an analysis of the play. He writes:

It deals with the idea that violence is pervasive, lying just beneath the surface of our everyday behaviour and is often masked by a conscious effort. It also posits that human thought, intention and action are all interlinked. It debates the Jain notion that intended violence is as condemnable as the action itself. The mere thought of bloodshed or brutality can condemn one as much as the deed would.

The play debates the conflict of faith. (31).

The ending of the play, vis-à-vis the sacrifice of the cock of dough, is part of Karnad’s modernity of thought and complex viewing that yields to multiple meanings.
As Karnad himself notes, the cock of dough, as it is in the original myth, eludes closure and as a site and sign within his dramaturgy is open to multiple meanings. Within a triangulated dialogicity – dialogues between the Queen-mother and the King, the King and the Queen, and the Queen-mother and the Queen – Karnad problematizes one exclusivist view of violence or non-violence. The sinfulness associated with the extra-marital communion the Queen had with the Mahout has to be atoned for. The Queen-mother, being a tradition-bound lady, insists on sacrifice in accordance the royal family tradition while the Queen, who does not see any sinfulness, or has no guilt-feeling or guilt-conscience in her act of belittling her marital fidelity, refuses to budge by virtue of her faith in Jainism. It is strange that she maintains a kind of peculiar paradoxical contradiction by having no guilt-feeling of any kind for the internal violence she causes to her husband by cuckolding him on the one hand, and by yet meticulously standing for her faith in non-violence vis-à-vis the sacrifice to be performed by way of atonement. A middle path is proposed in the form of offering a cock of dough instead of a real one as sacrifice. Though the Queen is not that comfortable with the middle-path solution offered because in her view, subterfuge is pointless, she, not wishing her husband any further torture, agrees reluctantly to the compromise-formula, namely to perform a symbolic sacrifice that could mean atonement and ensure peace and harmony in the family. But, unfortunately, to the Queen’s discomfiture, a real cock crows when the cock of dough is about to be sacrificed prompting her to think that the cock of dough has turned alive. As the king picks up the cock of dough and squashes it, the Queen snatches the sword from her husband and is about to lunge at him. But, as she realizes the folly of doing such a thing and comes out of the horrific predicament she is in, she hears the real cock crowing again and the King himself is taken by surprise. As he turns to the door, the Queen, as Karnad narrates, “presses the point of the blade on
her womb, impales herself on the sword, and collapses into his arms. The King holds
her, uncomprehendingly, listening to the cock’s crowing. It’s dawn” (124).

Karnad does not end the play here. The Queen, true to her name ‘Amritamati’
(life-giving elixir), comes alive, courtesy a beam of life-giving light, singing the eternal
verities of life, meaning that the cycle of life goes on although, as S. Subhash Chandran
comments, “the dark night of confrontation is over and the dawn is on heralding a new
cycle of action” (302). Drawing inspiration from the book, Drama of Social Reality, by
Stanford M.Lyman and Marvin B.Scott, he further points out that ‘the play has four
human characters and two deities symbolizing opposing belief systems’, dramatizing
‘the perpetual battle between two polarized forces from the beginning of civilization’,
one force that is determined to uphold ‘the Apollonian principle of stability’ tending to
impose form and order upon the world, and ‘the Dionysian principle of life’ tending to
‘burst out of forms and boundaries’.

Aparna Dharwadker, comments:

In Bali the queen is childless and although this lack is an inescapable point of
reference in her life, it is not (at least for her) a source of obsessive guilt or
shame. Aroused by the mahout’s song, she seeks him out for an anonymous
coupling that violates the boundaries of caste and class, but when challenged,
refuses to profess guilt for her action or to atone for it through a propitiatory
ritual. More than any other female character in Karnad’s drama, she is a
transgressive presence, deprived of conventional feminine roles by chance and
circumstance, but self-possessed and cerebral enough not to surrender to the
pressures of conformity. (15)

Commenting from the point of the dialectics of culture, Om Prakash Budhuria
remarks:
The myth of Cock of Dough, borrowed from the Sanskrit literature, serves the theatrical purposiveness. Girish Karnad makes an application of the four fold aspects to the thematic contents of Bali: The Sacrifice: the dialectics of culture, philosophical configurations of the Hindu and the Jain religions, the folk motifs of the drama and the art of dramaturgy. The two ways -- the violence and the nonviolence, become the dialectic of culture. (178)

In terms of dialogicity and plurisignification, the play foregrounds quite a few divergent concerns echoing modernist ethos vis-à-vis the deep spiritual rift between the Queen-mother’s belief in the traditional Kshatriya ethos and the queen’s staunch championing of Jain-faith that proclaims compassion, mercy, and non-violence as great values. Issues such as fidelity, infidelity, the psychological violence both the Queen-mother and the Queen cause to the manhood of the King, and the ideological and emotional conflicts between the Queen-mother and the Queen are motifs which serve Karnad’s dramatic purpose. In modern times too, such issues crop up in families on varied occasions, and by extension in social conflicts where rigid religious convictions contribute to the perpetuation of fundamentalism and associated practices which could include even acts of terrorism. As Barack Obama, US President, stated the other day, ‘humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history’. The aesthetics of drama as envisaged by Karnad’s revisiting of the myth relevant to this play connotes the complexities involved in tackling issues like violence and reiterates the need for dialogicity and respecting other points of view in the course of finding solutions.

Karnad’s The Fire and the Rain is another complex play in terms of issues such as revenge, futility of knowledge, jealousy, ego, and human struggles and dilemmas related to man-woman relationships in a male-controlled Indian society. The play can
be read from varied points of view with prospects of multiple meanings. As Rama Nair reads, the play can be ‘a dramatic representation of the quintessential conflict between good and evil’ through a ritual that be viewed as a means of ‘self-discovery’, a ritual that has a number of “symbolic and allegorical overtones” (243). P. Jayalakshmi views the play as one that deals with ‘politics of power’ vis-à-vis gender and caste. Shivaji Shankar Kamble reads it from nativist point of view wherein the ‘non-Vedic traditions of Buddha, Jain, Veershaiva, Varkari, Mahanubhava cult’ are reflected focusing on ‘self-realization or inner voice of human beings’ pointing to the yonder verities of life such as the Gandhian concern and search for ‘the gospel of truth, truth as non-violence and truth as love’. This researcher views it from the point of Karnad’s literary word as an intertextual temporal agency that concentrates on the Indian problematic, and by extension, on the perpetual human dilemma whether to follow the path of Cain as the story of his orgy with violence is told in the Bible, or to follow the path of love with profound concern for equality, fellowship and humanity, the path pursued by Aravasu with extraordinary inspiration from Nittilai as their part of the story is told in the play.

Though the play revolves around the matrices of a-historical intertextual mythic structures, the literary and poetic mythification done by Karnad brings in the role Nittilai to the forefront in Karnad’s temporalization of his dramaturgic narrative that has a terrific contemporary context and relevance. She, as a female character, transcends the barriers of gender and caste. Before her role is discussed, it is important to explain what kind of temporalization the playwright integrates within his restructuring. The play is a fine illustration of temporalization wherein Karnad skillfully uses his dramaturgy to combine varied intertextual themes and comment on the contemporary Indian problematic, namely the dichotomy between religious knowledge and faith and cult and practising moral norms. The issues he deals with are
perennial concerns in India. Citizenry in general in any culture or civilization for that matter expect that those who preach, especially the priestly or the ascetic class, practise what they uphold in their preaching. But, when that does not happen, schism, bordering on ‘split-personality culture’ is the consequence. This is the focus of Karnad.

Based on his readings and reflections on the myth of Yavakri (or Yavakrita) which occurs in Chapters 135-138 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto) of the Mahabharata, a task that has drawn his attention for thirty years, Karnad, as Aparna Dharwadker points out, revisits the world of Hindu antiquity and constructs a story of passion, loss, and sacrifice in the contexts of Vedic ritual, spiritual discipline (tapasya), social and ethical differences between human agents, and interrelated forms of performance still close to their moments of origin. The original myth is quite a complicated one with a number of motifs and intertextualities comprising of ‘play within the play’, a mask-mode that accommodates the mixing of the human and non-human, the natural and supernatural, wrought into it. The complexity of the original myth lies in its two religious extremes, one related to ascetic practices which would give knowledge and enlightenment to uphold dharma and moral norms for life, and the other related to ritualistic practices performed by the Brahmin-priestly class. With a critiquing mind based on realism, Karnad critiques both the extremes for the havocs they cause. He sees the dangers of ascetics giving up moral norms in spite of their knowledge of the Vedas acquired by penance and depicts the priestly class as the one fine and comfortable with what he names, ‘the cold logic’ of the Mimamsā philosophers who think that performing yajnas – Vedic rituals – is a gateway to please gods, with little regard for keeping up ethical standards of living.

What perturbs Karnad and prompts him to focus on, in his play, is the contradiction between ideals and practices, between moral norms and immoral
behaviour. Those who pursue ascetic paths for knowledge and enlightenment and those who believe in and practise ritualism – both – indulge in a life of hypocrisy and break ethical and moral norms which they are supposed to adhere to, indulging betrayals, treachery, sex-crimes, murders, vengeance and violence. By contradistinction, he shapes the characterization of Aravasu and Nittilai to foreground the *Eros*, the positive energies of life, which promote humanism and which can be cherished against the *Thanatos*, the negative energies of life, which lead to destruction. Against this backdrop, Karnad titles the play with contrasting connotations. The title of the play stands for the fire of lust, anger, vengeance, envy, treachery, violence and death, and the ‘rain’ symbolizes self-sacrifice, compassion, divine grace, forgiveness, revival and life. Karnad’s mythification, resembling Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* trilogy in terms of structure and thematic richness, connects the world of gods and humans contrapuntally through a number of co-texts used as intertextualities and throws more light on human frailties, temptation and related crime, and the dangers of knowledge without wisdom and power without integrity. As Vanashree Tripathi comments, the mythic cast of the play “draws us to a profound moral message – reawakens us to the world of the past, connects us with the secret regions of our psyche – a terrain of repressed anxieties, contradictory impulses” (43).

The essence of the storyline, available in the Preface to the play, narrated by Karnad himself revolves around two sages – Bharadwaja and Raibhya, who were friends, and their sons. Yavakri, the son of sage Bhardwaja, despite his awareness of the ethical and moral principles acquired through learning of the Vedas directly from Indra after ten years rigorous penance and despite his father cautioning him about the significance of acquiring divine power, fails to see the delusions of omnipotence and dares molesting Vishakha, wife of Paravasu and daughter-in-law of sage Raibhya, with
whom he has little rapport. In retaliation, Raibhya creates a demon, Brahma Rakshasa, and a spirit, Vishakha to represent the spirit of his daughter-in-law, so that they could pursue Yavakri and kill him. Yavakri, thirsty, looking for water with no urn to quench his thirst or give him the protection and with his entry barred to his father’s hermitage, is decimated by the rakshasha. The cycle of revenge goes on. Bhardwaja curses Raibhya stating that he would die at the hands of his own son. When he realizes that he is an ascetic who cannot afford to curse, that too, a friend, he dies by self-immolation. True to the curse, Raibhya gets killed inadvertently, or by a subtle conspiracy, by Paravasu, one of his own sons, who mistakes his father for a deer because he is seen, in the night, wearing deer-skinned dress. Paravasu, inclined to use his ascetic knowledge for destructive purposes, is deeply conscious of himself, his ego and super ego. Pretending to be busy with another ritual as officiating Chief Priest, he asks his younger brother, Aravasu, to complete the ritual formalities related to his father’s funeral and certain penitential rites to be performed by way of atonement. He knows that, in Brahminical tradition, penance or atonement cannot be done by proxy. He uses the occasion as a ploy. His intention is to pass the blame for the patricide upon Aravasu. As he stands accused in front of the king, Aravasu is forcefully ejected out of the sacrificial rituals and the religious thread is torn out of his body. Aravasu then begins his own penance to the Sun God, and when granted a boon, asks for Yavakri, Bhardwaj, and Raibhya to be restored to life. As Krishna Singh comments, ‘lives that were destroyed due to human lapses are restored through divine intervention’. Yavakri, reprimanded by gods, realizes his folly and he is advised to follow path of righteousness.

Originally written in Kannada as Agni Mattu Male and translated into English by the playwright himself, the text as performance has a long history of its evolution into a dramatic structure that consists of a Prologue, three Acts, and an Epilogue.
overall structure is a dynamic combination that has various art forms such as music, dance, contrapuntality, and role-playing. Thematically, it displays complicated human relationships depicting positive and negative emotions like jealousy of man against man, father against son, brother against brother, wife against husband, high caste against low caste human beings. As another tragedy of desires, the play, as a drama within a drama, with a number of related intertextualities, intertwine the stories of Yavakri, Paravasu, Aravasu, Nittilai and Vishakha as stories which “subsume motifs of Oedipus theme, patricide, fraticide, and incest, and recall the most archaic primal springs of human nature”, reverberating with the anxieties and desires of man not specific to a culture, or a class, or gender, but to the entire humanity in all times” (Vanashree Tripathi 122). In Karnad’s dramaturgic revisiting of the myth and related subtexts, drama becomes an artistic tool, to critique hypocritical traditions and practices associated with Vedic rituals and brahminical ways of harmonizing and appropriating power strictures, foreground fresh poetic gazes vis-à-vis the positives of human psyche and the goodness of lowly and humble people from among the Shudras or subaltern sections of society and romanticize the plausibility of graceful and dignified living in the ambience of mutual respect, care and concern. Motifs and symbols – such as fire, drought, water and rain – stand in between the lines to convey meanings which resonate with poetic romanticization of certain positives against the painful negatives.

The Prologue deals with the ritual of a seven-year long fire sacrifice approved by the King to propitiate Indra, the god of rain so as to overcome the agonizing impact of drought of ten long years because of which people suffer. The Prologue helps readers / the audience see the rationale for the fire sacrifice and the Actor-Manager declaims, with reference to the legends associated with the fire sacrifice in the Vedic age, on the need for the performance of entertainment going along with cultic oblations.
Paravasu is the officiating Chief Priest conducting the ceremony in the presence of the King. By bringing in the Brahma Rakshasa, symbolizing a cursed Brahmin soul, doomed to wander restlessly and painfully for all eternity, Karnad sets the tone of the play hinting at the co-existence of good and evil. In Indian aesthetics, redemption from evil and destruction could happen by the sacrifice of innocence, though the demise of innocence is only a temporary setback. Ultimately, it is truth and goodness that will triumph. Myths in the form of metaphysical battles and rituals in the form of fire sacrifices get intertwined to redefine the meaning of life with reference to creation and destruction and with prospects of regeneration beyond death, violence, and such other negatives. Karnad as an artist aware of the features of Indian aesthetics, uses the metaphor of ‘rain’ in the play, as the Epilogue unveils, to allegorically represent the possibility of regeneration and redemption.

The Prologue and Act I of the play give enough hints about how the nobler ends of the Vedic sacrifice, supposed to serve the cause of lifting man’s soul to the highest state of self-realization through self-surrender and self-effacement for the good of society, are thwarted. The sacrifice and related rituals are geared to towards serving egoistic and materialistic ends. As a result, malevolence becomes prominent in the form of crimes, murders and decimation of rivals. Acts II and III depict how Agni, fire, works as anger and ferocious revenge in most of the male characters, except in the case of Aravasu who has a therapeutic journey from innocence to experience and vice versa courtesy Nittilai, the girl from a hunter tribe, with whom he is in love. Even gods seem to be mute witnesses to the enactment of the human strife all around. There is little grace, or vision, or light in the sacrifice. In the end, as indicated in the Epilogue, the saving grace comes, released by god, Indra, in the form of torrential rain that quenches the parched earth, courtesy again, the goodness of Nittilai and Aravasu. All the
individual natures and egoistic identities get subsumed or merged into the Infinite Oneness through the sacrifice of Nittilai and Aravasu.

In terms of contemporaneous consciousness, a few other layers of connotations pervade Karnad’s structure of the play through subtexts serving as intertextual sites. Going beyond the prototype of Paravasu – Raibhya rivalry that ‘induces moments of sinister hostility and vicious rage’, Karnad infuses the old myth with new blood in terms of complexity of human condition by connecting it, as Vanashree Tripathi adds, “to the secret regions our psyche which have been a terrain of anxieties and contradictory impulses” (124). One prominent region of the human psyche is the hyper-ego intensity of Paravasu who believes that knowledge need not lead to virtuous living. It is poetic justice that he meets his end the way he deserves. The power politics that consorts with crushing mentality and attitude prevalent then in ancient society has its replicas even today in contemporary India. Another region is the female gaze Nittilai sustains with goodness and kindness on the one hand and with critical sneering at and challenging the hegemonic hollowness indulged in by the brahminical class. When Aravasu expresses his willingness to marry her, Nittilai is forthright and candid in telling him what her father thinks of high caste men: “He always says: These high-caste men are glad enough to bed our women but not to wed them” (8). As this researcher’s guide, the supervisor of this thesis, emphatically put it in one of the discussions with this researcher, Karnad’s characterization of Nittilai is a fine example of an authentic woman with her own sense of nobility, integrity, audacity, and humane identity. She is not a woman with a narcissistic tendency like that of self-centred Paravasu to aver that she ‘has no other but a woman’s reason’, or to indulge in sheer femininity or female sexuality. Hailing from a tribal background that has its affinities with Nature’s environment, she has the capacity to express and relate with healing touches, as
indicated in her impactful relationship with Aravasu. Her critical consciousness helps her embrace an audacious space within her feminine psyche to question the utility value of ascetic knowledge and Vedic rituals if wise men possessing such knowledge cannot solve day to day issues and problems and ‘if they cannot save dying children’. The critiquing space within her has its own approach in decolonizing the minds of hegemony makers, an approach sometime pugnacious, sometimes gentle, and sometimes touching and therapeutic, acting like tremulation on the ether. It is her touch of healing that really heals Aravasu, helping him understand how life is a journey from innocence to experience and vice-versa, and yet it is tragic that she cannot marry him because of caste and tribal community constrictions. She dies as a victim of tribal patriarchy, and the tragic irony and beauty in her death is that she loses her life in spite of the abundant goodness and humanity in her.

Nittilai is a contrast to Vishakha. A victim of brahminical patriarchy, Vishakha has no freedom even in the company of her family members who are supposed to be learned men. Pangs of lust and deprivation of sex haunt her psyche, all the more in the absence of her husband preoccupied with knowledge gathering so as to be omnipotent, essaying to be equal to god, Indra. Her silence describes the closeted universe she lives with. Her sense of isolation pushes her towards Paravasu to the extent of fatal attractions. It is understandable that she too dies. The contrast may be summed up this way: One represents natural goodness kept up even in the midst of odds and the other symbolizes urges for sensuous sexual gratification by ethically untenable means.

Reading the play or witnessing it in a theatric ambience makes us see the philosophical dimensions of life impacted by dichotomist or binary emotions with the consequence of 'confronting suffering and learning to survive'. Karnad’s “Notes” to the play helps us see the epic dimensions of the ingredients of the play, to see how the
teleology of human life vis-à-vis the Purusharthis – the four ethical goals of human existence, namely dharma, artha, kama, and moksha, rooted in the primordial soil of the Indic epic, the Mahabharata, is revisited with contemporary consciousness and relevance through the play. In this figural revisiting, the playwright blends both the mundane and the transcendent, the brutal and the glorious, and the real and the poetic, and yet shows us the contradistinction between the two contrary emotions.

2. Quest for Gender Justice: Man-Woman Relationship:

Two plays of Karnad -- Hayavadana (1971) and Nāga-Mandala (1990) – have been taken up for foregrounding the quest for gender justice. Karnad’s espousal of the cause of female subjectivity as agency of questing for identity against the odds of hegemonic patriarchy is part of his artistic representation of life. Karnad’s representation of the feminine psyche in Hayavadana and Nāga-Mandala contrapuntally incorporates reality and desire-images vis-à-vis the psychic aspects of his female characters juxtaposing their sense of alienation, humiliation, and muffled voice with their desire and dream-image of self-expression, gender equity and justice. Their desired dream-imaging questions and dismantles the assumed universality of male values and foregrounds gender equity and justice as paramount values. From this perspective, Karnad’s characterization of the female protagonists in the two plays taken up for discussion here is on a different plane of thought, different from the characterization other female characters in his other plays.

Under this domain of thought, an attempt is made to capture the subaltern feminine subtleties ingrained in the two plays, Hayavadana and Nāga-Mandala, vis-à-vis the characterization of Padmini of Hayavadana and Rani of Nāga-Mandala. It explores and examines how Karnad posits the feminine creative principle as ‘a cultural idea’ and how the central female characters in the two plays are comfortable with their
femininity, gradually unveiling their personality as agencies of promoting gender justice and equality of human beings. The main plots of these two plays have their exterior levels such as the story of Hayavadana, the man with a horse’ symbolizing a fragmented identity in the first play with reference to the Ganesha myth, and the folktales of varied hues ingrained within the central story of the second play. This paper refers to the exterior levels only to the extent necessary. The focus is on what the central plots connote within their interior entirety vis-à-vis the female quest for identity in the contemporaneous context. The authors of this paper assume that readers of this paper have read the two plays, or have witnessed the staging of the two plays, and hence the authors’ predilection towards dhvani-focused comments rather than towards detailed textual analyses which are found in a number of secondary sources.

The way Karnad foregrounds the female quest for identity reminds of the ways feminist critics like Elaine Showalter, Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and others examine the female self. In his dramaturgic perception, the female subjectivity becomes a cultural idea and agency protesting against patriarchy, a power-structured entity that treats women as the marginalized Other, subordinated and bound to suffer under male dominance. From this point of view, the two plays are ‘ideologically loaded’ taming the traditionally valued patriarchal assumption that forces women ‘to suffer an extra dimension of isolation’ (Sudeep 2), marginalization and exclusion. Against the reality of patriarchy, Karnad romanticizes liberal feminism as a prerequisite for women’s emancipation and empowerment towards social equality. His romanticization celebrates the creative potential of women to be self-assertive, echoing, as Helene Cixous avers, “Woman must put herself into the text as into the world and into history by her own movement….. Write yourself…Your body must be heard” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 875). In Karnad’s romanticization, the subaltern aesthetics of the feminine psyche gains
momentum enabling him to deconstruct male-gendered traditional hegemonic hierarchies which suppress and silence women’s subjectivity. To him as it is to Helene Cixous, the female self, her femininity, is neither ‘a dark continent’ nor an ‘unexplorable’ mystery.

Karnad is a cultural connoisseur and aesthete. His portrayal of the female quest for identity as a contemporary existential concern is a cultural idea that locates itself in myth, journeys through folklore and history, and moves towards modernity affirming its subjectivity, as Alpna Saini puts it, ‘as a locus of conflicts’ (127). As a locus of conflicts, it critiques the age-old discourse of patriarchy that confines and exploits women as the subservient Other, and foregrounds the subjectivity of the female self as a new discourse that is inclusive enough to accommodate gender-equality. Whether Karnad fully succeeds or not in negotiating the conflicts can be a moot point. But, his recourse to myth, his re-orientation of myth, serves as a legitimate vehicle to traverse through the past, visualize the present, and discern the future possibilities vis-à-vis the female quest for gender-equality. In the course of this re-orientation that ‘addresses the problematic of the Indian subjectivity’ certain constituents of the new female subjectivity stand out as significant values to be cherished.

Sexual politics becomes the motif and matrix on which the subaltern aesthetics of the female self is defined and built. Padmini in Hayavadana and Rani in Nāga-Mandala define the feminine subtleties of the subaltern aesthetics within the ambience of the milieu and circumstances in which they are located. Hailing from a family of leading merchant of PavanaVeethi of Dharampura, Padmini has the wherewithal, beauty and strength, to represent ‘the modern woman’ in search of completeness and perfection. It is assumed that incompleteness is the predicament of human nature and it cries for perfection. Against this assumption, Padmini is portrayed
as a female protagonist who aspires towards perfection. In the process, she moves beyond the traditional bind of conjugality and succumbs to a ‘Dionysian tendency’ (Krishna Singh 3) to indulge in cuckoldry. She is torn between two men – Devadatta and Kapila, one endowed with intellectual acumen, the other with muscular strength, and she wanting to have the best of both the men, “the male smell of fabulous brain – fabulous body” (43) as Karnad puts it. As Bharathi Chinnasami comments, ‘the Apollonian ego’ and ‘the Cartesian division’ have their contributory impact preventing Devadatta and Kapila from coming out of their self-alienation and Padmini from exercising her creative quest fully on ‘the Lawrentian terms’ (http://www.museindia.com/viewarticle.asp?myr=2010&issid=34&id=2312). This is why Padmini’s effort to juxtapose the body of Kapila with the intellect of Devadatta in the darkness of the forest at the intervention of Goddess Kali fails to fulfill her dream, her quest for completeness. Married to Devadatta and not satisfied with the mere intellectual acumen of her husband who, despite his fair colour and comely appearance, does not have the physique to charm and captivate her, she has a sense of disillusionment and a fatal attraction towards Kapila whose muscular and masculine body capable of, as Karnad puts it, “climbing a tree and diving into a river” (50), fascinates and makes her a victim of “the mad dance of incompleteness” (57) forcing her to seek and enjoy extramarital relations with Kapila. Even the female Chorus justifies her flames of passion, stating “why should love stick to the sap of a single body?” (64). Padmini has no sense of shame or regret about her passion for Kapila. The fact that Kapila belongs to a low caste does not matter to her. Her quest for identity makes her feel indifferent to conventional norms and codes of conjugality or morality. More than Kapila becoming an easy target of Padmini’s lust, her communion with Kapila, a low caste, is foregrounded as a symbolic act. It can be viewed as part of her
aesthetic valuation of the subalternity of Kapila in a tradition-bound society that has a condescending look at Kapila. Her attitude towards Kapila is in sharp contrast with that of Devadatta who is fine with patriarchy and its base and superstructure.

One attuned to conventional ethics may tend to ask whether ‘the misdemeanour’ of Padmini is tenable within the boundaries of morality. Karnad’s stance seems to be ambivalent. His interest is not to find a solution. He problematizes an issue, philosophically ruminates, and leaves it to the discernment of the audience / the reader. His focus in on delving into the inner psyche of the protagonist, exploring the myriad dimensions of her personality and seeing her as a potential agency of liberal humanism to redefine female identity against the impact of patriarchy. The way he problematizes the triangulated Devadatta-Padmini-Kapila relationship is intriguing. The childhood friendship between Devadatta and Kapila valuable even after Devadatta’s marriage to Padmini propels both Devadatta and Kapila to reconcile after some agonizing moments of conflict and end their lives forcing Padmini to seek her end in the pyre of sati. The divine intervention of Kali asking Padmini to transpose the heads of Devadatta and Kapila does not really come to the rescue of Padmini. In fact, it aggravates her predicament, constrained to cope with a muscular body with an intellectual head. She is lost either way. She can have neither, neither Devadatta’s docile head nor Kapila’s physique. Her hunger for combining intelligence and strength into a harmonious whole seems to be an elusive possibility. The psychological crisis she undergoes vis-à-vis the desired image of her identity deepens even after the divine intervention of Kali. Her self-created world seems to be a vain attempt towards achieving a unified entity or identity. Yet, she is not a schizophrenic split-personality with multiple syndromes. Karnad’s artistic intention is not to defeat her or her feminine quest for identity. There are ample hints in the dialogues and in his dialogic
imagination to reiterate the stance that her femininity represents a symbolic struggle of a female as an agency of modern/postmodern Indian quest for poetic humanism, humanism of metaphysical realm against the odds perpetuated by the worldly face/phase of patriarchy. Placing sexual politics as the motif and matrix is only a dramatic narrative strategy which has an appeal to the modern/postmodern generation.

Karnad does not imply that living together like the Pandavas and Draupadi can be a solution. The solution offered in *Vrihadkathasaritasagara* is not the solution Karnad seeks. The predicament of Padmini is the plight of human nature, modern man or woman. It tells the story and connotes the angst of modern man’s suffering bordering on the sense of fractured identity and incompleteness experienced and endured within. Human beings continue to search for perfection, for a sense of fulfillment. The existential dilemmas conveyed in the triangulated personalities of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila are part of the angst surrounding human limitations. The flaming passion and tongue of Padmini illustrates the contemporaneous presentness of human nature, a perennial predicament vis-à-vis an impossible ideal. Humanely speaking, attaining completeness seems to be an impossible ideal. The realm of erotic love Padmini stands for in the course of her quest for completeness seems to be a recipe for further frustration. It helps the audience/readers become aware of the sterility and horror of life associated with modern/postmodern existential angst.

The thematic design of the play shapes the main characters more as types than as individuals signifying and connoting multiple social messages for multiperspectival viewing of a complex problem. It takes the reader beyond the conventional debate of the mind-body dichotomy and focuses on the mythification of ‘Padmini’s free-floating volitional and volatile consciousness that demands a perfect man for her’ (Tuta Easwar Rao 2). Karnad’s focus is on the feminization of the female subaltern self of Padmini.
In his paper, “Redefining Femininity in Modern Indian Theatre”, Ravinder Kaul notes that “if feminism can be described as an aspect of humanism to sensitize both men and women to come out of the orientations resting on exploitative forms of existence, then Ardhanarishwara (the lord who is half woman and half man) is its finest manifestation” (1). Karnad’s foregrounding of the feminine psyche projects a view via the subalternization of Padmini and Kapila that in every human being there is a portion of both the male and the female personality combined within his/her humanity, and therefore, what matters is inclusive humanism. There is no point in perpetuating gender discrimination or exploitative forms of existence. The modernist or postmodernist ethos ingrained in the poetics of inclusive humanism, particularly the cuckoldry Padmini accommodates within her subaltern sensibilities, may not be tenable within the norms of conventional morality. Yet, in Karnad’s perception, Padmini as a female agency is one of the plausible voices in the modern Indian theatre pleading for inclusive humanism. The impactful relevance of the artist -- the male playwright writing the female self -- and his portrayal of Padmini’s femininity, lie in the femininity of this inclusive humanism.

Whether Padmini’s femininity can be a role model, Karnad, as mentioned earlier, is ambivalent. Within this ambivalence, Karnad facilitates the audience / readers to see ‘the essential female self, caught up in critical situations’ (Anish Kumar 104). The way he uses the Hayavadana myth prompts the reader to move beyond the head-the body divide, indicated in the original myth, and discern for himself or herself how multiple viewpoints are possible and plausible through juxtaposed and contrapuntal readings of the play. From this point of view, the roles of the Dolls and the female Chorus are relevant. The former represents the view point of the society that condemns Padmini’s misdemeanour, and the latter the point of view emanating from the
modernist/postmodernist ethos that views Padmini’s predicament and her response sympathetically. Yet, beyond the polarities, “the multilayered structures within the play”, as Erin B. Mee observes, “insist on multiple responses” the intertextuality of the play contains, enabling the artist “to decolonize the way of seeing” (152). It is towards this end that the audience/readers can relate the multifaceted role played by Bhagavata in the play. Bhagavata’s role in negotiating the cross-referential -- cultural, linguistic, and theatrical realities and cross-dimensional frames of realities operates as a contrapuntal or in tandem with the role of the female agency played by Padmini. With mere Hayavadana myth and without Bhagavata, the play would be reduced to a melodrama. The condensation Karnad brings in ensures that the dramatist is ceaselessly conscious of foregrounding the subaltern side of the feminine psyche as a plea for inclusive humanity that has zero tolerance towards gender discrimination or caste inequalities.

The play, Nāga-Mandala, is a combination of two plots, combined out of the folk-mythological stories he heard from A.K. Ramanujan to whom the play is dedicated. Thematically, it is an extension of the same theme but the mythic proportion and the socio-cultural dimensionality of the play has far-stretched and far-fetched metaphorical connotations vis-à-vis Karnad’s critique of patriarchy and his focus on female chastity and sexuality and the protagonist’s individuality and dignity. The gap between the publication of Hayavadana and that of Nāga-Mandala is a considerable one. In this play, Karnad’s dramaturgic and dialogic imagination has a richer and greater level of maturity to find ways to address issues related to patriarchy. What is innovative is the way he reworks on the two plots ushering in ‘a Brechtian complex viewing’ and ‘a Bakhtinian carnivalesque’ (Anupama Mohan 4) laying emphasis upon women-centric identity formation in the backdrop of exorcising socio-cultural evils. Within the interior
entirety of the play, Karnad’s dramatic medium focuses, as Karnad himself notes in his Introduction to the play, on two levels, namely the power structures of patriarchal culture that subsume women’s inner subjectivity and “a woman’s understanding of the reality” presented as “a lived counterpoint”, as “a robust opposition to the male mechanisms of folkloric communication” (17).

As Anupama Mohan comments, “the positive female agency” within the play, “emerges in multiple forms”, courtesy the folkloric interventions of the Story, a character, and the female-voiced Flames. The presences of the folkloric characters facilitate the dramatist’s emphasis on the centrality of Rani, the protagonist, within the dramatic medium of the play. The rustic coyness and “frigidity” of Rani, typical of an Indian rural woman, is transmogrified into a female agency, courtesy the intervention of Naga, the King Cobra, to face and challenge the onslaught of patriarchy and male chauvinism. Karnad’s recourse to the a-temporal legacy in the course of re-orienting the Naga myth and other folklorics so as to negotiate contemporary Indian realities is quite expansive involving “cross-pollination of psychological complexity and women-centric emblematization of identity-formation and articulation” (Anupama Mohan 2).

The reality that haunts Rani, married to Appanna, is patriarchy and male chauvinism. Patriarchy understands Appanna’s adulterous behaviour but condemns Rani’s alleged adulterous behaviour. It does not mind that male chauvinism could go to the extent of confining Rani within the four walls of her husband’s house during day time when Appanna is away indulging in cuckoldry, having extra-marital relationship with a concubine, which is not seen as a taboo, but it does mind when there is an allegation that Rani has committed adultery. Patriarchy demands the censure of Rani, expected to live “a cloistered life of unequal marriage” (Anupama Mohan 5) within the confines of male chauvinism, and she has to prove her innocence through a snake
ordeal. It is against this reality that the Naga-intervention becomes figural, metaphorical and significant. In Karnad’s dramaturgy, reorientation of myth is geared more towards challenging traditional values that oppress and exploit than towards upholding them as if they were part of eternal dharma.

The Naga-intervention wherein the King Cobra becomes Rani’s lover is a world of fantasy that, on the one hand, mocks the traditional hegemonic Hindu notion of chastity that gives a permit to the promiscuity of Appanna but expects Rani’s fidelity to her husband, and that, on the other hand, gives a mystic elevation to the feminine-subjectivity of Rani. The re-orientation of the mythic patterns in which the original plots were warped facilitates Karnad to prioritize the female-subjectivity-agenda of the play. Human reason, as the Story notes, knows that “no two men make love alike” (59). But, Karnad’s re-orientation gives an exemption to Rani from knowing. The masculinity of Naga, though it can be viewed as a kind of patriarchal intervention, is tenable because it not only protects the interests of Rani’s female subjectivity, her innocence, and her loyalty to Appanna but also ensures her triumph as the female agency of emancipation and liberal and inclusive humanism. Neither Rani nor Appanna has the temerity to ask questions against Naga-intervention which has a therapeutic value. Within this therapeutics, Naga’s injunctions upon Rani and Appanna not to ask questions, though controversial, are justifiable. Rani’s disclosure of her pregnancy becomes a personal moment of the triumph of her female agency. The fertility-myth associated with the Naga-ritual blossoms forth without any inhibition towards affirming the positives (Eros) against the odds of the negatives (Thanatos). As Gauri Shankar Jha comments, “it is Naga who teaches the intricacies of sexual love and pleasure…. that subsequently enable Appanna and Rani to enjoy marital life” (152).
The confusion of identities – real Appanna being away from home during day
time and Appanna in the form of Naga living with Rani during night time – emboldens
Rani to assert her innocence and her loyalty to Appanna. She gives no scope for guilt-
feeling or shame or secrecy when she knows that she is pregnant because of her
communion with Appanna. She is even ready to prove her innocence through the
snake-ordeal. The venomous snake, held by her, instead of biting her, protects her. It is
understandable because the snake is her lover. As Aparna Dharwadker notes, “her very
act of infidelity comes to her rescue”, courtesy Naga’s communion with Rani,
propelling her to prove her fidelity to Appanna against “male claims and ambitions to
control her sexuality and chastity” (xiv). Her virtuosity lies in her belief and conviction
that Naga is nobody but Appanna. Appanna’s predicament, incomprehensible to
himself, is transmogrified into a mute acceptance of Rani’s public defence of her
fidelity to him despite the knowledge he has that he is not the father of the child in the
womb of Rani, the mother in waiting. This is Karnad’s dramatic way of snubbing
patriarchal canons of male dominance that subjugates the creativity of women. The
medieval ways of confining women to slavish treatment get exposed and dismantled in
his dramaturgy.

As Sharmila Sreekumar and K.C.Bindu observe, Rani’s body becomes an
interstitial site not only to demonstrate how victimization of women is perpetuated but
also to foreground her femininity, her emotional satisfaction deprived hitherto because
of male chauvinism, and to celebrate the socialization process Rani is facilitated to
initiate in the course of the evolution of the play. It is a site where “the transgressions of
social regulations are read” (219), where the absurdities of the universe, wherein
women like Rani have to endure a suppressed existence, are dismantled and
deconstructed, and wherein the incomprehension of the world of fantasy, the dream-
world that gives Rani a chance to romanticize liberal humanism with a sense of equality, becomes tenable. The world of fantasy facilitates her to fulfill her longing for motherhood, for womanhood, via her bonding with the Naga by virtue of the efficacy of the herbal potion suggested by Kurudavva, the blind woman. The might of Kurudavva, another subaltern, is as figural as the might of Naga, the King Cobra, in facilitating Rani to discover her individuality, her female subjectivity against a male-dominating hypocritical society. By making Naga become Appanna, Karnad personifies and feminizes his plot-construction so as to imply the vivacity, virtuosity and virtuousness of the creative force present in a woman as it is in the case of Rani.

Karnad’s deft and masterly handling of the main plots within the texture of multiple frame-works of folkloric sub-plots is laudable. The Indic touches he provides in the instantiation of life-situations, episodes and dramatization and the contemporaneous matrices he provides within his plot-construction is evident. As another critic points out, Karnad’s reorientation and reuse of myth and mythic patterns help him to ‘juxtapose the world of credulity with the world of complexity’. As a cultural connoisseur of the human predicament and by reusing the folkloric convention, he ensures that art is an epiphany that transmogrifies the brutality of realities, the tragic-comic dimensions of life-experience, and sublimates the poetical side of life as potential agency of liberation and empowerment. Mythification ultimately points to the eternal verities of life. Towards this end, the central characters in both the plays stand for ‘every man / woman’ who either makes society an ogre, or transforms it by his/her creativity. Both Padmini and Rani, as creative forces, may seek refuge in a dream-land and have recourse to supernatural powers for redemption. But, Karnad does not fail to inform his audience / readers that reality is terrible, and yet comprehending and manifesting the glory of existence is a plausible ideal, worth pursuing. His
foregrounding the feminine psyche and his articulation of the subaltern aesthetics vis-à-vis the female selves of Padmini and Rani is part of this plausibility.

3. Dialogic Engagement with History: The Contemporary Indian Political

Problematic:

Karnad’s two more plays --- Tughlaq and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan -- taken up here for discussion focus on power politics, leadership issues and governance. In fact, from history and historicizing point of view, Karnad’s three plays – Tughlaq, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, and Tale-Danda can be read together, or as parallels. In his re-reading, the subversion of national history becomes the major focus of his postcolonial modernist-critical eye. Keeping Tale-Danda in reserve for reading under the domain of ‘Egalitarian Goals: Religion, Caste, and Communualism as Barriers’, the other two plays are brought in for critical considerations here.

The ways Karnad re-assesses the two heroes of history, Tughlaq and Tipu Sultan, and connects them with contemporary power politics and governance by Brechtian modes of complex viewing and historicizing, dhvani-modes of indirection, and vakrokti modes of connotations enable readers to juxtapose, see and understand how, for instance, Tughlaq’s political decisions and innovative ideas were far ahead of his times, why his commendable leadership and effort to bring about religious equality was opposed by fanatics and betrayers in his core-cabinet, and how, much later, in terms of historicizing, in the contemporary Indian political problematic, the Nehruvian era of idealism had its own angst and was followed by a mood of disillusionment in the politics of India. A critical reading of the play, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, gives readers a glimpse of Karnadian way of remembering the heroism of Tipu and connotes its relevance to the contemporary Indian socio-political context when India was celebrating the fiftieth year of her independence from colonial masters. Karnad’s focus
on the Other point of view gets highlighted. The contemporary Indian political subjectivity he deals with consists of critical realism that is subtle providing multiple connotations in terms of other points of view. Readers may be aware of the fascist kind moves in the late 1970s and early 1980s some of the officials of the National School of Drama, ‘ever –too-eager-to please the masters in power’ to quote Prasanna, one of the known names in the theatre circle in Karnataka, succumbing to political pressures to ban the staging of the play, *Tughlaq*, for the perceived or alleged anti-establishment stance the play was supposed to have projected.

To appreciate Karnad’s postcolonial and subaltern-conscious portrayals in these two plays, it is relevant here to refer to the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and the launch of ‘Subaltern Studies Collective’ in the 1980s. These critical idioms-friendly texts focusing Other-centredness were great propellers facilitating postcolonial writers not only to question, as Aparna Dharwadker argues, ‘the autonomous status of history but also stress the complicity between the historical discourse and the colonialisit strategies of cultural domination and self-legitimation’. The notion that the official version of history was ‘the prerogative of the colonizer’ was challenged. From this angle, Karnad’s postcolonial writing represents ‘fictionalized representation of history which stands in a contrasting ideological relationship to the textualized history—confirming, repudiating, or radically reshaping its message’. This fictionalized narrative may be regarded as an alternative form of figural representation. A postcolonial way of presenting ‘history-fiction interface’ is a Hegelian philosophical way delving into history that gives the reader a spiritual momentum “in which rational thought and self-expression realize the genius of the self, the era, and the collective” (Paul Sharrad 3-4). It paves the way for the mythification of history that invites the reader to have an inward looking into the historiography of
human lives and relationships correcting misrepresentations found in recorded histories. The figural interaction that happens in the process between historical spirit and great genres of literature prompt the reader to discern the aesthetics of assimilating the ‘the totality of history’ that can give certain poetic awareness of the historicity of the lives re-presented and of the relevance of historicizing in the contemporary context.

Karnad’s plays, as part of the contemporary Indian theatre in the post-independence era, has done a yeoman service to this kind of writing and reading. As one of the finest first generation-playwrights of postcolonial India whose contribution to the modern Indian theatre has been recognized and acclaimed widely by critics of varied propensities and dispositions, Karnad’s modes of reusing myth, folklore, and history mean that narratives are national allegories connoting contemporary significance. Through allegorical presentations, his creativity artistically foregrounds the modernist secular ethos in the backdrop of his complex viewing of contemporary human predicaments. His dramaturgic re-reading of the history of Tipu Sultan (1750-99) not only problematizes the conventional or given views on Tipu, the valiant ‘Tiger of Mysore Kingdom’ who fought the British and their colonial attitude and mentality, but also develops, as Aparna Dharwadker notes, “a resonant parallel between pre-modern and contemporary Indian political and cultural experiences” (43) re-enacting the country’s struggle for nationhood. Karnad’s sense of history has terrific capacity to interpolate the ‘true’ and ‘fictive’ modes of narration wherein the confluence of the textual, political, and cultural contexts of history are artistically demarcated and interfused enabling readers to see the eclectic complexity the artist brings in, and appreciate ‘complex viewing’ by virtue of the interdependence of perspectives wrought in the plot constructions. From this angle, Karnad’s plays, all the more the two plays being discussed here, may be viewed as interstitial sties which celebrate
multiperspectival consciousness vis-à-vis finding solutions to contemporary issues. This multiperspectival consciousness resonates with the Brechtian ‘complex seeing’.

Written just as the era of Nehru was coming to an end, Karnad’s *Tughlaq* is an outstanding Indian play contemporizing the Indian subjectivity. It is a classic in terms of its allegorical connotations and portrayal of ironies and contradictions associated with dichotomized spilt-personality syndromes, portrayed with dark humour. The play is still the best illustration of Karnad’s creative genius in terms of bringing out the paradoxical and complex nature of human nature or human character. Venturing to write a historical play at the prompting of the notable Kannada critic, Kirtinath Kurtotki, Karnad was fascinated with the paradoxical dimensions in the life of Tughlaq, namely ‘the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come to the throne of Delhi but who, nevertheless, ended up as one of the greatest failures’. Karnad had perused through various historical documents, especially Barani’s contemporaneous account of Tughlaq’s reign, the Tarikh-I Firoj Shahi, in order to distil facts and interpolate them with his fictionalized version. He was aware that the history of Mohammed bin Tughlaq was primarily a product of medieval Muslim and colonial British tradition of historiography. Focusing on the last five years of the reign of Tughlaq, Karnad begins his scrutiny of the received history. His alternative historicizing reading concentrates on the cultural retrieval of the past rectifying the gaps and the omissions glaringly visible in the European view of Indian history, and the silences in the national historiography of India. The cultural vitality Karnad brings into the texture of his version of the history of Tughlaq lies in its connectivity with the present, namely the themes of communalism and power politics in the contemporary Indian problematic.
In Karnad’s portrayal, varying and contrasting interpretations are done with reference to certain events and episodes that happened during the reign of Tughlaq. In the very opening scene, Karnad provides reasonable matrices to make readers see that Tughlaq was an impartial ruler committed to secular and humane outlooks and attitudes, and his vein of idealism is permeated by his dream to ensure “greater justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life” (3). A young man comes in to aver that “the country’s perfectly in safe hands—safer than any you’ve seen before… what’s the use of sultans who didn’t allow a subject within a mile’s distance? This king now, he isn’t afraid to be human” (5). He makes one of the people of Tughlaq’s kingdom say in the beginning itself that Tughlaq is a pious religious ruler attuned to a life regular prayer in the Islamic tradition. He affirms and argues:

How often did you pray before he came to the throne?... Not even once a week, I bet. Now you pray five times a day because that’s the law and if you break it, you’ll have the officers on your neck. Can you mention one earlier Sultan in whose time people read the Koran in the streets like now? (5-6)

This is Karnad’s response to Barani’s criticism that Tughlaq was anti-religious. In fact, Tughlaq’s enemies try to kill him during his prayer time and the plot to assassinate him during prayer is meant to substantiate the omitted truth that Tughlaq was so devoted that he made it compulsory for every Muslim to pray five times a day.

Tughlaq’s affinities with secularist ethos become a point of focus in Karnad’s presentation. He abolishes jiziya—a tax on Hindus who lived under the Muslim rule—for the betterment of his people and kingdom. But, it angers Muslim fanatics around him who are incapable of comprehending or assimilating his commitment to secular
values. Their fundamentalist stances force them to see his concept of religious tolerance as something untenable and foolish. Karnad gives certain hints in the beginning of the play itself to help the audience/readers see the naivety of Tughlaq, his failure to realize that even in his reign religion and politics are inextricably intertwined. He is too naïve to see the criminal insolence Aziz, a low caste Muslim washer-man who chooses to masquerade as a poor Hindu Brahmin just to exploit Tughlaq’s concept of impartial justice. In fact, he has the gumption to share his real intention for masquerading: “A Muslim plaintiff against a Muslim king” (8) would not be in tune with the Sultan’s idea of impartial justice. That Aziz is capable of hidden agendas and fundamentalist outlooks is already hinted for the knowledge of the audience who could see the implications of his masquerading. That this play would demand Karnad’s critical viewing of the complexities of religious communalism is also further hinted when a Hindu from among the people of Tughlaq’s kingdom intervenes to react against the tax exemption granted to Hindus in the Kingdom and say:

We didn’t want an exemption! Look, when a sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, ‘pay up, you Hindu dog’, I’m happy. I know I am safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being”—well, that makes me nervous. (6)

The way Karnad follows the chronology of Tughlaq’s reign closely, mixes historical characters, such as Barani, Najib, Sheikh Imam and Aziz, and creates a complex ideological and intertextual connection between history, historiography, and his own fiction so as to problematize the contemporary Indian subjectivity vis-à-vis religion and politics and the consequent implications in terms of communalism is superb. This is intertextuality as enunciated in the beginning of this chapter. The
intertextualities he brings in problematize the veracity of received history vis-à-vis Tughlaq and urge readers / the contemporary Indian audience to scrutinize the institutionalized history given to them as ‘the’ source of knowledge and cherish a multiperspectival viewpoint.

The play as a text can be read at varied levels, in terms of history contemporized under ‘Brechtian impact’, in terms of the inner self intrigues and struggles between following the ideal and the practical as U.R. Ananthamurthy indicates in his Introduction to the play, in terms of the ‘Nietzschean enigma’, as both N.K. Ghosh and Rajendra Kumar Sharma do in their respective essays on the play, revolving around the inner-self-alienation effect due to the fact that the protagonist is tortured by a dark spiritual vision combining brilliance and venom, in terms of the leader’s breadth of vision of social harmony suffering in the hands of religious orthodoxy and fanaticism vis-à-vis Hindu-Muslim unity, in terms of psychosomatic level wherein human ambition, idealistic though, is taken to a level where it is turned into indulgence in wrecking vengeance, or wherein human comradery falls into an abyss of betrayals and split-personality syndromes, and in terms of a forward looking emperor’s humanism failing and falling down in the face of shrewd Machiavellian kind of political cunningness, debauchery, and heartless turmoil, tussles, and troubles. Though Karnad’s play can be read at all these levels, Karnad’s projections of the ambiguities and ambivalences associated with Tughlaq’s visionary idealism, structured on and going beyond his own religious affinities, doomed to be a failure, Tughlaq and his relationship with his subjects coming into conflicts on varied counts culture, religion, communalism, and taxation policy, and Tughlaq’s history striking a parallel to that of Nehru stand out as part of Karnad’s honest attempt to embrace cultural retrieval as a
dramatic strategy which would provide him enough scope to comment on the contemporary Indian subjectivity.

As ShyamBabu notes, the play, *Tughlaq*, 'signifies not only a medieval sultan Muhammad in a linear narrative but at the same time a disillusioned government India envisaged after the independence' (1). As Dharwadker remarks, the contradictions in the personality of *Tughlaq* and the self-defining nature of the politics he was involved in became the focal point in the postcolonial eye of Karnad. Moreover, the twenty year-period of Tughlaq’s decline as a ruler also offered a striking parallel to the two decades of Indian independence under Nehru’s idealistic but troubled leadership. Readers have enough grounds to assess Nehru in comparison with Tughlaq in terms of his propensity for failure despite the fact that he was an extraordinary intellect. From this angle, Karnad’s *Tughlaq* can be read as play brilliantly portraying the alienation faced by Indian society in the post-independence period. The point Karnad seems to connote is that the gradual erosion of the ideals of equality and secularism in independent India and the co-existence of conflicting religious groups in a single society inevitably led to such a predicament. By extension, the alienation faced by the ruler and the subjects alike in *Tughlaq* may be viewed as an allegorical parallel to what happens in contemporary India today.

To Karnad, as to Marx and Brecht, art and aesthetics, instead of focusing on mere metaphysical planes of thought, should reflect life in society in its existential context, in its political and cultural permutations and combinations focusing on the people and their social apparatuses. His construction of the plot is textured and ingrained within the matrices in which he rereads the history of Tughlaq signifying the ups and downs of the medieval sultan Muhammad and subverting the same to include
the contemporaneous by extension. This rereading, by extension, propels his creative urge to do a *tour de force* on the question of leadership in the contemporary context of India which becomes the constitutive element of the Indian subjectivity in the play. The way Karnad portrays the Indian subjectivity constitutes and involves a complex viewing in the Brechtian sense. This complex viewing, as Shyam Babu notes, consorts with ‘historification in the light of past happenings’ extending itself by viewing the present in a broad perspective. This simultaneous seeing resonates with the Eliotian mode of viewing and juxtaposing the ideal and the problematic. It resonates with the historical sense, ‘connoting the pastness of the past as timeless’, interpolated with the temporality of the contemporaneous present. In his complex seeing, Karnad does not follow the entire norms of epic theatre but provides enough space for connecting the past and the present so as to enable readers to chart out contemporary issues in the light of a subversive mode of perception. Within this charting, Karnad’s play, as Darren C. Zook comments, becomes “a complex site wherein serious political rule becomes increasingly indistinguishable from political charade and brute force masquerading as idealism” (188). As Dharwadker comments in her Introduction to Karnad’s Plays, Karnad’s approach here is a testimony to his commitment to “serious literary activity and his viewing drama as a complex verbal art, potentially connected to, but also independent of, theatrical practice: the play – as a meaningful text is thus detached equally from the genres of commercial entertainment and topical political performance” (vii).

Aparna Dharwadker’s reading of the play blends both postcolonial representation and the modernity of thought intersected in the play. Muhammad bin Tughlaq, a brilliant but spectacularly unsuccessful fourteenth-century Islamic sultan of
Delhi, known popularly as Mad Muhammad the major focus of the play. Reusing Barani’s basic narrative, Karnad arranges the thirteen scenes of Tughlaq as a sequence of self-canceling actions that articulate both political and psychological ironies. Politically, the play shows Tughlaq’s futile attempts to be just and liberal toward a majority Hindu population that he is obliged as an Islamic ruler to persecute. Episodic narratives, textured as integrated intertextual sites in the first scene of the play, set in Delhi in 1327, point to the fact that Tughlaq is a king committed to objectivity and fairness to all in formulating a new system of justice, which works "without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed" (3). But, as Aparna Dharwadker observes, the audience are given to understand that the only character to benefit from ‘this utopian move’ is a low-caste Muslim washer man, Aziz, who ‘assumes the identity of a poor Hindu Brahman to win a false judgment against the sultan and secure a position at court’. Later in the same scene, when Tughlaq announces his decision to shift his capital from Delhi to Deogir, rechristened as Daulatabad, a city eight hundred miles away on the Deccan plateau, his reasoning, an alienating one in the eyes of Muslims, adds to his woes rather than to his visionary leadership. To his bad luck, his reasoning stands on a pragmatic strategy, namely the fact that Delhi is located near the border and can be vulnerable to attacks by enemies, and on an idealistic pursuit, namely to ensure communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus, without any verified basis. He has a firm belief that this shifting to a faraway city, predominantly of Hindus, would ensure and enhance a bonding between Muslims and Hindus. It is his gesture and sign of his wishful dream in the course of “developing and strengthening my kingdom” (4) in a harmonious way. But this move alienates Muslims to the extent that dissidence brews within his royal Court in the form of a failed coup that makes him wreck vengeance upon the people of Delhi. The arduous journey of the people to
Daulatabad turns out to be a nightmare resulting in starvation, disease, and death. This unwise move on the part of Tughlaq costs him his empire at the end forcing him to suffer self-humiliating, desolate loneliness and the onslaught of rebellion. It is difficult to say whether his ambition and vengeance alone caused his denouement. His idealism is constricted by his impatience, whimsicality, overconfidence and suspicion. People see him from materialistic angle and loathe him for his taxation policy. When he sees that his idealism – his dreams of ruling by the power of benevolence, justice, and impartiality – lie shattered, and when he knows that his ‘hopes of building a new future for India’ and making his empire ‘the envy of the world’, the philosopher king turns out to be tyrant and ruthless demagogue, “sliding into the morass of despotism” (Ghosh 111). What fails him is the lack of prudence and practical wisdom which were the blessings of emperors like Akbar.

Karnad’s portrayal is an artistic blend of cultural dexterity wherein he makes readers see why Tughlaq deserves an alternative and contrasting in-depth characterisation by virtue of the multidimensional, great, and noble qualities he had within his personality. Karnad is particular to portray Tughlaq as a scholar well read in Greek philosophy, logic, literature and mathematics and as a humanist committed to certain secular ethos. At the same time, he also provides enough hints to suggest that his subjects, particularly his those closely known to him --- Amirs, Syyadis and Ulemas, to name a few, betray him and distort his intentions and manipulate the perception of the people against Tughlaq. While Barani, the historical character in the play brands Tughlaq a tyrant and accuses him of parricide against Muslims, Karnad’s point of view makes readers see a counter point, namely, the killing of Muslims as a conspiracy hatched by Tughlaq’s enemies to spoil his reputation. Barani’s obituary-
remarks to the people of Tughlaq’s kingdom that “I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then flagellates himself in remorse” (35) sums up the kind of attitude his own officials towards Tughlaq. The point of Karnad is that Tughlaq is a victim of both alienation perpetuated by the mental and spiritual distances between him and some of his officers who are depicted as imposters and treacherous people, and painful and agonising distances between him and his subjects. The fictional characters like Aziz and Aazam remind readers of the level of treacherousness his betrayers can succumb to. Most of them had a sort of mindset that would not stand the scrutiny of the acid test of rationality, objectivity and fairness to all. Karnad is objective enough to connote that as Priya Srivastava remarks, Tughlaq “is estranged from the society because he is a man ahead of his age and is not understood by the society around him because his ideas and ideals are far above and very different from an ordinary human being” (76).

At the level of paradoxical political ironies, the play has certain other dimensions, and these dimensions are the psycho-dramatic portrayal Karnad does through intertextualities, motifs, and symbols in the play. One dimension is that Tughlaq’s manipulative impulses and his active role in jockeying for power, as narrated in Scenes 2-4, in cohort with both friends and adversaries diminishes his image as a visionary and exemplary king. Another dimension is that Aziz and Aazam are crooked enough to subvert every good move of Tughlaq for the kingdom. Tughlaq is not wise enough to see their dark moves against him because he admires Aziz’s loyal discipleship and Aazam’s friendship from the childhood days. One instance that may be relevant here is the way the dramatist ironically presents Aziz, the dhobi, who had disguised himself as Brahmin then, now appears in the guise of the great grandson of
His Imperial Holiness Abbasid, the Khalif of Baghdad. Tughlaq invites him Daulatabad to bless the country and to re-start the banned prayer-obligation. Apart from hinting at the naivety of Tughlaq, Karnad dexterously shows how the genuineness of religion and prayer is vitiated when the politics of religion prevail over the realm of political leadership and governance. By extension, Karnad implies how even in the contemporary Indian problematic such things happen. Rulers and politicians misuse religion to befool the public. But, the irony here is that it is the other way, namely Aziz, the common man, fooling the king. On the denouement on the part of Tughlaq, Sadhana Agrawal comments:

It is a great ironic act that Tughlaq, the mighty and the most powerful, falls at the feet of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, disguised Aziz. The great and shrewd politician of his time wants to seek shelter at the feet of a religious man not knowing the dust of the feet he is taking on his head, is a very common man’s dust. Here the great emperor becomes an object of pity as his dreams of the monarch are shattered. Politics fails and the realm of religion begins to prevail over politics. Karnad succeeds in presenting the common man in disguised is more powerful than the Sultan for the royalty has to bow down to him. The last scene becomes more ironical because the Sultan, who initiates the prayer after five years, falls asleep. (4)

At another level of cultural dialecticism, Karnad, as a postcolonial dramatist, helps the audience/readers participate in a dialectic and dialogic discourse wherein, as both Aparna Dharwadker and Vinay Dharwadker interpret, both ‘the heroic’ and ‘the satiric’ have their antithetical encounters “praising and denigrating historical traditions, religious and philosophical systems, social and political
institutions, and cultural and civic practices that constitute India as subject” (224), as Vinay Dharwadker puts it. The satiric mode employs irony, invective, and ridicule in order to attack, and the heroic mode adopts an idealistic, romantic, or sentimental stance in order to celebrate. In both modes of representation, history is central to the dialectic discourse happening. Karnad creates a convincing diachronic-synchrony between the pre-modern and the contemporary Indian problematic. While in the course reappraising the past, he de-idealizes it, and while relating it to the contemporary Indian subject, he expresses his disenchantment with the politics of the day starting from Gandhian-Nehruvian post-independence era. By extension and in terms of Homi Bhabhan theoretical framework, Tughlaq, as Aparna Dharwadker point out, “grounds the problematic unity of the nation in historically inherited pluralities of religion and community that thwart the construction even of a national perspective” (244). This is how Karnad’s postcolonial dramatization of the Indian problematic portrays the polarities associated with contemporary Indian power politics. Karnad gives broad hints about how self-serving politicians undercut the aspirations and dreams of the masses, the common people, marginalizes the efficacy of ethical norms, and rationalizes their culpability. Power, for them, like for Aziz, is a license for indulging in evil, and hence their justification of the brutality they are capable of. They know how religion and caste can be used as means of controlling the nerve centres of power. Elections in India are often won, or lost on religious, communal, and caste lines.

Tughlaq’s madness for power, or as Ghosh comments, “living dangerously in the style of a Nietzschean hero, Tughlaq considers every conceivable unscrupulous means to be justified in acquiring and sustaining power and authority” (112), his foul means of silencing dissent and opposition, his refusal to punish Aziz despite the
enormity of his insolence and crimes against the masses, and his (Tughlaq’s) heightened conscious self-reflexivity are, in fact, signs of his powerlessness and loneliness he suffers. Readers may be reminded of the Emergency days of Indira’s era of politicking. He may point his fingers at those people who betray him and dig his grave by pretending to be with him, or at the masses who are a stumbling block to his campaign for religious and communal harmony and for administering justice and equity so that peace and joy prevail in his kingdom. But, Karnad is objective enough to propel the audience / readers to see that it is Tughlaq’s impulsiveness, his lack of farsightedness, and his preference to find freedom and security in his madness that usher him in to experience loneliness and failure, resulting in, as Ghosh adds, ‘his glorious ideals remaining at the level of optical illusions only’. His decision to shift the capital back again to Delhi is part of his tragic flaw. As Karnad states in an interview to Rajinder Paul, it is in his tragic flaws which are his nemesis that Tughlaq ‘comes face to face with himself and and finds peace in madness’.

To conclude the discussion on Tughlaq, the tragic tale of Tughlaq symptomatically represents the tragic tale of India where, as Nayak observes, “mere idealism and unrelated understanding of time cannot help a ruler in reaching visionary heights” (170). By oblique references, the collapse of the idealism of Tughlaq marks, as Karnad states, the sense of “slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence, and the coming to terms with cynicism and real politics” (7). From this point of view, the play as a postcolonial text and the characterization of Tughlaq as an archetype may be viewed as allegorical comments on the perennial crisis India has been enduring vis-à-vis secular nationhood in a multi-
religious, multi-lingual society. It hints at the irreducible social inequalities and religious differences India continues to grapple with. Tughlaq says:

My kingdom has millions—Muslims, Hindus, Jains. Yes, there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean up the dirt deposited by men?.. And my kingdom too is what I am—torn between two pieces by visions whose validity I can't deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha. I am sorry. But it can't be done. (26-27)

The helplessness Tughlaq exhibits suggests contemporaneously the predicament Indian leadership from the days of Gandhi through Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and others till date has been in. Indian history from Gandhian era to contemporary times suggests that no authoritarianism, no pseudo-secularism, no political opportunism, no minority appeasing, no fundamentalist ideologies, and no caste or communal chauvinism will work in India in terms of nation building, progress and development. The play is a dark reminder to the citizenry that as long as plurality of cultures, polyphonic ideologies, and multi-religious faiths, and multicultural differences within the framework true democracy is not regarded, respected and imbibed as prime value-collective, India will have tough times in the years to come despite the impact new knowledge societies, technologies, and migrations may bring in. When the majority of the masses still grope in ignorance or suffer and endure the manipulative politics indulged in by political forces in connivance with bureaucracy and other elites, Karnad’s play connotes by implication that imagining India in terms of equality, fellowship and brotherhood would remain as a mirage. Idealistic pursuits are tenable when they understand ground realities of the times.
Karnad’s ways of temporalizing the word and the world brilliantly portray a panoramic poetic vision that gives a clarion call from the depths of the valley of India through textual mediation, mediated through the history of the reign of Tughlaq, enlightening the audience / readers on the turbulent fluxes of conflicts and turmoil India grapples with in terms of some of the known and ‘ever-present fundamentals’ (Ghosh 115) such as the seamless web of human politics, religious and communal politics, ferocity of power politics, the bane and the bliss of India, its polity and governance, and the predicaments in which the masses are constrained to live. Within this temporalization, Karnad not only cautions the people of India on the dangers haunting them but also enlightens them on the eternal verities spatial and temporal realities connote in terms of enhancing the prospects for conserving and cherishing certain timeless values such as plurality of dialogicity, polyphony of meanings, hybridity of cultures, religious and communal harmony, and above all, a sense of compassionate understanding of life, all timely and relevant to Indians, and others by extension, at all times.

In the light of these observations, the researcher is of the view that Karnad’s artistic concerns are a plea for the need for decolonizing the mind of the masses, for the need to reconcile idealism with the reality of the age, and for the need to cultivate, cherish and practise a fine sense of integrity and probity in public life besides assimilating and appropriating the above mentioned values which have a-spatial, a-temporal dimensions vis-à-vis eternal verities of life. These may be read as signs of great hope for the country. Despite the tragic failure that marks the statesmanship of Tughlaq, Karnad is keen to showcase how Tughlaq is a role model by virtue of his vision of life, his commitment to the cause of nationhood, his kind-heartedness towards the poor, and his sense of benignity and benevolence. Tughlaq with all his goodness and frailties is a reminder to Indian citizenry, particularly current leaders in India, on the perennial need for self-reflexive introspection in
the course of their involvement in public life. Through varied motifs and symbols, discussed in detail Chapter Four, texted in the play, Karnad gives enough hints on how India can be great country if only leaders in India eschew criminalization of politics, if only their political involvement is free from debauchery, communalism, vote-bank politics, and if only the masses have sufficient critical literacy in terms of power politics affecting their lives and the destiny of the nation. The poetic illumination Karnad presents in the course of his dialogic engagement with the history of Tughlaq and in the course of comprehending the problems of India relevant to contemporary times can liberate Indian critical consciousness from the boredom of cynical pessimism and elevate it to a realm of active and collective involvement in nation building that can really be ‘the envy of the world’, as Tughlaq dreamt in the midst of his limitations.

Karnad’s *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) is an attempt to decode the inner psyche and the ‘inner history’ of Tipu. The prime focus of this paper is to argue and defend how Karnad facilitates the reader to see Tipu as a pioneer in resisting the colonial masters who tried to colonize the mind and psyche of India. For Karnad, Tipu is a ‘Renaissance man’ who not only embraced modernity of thought as a way of life and appreciated, without hesitation, the industrial technology the West offered so as to modernize India but also cherished an indomitable spirit for freedom from all forms of hegemony and ushered in enlightenment against the British imperialism much before the known freedom fighters launched their struggle for India’s political freedom. Karnad’s portrayal of Tipu suggests that India’s effort to decolonize the mind stuck up with the impact of imperial colonialism started much before the other known historical and literary figures came to the political forefront dissenting against the insidious designs of the colonizing power.
It is important here to note that Karnad chooses one of the best-known but least understood figures in the history of modern India. The occasion for which the BBC wanted him to write a play was the commemoration of the 50th year of India’s independence. His selection of this particular historical figure seems to be a conscious one. His option to represent Tipu in new light was not only in tune with his own sense of fairness and objectivity to truth but it was also an attempt to make a correction to the British colonial historiography that has often represented Tipu “as a tyrannical villain and usurper”, a perception that is also subscribed to by many in India, given the fact that “Tipu”, as Phillip B. Wagoner comments, “was a Muslim ruling over a traditionally Hindu realm”(543). The invitation of the BBC came handy to Karnad in exercising his poetic act. His poetic act foregrounds his perception of a heroic image of Tipu, that it was Tipu who laid the foundation for India’s independence way back in the 1750s. As S.S. Kamble adds, “this play resurrects him as a modernizing monarch whose mind was fraught with high ideals, hopes, projects, missions and visions which he wants to use for the regeneration of his subjects” (24).

It was Karnad’s well discerned option to project Tipu as the right hero who would fit into the occasion for which the play was written. His creative genius lies in choosing a fragment from a historical legendary experience and making a forceful statement on the mindset that believes in ‘the right of conquest’ via hegemonic expansion, relevant to the contemporary times. His dramatic imagination transforms the more than 240 years’ old historical moment into a relevant new theme that facilitates readers, or the audience to understand contemporary India which is complex. His perception of Tipu Sultan as the bravest warrior who was unwilling to compromise, all the more firm even in the midst of his neighbourly monarchs and princes behaving like
weaklings, political visionary and dreamer of the cause of political freedom may be viewed as a fine tribute to Tipu on the occasion of commemorating the 50th year of independent India. By extension, one may aver that this poetic act is a Karnadian way of juxtaposing contrapuntally and by indirection the kind of leadership exhibited by Tipu then and that that prevails now in contemporary India that can slant towards political and communal violence for perpetuating self-interest rather than preserving and enhancing national identities. It is his way of inspiring the citizenry of India, especially the youth, to appreciate what patriotism is. The radio version of the play was broadcast by the BBC on 15th August 1997 and the Kannada version was staged at Tipu’s Summer Palace in Srirnagapatna by Karnataka Nataka Rangayana in May, 1999 to commemorate his 200th death anniversary.

The way Karnad portrays Tipu Sultan and his dreams propels this writer to interpret the historical presence of Tipu that has a reference to pre-independent India as a postcolonial text by virtue of the fact that the referred presence is a site that speaks volumes of the resisting capacity of the protagonist associated with that moment of history. From this point of view, Karnad’s text, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, presents a combined view of ‘recorded and fictive’ narratives of history figuring out a new persona, out of the historical protagonist, who nurtures a sense of subversive and subaltern consciousness against the hegemonic presence of the imperial power, inspiring, in turn, a sense of awe and admiration in the mind of the reader, or the audience when the play is performed. Within this dramaturgic historiography, Karnad, as a postcolonial writer, performs certain “complex, epistemological and cultural functions intervening significantly in the discourse of history” (Aparna Dharwadker, 44), ensuring that his / her writing becomes intertextual and figural. In this postcolonial
figural representation, the discourse that goes beyond ‘the archeology of knowledge’, to use the phrase of Foucault, created by colonialism, consists of various modes of figuration vis-à-vis “emplotment, argument and ideological implications” (45), to quote Aparna Dharwadker again. In the process, recorded or given history is neutralized, or repudiated giving an aesthetic resistance to dominant hegemonic narratives and discourses. In such modes of figural representation, the fictive history becomes, as Hayden White remarks, ‘an essentially poetic act’ (37). This is precisely what Girish Karnad does in his history-plays, namely Tughlaq (1964), Tale-Danda (1989), and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (1997).

As Krishna Singh observes, Karnad presents Tipu as a multifaceted personality – as a beloved ruler,legendry warrior, loving father, visionary dreamer who wants to modernize India, Machiavellian schemer who plots with the French against the British, defeated soldier who enters into humiliating treaties with the enemy and gullible commander who is eventually betrayed by his own side. What stands apart is that Tipu is projected as the one standing for a social and political cause against a powerful political enemy who comes with a hegemonic agenda. Almost all the characters, major and minor, are portrayed with a profound sense of objectivity. All the historical figures are ‘interlineated’ within the parameters of ‘textualized’ history that blends well with legend, lore, and memory.

The beauty of Karnad’s reading into history, myth and folklore lies in his capacity to reuse history to comment on the contemporaneous context. His wide literary and cross-cultural influences impinge upon him ushering in a site of confluence wherein his subtle comments on the contemporaneous context or on contemporary issues stand apart by way of indirection and connotation. These connotative meanings
are quite often part of the Karnadian ways of problematizing, complex-viewing, multiperspectifying, and philosophizing rather than finding solutions to the issues commented upon in his plays sensitizing the reader, as Dasan averred in his keynote address in the seminar wherein this paper was presented, to “discern the figural realism of truth as ‘the ultimate altar of wisdom all of us, as students of literature, aspire to genuflect before’. As an Indian playwright writing in English and translating the same into Kannada, his adopted tongue, Karnad involves and interpolates history, myth, and contemporaneity of context facilitating the reader to see the existentiality of modern life and the complexity of the modernity of thought emerging out of existential conditions. As Prema Nandakumar remarks, the source of his texts may be a legend, or a folktale, a page from history but the ambience he creates is contemporaneous. The fusion between the specificity of culture and context and the connotation of meaning that transcends time and context is unique. The researcher’s discussion with the guide makes her argue that the spatiality of culture, history, context, text and semiotics and the a-temporality of semantics problematizing one single-window type of viewing and implying certain multidimensional synchronization of thought are the hallmarks of Karnad’s dramaturgy that make him a prominent postcolonial writer.

Coming to the decoding of the dreams of Tipu Sultan, it is relevant to note here that dreams, in Freudian terms, call for symbolic interpretation. They have a prophetic dimension as they are related to meanings in future. They are associated with the subconscious mind of the dreamer and consequently with hidden meanings too. Karnad deftly harnesses all levels of consciousness into a rational, logical flow not only from dreams to actions but also from Tipu’s era to ours. His dramaturgy blends the fusion of dreams, thought processes and actions into a fine choreography embellished by
accessory dramatic devices and techniques. Karnad handles the theme in such a way that it makes Tipu Sultan so ‘graphic and real’ that his dreams go beyond the spatio-temporal limits and becomes ‘a state of mind’ exemplifying values like nationalism, secularism and anti-colonialism. Tipu’s determination to fight against the domination of the British in India is abundantly clear vis-à-vis his dreams. His intent to drive the British away serves as a pointer to the British presence that means ‘a new religion, an alien culture, and an imprisoning language generating a culture shock’ (Krishnamurthy Hanur 304).

Though the storyline of the play follows the last days as well as the historic moments in the life of Tipu Sultan through the eyes of an Indian court historian, Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kirmani, and a British Oriental scholar, Colonel Colin Mackenzie, it is evident that Karnad is particular to subvert the stereotyped, written and documented notions about Tipu, redefine the heroism of Tipu, the heroic fall of Tipu, vis-à-vis his dreams, kept close to his heart, that reveal his inner psyche, his credibility as a ruler, his commitment as a patriot, his disposition to be a scholar willing to learn, his worth as an anti-colonial ideologue in the midst of the betrayal by his own men, and above all, as Vasanthi Sankarnarayanan underscores, to portray “the tragedy of the man as that of a man born ahead of his times… discarded by his own people and despised and scorned by outsiders, standing as a lonely and unfulfilled character in the annals of Indian history” (The Hindu 19 March 2000). As she adds, “Karnad’s timing for resurrection of this character is very timely, as India needs new heroes, new ideas and new faiths”, heroes who understand why advanced technology matters but would not be infatuated with the Western modes of acculturation.
In the play, the four dreams are artistically re-presented within the matrix of “a constant flux between dream and reality”. They unfurl in a scenic fashion the multifaceted personality of Tipu. He is a poetic hero relevant to the contemporary times. He is projected as an educated and cultured ruler whose aspirations towards modernity of thought that reflect his commitment to change for the better vis-à-vis advanced technology get cut short because of the arrogation of power by the British intruder, whose patriotism sensitizes and elevates the empathetic mind of the spectator into “the realms of the subliminal” (Grace Sudhir 308, 309) now, whose resistance dismantles and challenges the British presumption about India as a primitive and barbaric people, whose moral integrity and audacity, perceptiveness, sense of duty, accountability, and fearlessness stand in sharp contrast to the feeble nature and betraying behaviour of his nobles, whose love and commitment to the dignity of his motherland makes him endure humiliations even to the extent of offering his own sons as hostages, whose foresight sees the dangers of colonial masters bent upon usurping the sovereignty of individual nations, and above all, whose human dimensions that lift him from selfish greed fade into the murals of history evoking in the spectator a profound sense of tragic beauty. This is how Karnad re-presents his protagonist whose patriotism and heroism get trampled and truncated by the colonizing force, men of no great virtues, by treachery and betrayal of trust. This is how Karnad contrasts the legendary valour of his protagonist with the mediocrity of ordinary leaders.

His reuse of history deconstructs jaundiced public perceptions about Tipu, perceptions such as the one that he was an intolerant Muslim monarch who indulged in destroying Hindu temples and converting Hindus into the Islamic fold, and mythifies true heroism capable of futuristic leadership that reclaims and proclaims the triumph of
the human spirit and celebrates so many freedoms. In a nutshell, the dreams cumulatively summate that Tipu, the historical figure, was a visionary who dreamt of a united India years before a united India could actually evolve. It was via his dreams that he wanted to shape his destiny. The sifting Karnad has done vis-à-vis his reading of recorded history, memoirs, letters, oral history, and extracts from ‘Notebook of Dreams’/ ‘Tippoo’s Dream Book’ (Denys 212) has gone into the holistic characterization he constructs and presents to the reader/ the audience.

The contraries suggested in the first dream reveal one side of his heroic personality. The seating of Poornaiya, his Finance Minister, by the side of Tipu is ironic as the reader/the spectator already knows how opportunistic Poornaiya can be. The dream also reveals the secular credentials of Tipu, as one who was known for his religious tolerance and as one who visualized an ideal State with all modern facilities. In the second dream, Karnad shows how sharp and vigilant Tipu was with regard to his military strategies. Besides indicating how pragmatic Tipu was in using the English technology to enhance the quality of his armoury, Karnad’s portrayal reveals how passionate Tipu was in pledging his life for the sake of his motherland. In the dream, the maimed Haider asks him why he let the retreating Cornwallis escape, and Tipu responds saying that he was pleasantly shocked to see the passion and commitment with which the young English soldier fought for a dream, called England, but not for a religion, or for a land that feeds him. It was Tipu’s wish that his countrymen exhibited such passion. Tipu’s diplomacy with the French so as to strategically caution the British against their ambitious trade and political agendas that mean the exploitation of India and his. The third dream hints at the fears Tipu has about the brainwashing capabilities of the British, their addiction towards linguistic, ethnic, and cultural brainwashing. He
is more concerned about the internal violence than the external harm that could be heaped upon his sons as hostages. He says:

The danger is: they'll teach my children their language, English, the language in which it is possible to think of children as hostages. All I can try to do is to agree to their terms and conclude the treaty in a hurry before my children have learnt that language. (43)

Tipu is a true nationalist not only for the fact that he respected his national language but also for the way he refused to adopt a foreign language either as the medium of teaching, learning, or planning. His belief is that if any language becomes the medium of thought, it brings a great transformation in one’s personality. Save for the colonizing characteristics, he had deep reverence for the progressive ideas, entrepreneurship, inventive and innovative attitude of the British.

The fourth dream hovers again around another contrasting juxtaposition wherein Tipu envisages the dawn of a new era of independence for his State free from fear, sycophancy, betrayal and bloodshed. But the reader/the spectator is in for a jolt when he/she realizes that the bloody end of Tipu in the hands of Tipu would bring all his dreams into naught. Karnad’s use of symbolism -- the rose bush blossoming and the placing of stars in favourable positions -- connotes that the life-time of a single hero is not sufficient and that Tipu's sacrifice will create ripple effect and many more heroes will emerge, in course of time, for the cause of freedom of the State, called India. From what Kirmani states at the end of the play -- ‘my history of Tipu Sultan ends with his dreams’, the reader can discern how Karnad’s reuse of history echoes, besides reiterating what a nightmare Tipu was to the British empire, the poetic yearning, a desired image, for a country that could be free from hegemonies, betrayals, treacheries,
and greed. Ground realities around us and across the nation inspire us to state that contemporaneity of context in the plays of Karnad is a perennially fascinating feature.

To conclude, Karnad’s portrayal of Tipu’s dreams is a pointer towards what a role model Tipu, as a multi-faceted personality and visionary, can be today, all the more when regional loyalties and the fragmentary nature of the diversity of India outweigh the diverse-unity of India as a nation. His perception of the dreams of Tipu Sultan reveals more the visionary qualities of the man rather than his warlike dispositions. There is an evolving journey in his depiction – ‘from real life to history, history to literature, literature to theatre, and theatre to life’. The poetic affinity Karnad has with a new perspective resurrects Tipu as an admirable and loveable character capable of nurturing fine emotional depths of human relationships. In parenthesis, the theatre production of the play is much more effective in terms of the manifestation of the qualities of a spectacle vis-à-vis the tragic-beauty of the man that can reflect varied aspects of Indian aesthetics, varied contours of rasananda. And our affinities with Karnad’s poetic perception of Tipu usher us in concurring with Karnad who once responded to a query of a journalist saying that “for me, Tipu is the greatest Kannadiga” (qtd. Staff Reporter in The Hindu 2005), and by extension, he may also be viewed as the finest trend-setting hero who dreamt of the idea of India as a free country.

4. Egalitarian Goals: Religion, Caste, and Communalism as Barriers

This domain examines how Karnad presents his angst against inhuman customs and practices which exploit marginalized people: The analytical reading of Tale-Danda done under this domain may prompt readers to see the politics of the Mandalization of the Caste system done in India in the late 1980s juxtaposed with the efforts of Basavanna, the revolutionary saint of the 11th century, to eradicate the ills of Caste system in India. Critiquing fundamentalist religious consciousness that divides Indian
society on the lines of communalism and caste-highhandedness that discriminates dalits and other subalterns in terms of demeaning social stratification, Karnad shows how oppressive and exploitative the so-called Hindu varnashrama dharma is, how inequality is taken for granted almost as part of the established norms of the Hindu / Indian society, passed on from generation to generation, and why revolutionary steps, like the ones initiated by Basavanna, to eradicate are indispensable even if they cannot achieve an enduring solution. Haralayya, the low caste-cobbler who asks poignant questions on the legacies of subcultures of discrimination perpetuated in the name of caste-based physical parentage and associated mind-sets, seems to be a mouthpiece of the playwright’s anguish in the play. In Karnad’s dramaturgy, Basavanna, the eleventh century-saint, becomes ‘the archetypal arch’ to condemn the ill effects of violence in the contemporary Indian scenario wherein animosities periodically emanate in the name of conflicts related to religion, communalism, and caste.

In the play, Tale-Danda, the action takes place in 1168 in the city of Kalyan. A community of 196,000 disciples or Sharanas, Disciples of Lord Shiva, as they are called -- poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers -- has gathered around Basavanna to form a powerful movement for religious and social change. Under the inspirational leadership provided by Basavanna, they reject the language and rituals of the priests, and the superstition of image worship. Basavanna’s worldview embraces a vision that development is a human enterprise, and if religious orthodoxies and caste-hierarchies were to be barriers to such an enterprise, causing a debilitating effect upon human psyche, they need to be dismantled. Contributing to human development through hard work and disinterested devotion, awaiting no reward, is the guiding principle of their social involvement. Their string belief and conviction in the equality of all negates the traditional importance attached to Caste-system. They rely on India’s
brighter sides of India’s legacies of cultural ethos to counter the negatives of certain age-old systems oppressing, exploiting and marginalizing people at diverse levels, systemic, political, psychological, and interpersonal. They promote the philosophy of oneness of humanity in the midst of inevitable and fascinating diversities which mark Indian civilization in all its gyres. Karnad’s intention of giving readers this much of focused information with reference to the history of Basavanna and his Saranas makes them familiarize themselves with the episodes, dialogues, and characterization so that they could participate contemporaneously in the evolution of the play with reference their own socio-political and cultural contexts. By re-reading and re-contextualizing history, Karnad focuses on how one individual emerged as an avant-garde leader promoting communal integration in the midst of violence. Karnad’s stance that social justice is achievable only in terms of promoting equality of human beings is gradually revealed by textual narratology that has a number of connotative meanings, all diachronically-synchronizing with certain humanistic aesthetics. The syncretic-synchronization Karnad intends to pursue in this play vis-à-vis contemporizing history is clear in one of his statements about his decision to write a play of this kind:

I wrote Tale-Danda in 1989 when the Mandir and the Mandal Movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by the thinkers of yester years were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered. (qtd. in Nayak 141-142)

Karnad’s worldview, as he presents it in this play within a framework of syncretic dramaturgy, resonates with Basavanna’s philosophy of ‘ekta’ – oneness of humanity, which cautioned citizenry against social trends bordering on caste-discrimination – ‘father against son, and brother against brother’. The way he revives
the age-old debate on India’s Caste-system and intertwines it with contemporary class-
divisions and opposing positions which encourage inter-caste marriages shapes the
plot-structure of the play into an act of cultural retrieval foregrounding humane
aesthetics in contrast to ghetto-brahminical positions. This way, Karnad’s predilections
for uplifting the human soul through weaving of mythic intertextualities come once
again to the forefront in this play sensitizing the audience / readers to de-learn and re-
learn the art of being human. *Tale-Danda* is an illustration par excellence amidst all his
plays of the deep-rooted humanism Karnad is committed to as a playwright. Although
his siding with the humanistic aesthetics of Basavanna is abundantly clear, sometimes
directly proclaiming, and sometimes by indirection, that fact his poetic urge longs for
an egalitarian society where “people will —sit together, eat together, argue about God
together, indifferent to caste, birth or station” (21), as he makes one of the characters
utter these words, is stated without any ambiguity or ambivalence.

Act I of the play opens with an unorthodox friendship between two young men-
- Jagadeva, a Brahmin, and Mallibomma, a tanner untouchable, attuned to Sarana
aesthetics. Karnad’s juxtaposition places them at binary ends of the exiting caste-
hierarchy. An episode linking Basava, an official working as treasurer, and serving as
leader of Saranas, takes place, shocking the Saranas. Sovideva, the young prince,
attuned to ghetto-Brahmanism, visits the treasury all of a sudden in the absence of the
king Bijjala, and Basava, the treasurer, and makes an attempt to brand Basava as a
thief. Shelled by this accusation, the Saranas force the prince not to leave the place until
accounts are checked. As everything is impeccably perfect, the prince is made look like
a fool. The king takes this episode as a proof for the innocence of Basava. He sees it,
just as ‘the whole citizenry’ of Kalyan where Saranas have gathered, as ‘a miracle’
(12). But, opts to resign, and such a perception is in sharp contrast to Sovideva’s
attitude and behaviour. Sovideva’s staunch affinities with high-caste mentality are a recipe for disastrous controversies. In another context, he avers:

I shall bury them alive! Hack them to pieces and feed them to my hounds. (14)

Act II narrates another episode that dismantles caste-hierarchy in tune with the philosophical aesthetics propounded by Basava. Two broad-minded Saranas—the boy, Sheelavantha, from a low-caste background, and the girl, Kalavathi, from the Brahmin community, enter into wedlock signifying that the bond of love transcends caste-hierarchies and societal discriminations based on ghettoism. Here again, the binaries, socially speaking two poles apart in terms of mindset, go against ‘the grain’ of the age-old, traditional, and fixed caste and social norms. As Karnad’s Basava puts it, “bigotry has not faced such a challenge in two thousand years” (38). But, yet, Basava knows that inter-caste marriages may not solve the problem of casteism as the problem is deep-rooted in the psyche of the people who are bent upon perpetuating hegemony. Though he is fine with the values behind such proposals and implementations, he declines to bless the couple even after the intervention of the king who is aware of his own mixed origin. Basavanna says:

This is no time for pretty speeches! It is a question of life and death for these children. From tomorrow the wrath of the bigoted will pursue them like a swarm of snakes, to strike as they pause to put up a roof or light an oven. Who will protect them then? Elementary prudence demands that. (45-46)

By calling low caste people as ‘impudent scums’ (62), as Sovideva brands them, Basava warns that no solution can be found, hatred will erupt, and violence will follow.

As the evolution of the play dramatically unfolds, characters range themselves into opposing sides: the ‘horde of howling Brahmins’ (47) with their ‘logic of inequality’ (56) versus a large number of Sharanas pleading for social change. Bijjala, the king, is
in a state of cate 22 situation, `sympathetic to Veerasaiva principles (15), on the one hand, and unwilling, on the other, to ban the marriage outright. Impending disaster in inevitable.

Act III narrates the impactful consequence of the disaster. The coup organized by ghetto-brahminical forces in the palace raise Sovideva to the status of a king and deposes Bijjala. Basava fails in his attempt to gather sufficient number of Sharanas who could confront the coup-makers. As Basava moves towards the Lord of Meeting Rivers, a kind of civil war breaks out in the kingdom as Sovideva uses all his hegemonic prowess to attack dissenters and opposing forces. The audience and readers are kept informed, off the stage, that the fathers of the bride and groom are publicly blinded and dragged through the streets to be trampled by elephants. Bloody paths follow with vengeance and violence. Jagadeva turns his dagger on himself when he fails to take revenge on the perpetrators of violence from the palace as he finds none. In the process, Bijjala gets killed. Basava, when he comes to the events as they unfolded, sees what has happened to his reformist movement and has recourse to the Lord of Meeting Rivers for `light and peace’ (88). The violent behaviour of Sovideva and his army of supporters means massacre of the innocent people, exclusion of subalterns, marginalization of Basava’s reformist tenets, and bedlam and chaos in the ailing kingdom. His solemn consecration as the new king points to the horrors the masses are constrained to live with. The new king’s self-conscious monologues and final averments such as “the king as God incarnate”, “No tongue shall wag against the King or his family.....”, “From this moment all sharanas, foreigners, and free thinkers are expelled from this land on pain of death. Women and the lower orders shall live within the norms prescribed by our ancient tradition, or else they’ll suffer like dogs” (90-91), could remind the audience
After watching or reading the play, one can say that there are quite a number of omissions and commissions, permutations and combinations, all leading to shape the play into “a drama of ideas, a thesis play based on history” (Santhosh Kumar 1) that can be re-read in the context of contemporary experiences of democracy, its challenges, and alternative plausibility. As Julia Leslie points out, Karnad’s treatment of history in the play has both verifiable and plausible facts. In a drama of ideas, what matters more is the question of plausibility rather than the concern for accuracy. The predominant feeling one gets is that it was for the first time in the history of Hinduism, that a reformist, saintly in character and known as a visionary ahead of his times, in the person of Basavanna, could come forward to proclaim that all are equal before God, there is no Brahmin or Shudra in the eyes of God, and humanity is one. Basavanna, not inclined to sermonize, stood like a rock in his worldviews but had practical to understand the mentality of the people in general vis-à-vis caste-consciousness, that it would take time, years, to build ‘a platform of fertile ground’ to initiate and continue the process of de-learning and lea-learning in terms of local decolonization of the mind and assimilation of human values appropriate for launching and sustaining a new social order committed to brotherhood and common fellowship. It is the mindset prone to indulge in self-interest-hidden discriminating practices that makes the prospects of truce remote as if equality were an unattainable goal. The painful awareness the king himself has about his own mixed origin (a barber by birth), that is often hinted in the texture of the play by both others and him, for instance in his conversation with his wife, the queen who belongs to a high caste, is Karnad’s way of reiterating the
challenge involved in activating the decolonization of the mind. The king tells his spouse:

In all my sixty-two years, the only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly birth lurking deep in their eyes are the sharanas: Basavanna and his men. They treat me, as what? - as a human being. (51)

In terms of Basavanna’s link with the contemporaneous context, Karnad, as mentioned above, has confirmed on varied occasions in writing or through interviews, that the volcano of Mandal Commission and the Mandir issue of the late 1980s and the early 1990s haunted him and prompted him to write this play. The point Karnad insists, just as Basava does in his interventions in the play, is that even after the passage of more than eight hundred years of Basavanna’s intervention in Indian history, India is still unable to eradicate the caste system. Violence is a regular phenomenon the moment caste-conflicts or religions tensions erupt in any part of India. Atrocities are committed and the victims are often innocent dalits, women, and children. Just as Basavanna was aware of the dangerous consequences or implications of mixing religion and politics, caste and politics, and ideologies and self-interests, all these as reasons for the collapse of his reform initiatives, just as Basava cautions his Sharanas about the consequences of Sharanas indulging in using the reformist movement for personal vested interests, or for mere propaganda, as it was done by the parents / guardians of the inter-caste couple in the play, Karnad by intertextual connotations and post-textual re-readings of his own play, cautions readers on how there could be imposters around the people to fool them and to exploit them for their interests or perpetuation of their narrow ideologies.
Karnad cautions that reformist principles as such may not be a problem but the disciples who promote them can be great obstacles by dint of their propagandist tendencies, pursuit of dogmatic and ideological passions at the cost of other religions and ideologies, and by their inclination to use the reform movement for their own social mobility. Jagadeva’s hankering after publicity for proclaiming his leadership, his madness in killing the king, and the pangs of identity crisis he suffers in the midst of the ongoing conflicts may be noted here as an instance. Jagadeva serves as an archetype for the modern/postmodern day Sharanas who have their own ego problems vis-à-vis the mystic and the egotist or the militant.

Basavanna valued equality of sexes / genders as a prime reformist norm and goal. But, just as in his own day as it is so even now, life for women in general is a perennial story of inequality and gender discrimination. Karnad’s play enables readers to recognize how reformist movements and egalitarian goals pursued in the midst of other ground realities such as divisiveness of language, caste prejudice, gender discriminations and commercial interests and considerations which can be stumbling blocks in realizing idealistic reforms and related goals.

Julia Leslie’s comment may be an apt conclusion to the critical examination of this play in the part of the study. She states that the play comes more alive in terms of Karnad’s treatment of the two relationships most crucial to our understanding of the complexities of that time. Basava’s relationship with his king, Bijjala, reflects the constant and inevitable tensions between spiritual and worldly power. His relationship with his wayward disciple, Jagadeva, demonstrates the polarity of mystic versus militant that is evident in any religious movement, whether in the twelfth century, or today. (248)
Other critical considerations in terms of motifs, imagery, symbols, and related connotative meanings in the select plays studied in depth in this chapter have been accommodated in Chapter Four of the study as they strengthen the perception of Karnad as an ethno-symbolist and cultural aesthete, which is the focal point in the Chapter.