CHAPTER: 5

USE OF MYTHS IN *NAGA-MANDALA, YAYATI* AND *TUGHLAQ*

Girish Karnad bases his play *Naga-Mandala* (Play with a Cobra) on two folk tales from Karnataka, which he acknowledges to have heard several years ago from A. K. Ramanujan. Karnad's plays reflect upon contemporary Indian cultural and social life using folk tales, myth and historical legends. He weaves together timeless truth about human life and emotions contained in ancient Indian stories with the changing social mores and morals of modern life. His plays are particularly concerned with the psychological problems, dilemmas and conflicts experienced by the modern Indian men and women in their different social situations. His play *Naga-Mandala* is a powerful portrait of the agony and anguish faced by both men and women in their development into adult roles and social adjustment in a society where the individual is given little space for self-development, awareness and liberty as a being.

The play *Naga-Mandala*, directed by Vijaya Mehta in German was presented by Leipzier Schauspielhaus at Leipzig and Berlin for the Festival of India in Germany in 1992. Again, it was performed at the University Theatre at Chicago and subsequently at the Gutherie Theatre in Minneapolis as part of its 30th anniversary celebrations in 1993.

Naga-Mandala (1988) is Karnad's one of the finest plays. It was published in Kannada first and then translated into English by Karnad himself. It is based on a Kannada folk tale. It combines folk elements

with mythical and surreal to present a domestic drama. Karnad himself writes about the source material of play in *Introduction to Three Plays:*

> *Naga-Mandala* is based on two oral tales I heard from A. Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women-normally the older women in the family - while children are being fed in the evening in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore, these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as a system of communication among the women in the family.
>
> They also express a woman's understanding of the reality around her, a lived counterpoint to the patriarchal structures of classical texts and institutions. The position of Rani in the story of Naga-Mandala, for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles - as a stranger during the day and as lover at night. Inevitably, the pattern of relationships she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be something of a fiction.

> The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she married into.
>
> Many of these tales also talk about the nature of tales. The story of the flames comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general: They have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener. Seen thus, the status of a tale becomes akin to that of a daughter, for traditionally a daughter too is not meant to be kept at home too long but has to be passed on. This identity adds poignant and ironic undertones to the relationship of the teller to the tales.[1]

The feeling of dread and repugnance venomous reptiles universally inspire, is shared by the Indians too. It was probably their dreaded powers that led to the deification of serpents. In Hindu scriptures, snakes are in some places mentioned as the enemies of mankind and in others as deities. Originally, the Indo-Aryans were averse to snake-worship, but later Hinduism absorbed some races who worshipped snakes and with them their beliefs.

The Nagas (*snakes*) are fabled to live in a magnificent world named Patala, situated in the nether regions. There dwell the lords of snake-region, Vasuki, Sankha, Kulika, Mahasankha, Sweta,

Dhananjaya, Dhritarashtra, Sankhachurna, Kambala, Aswatara, Devadatta and other large-hearted serpents. Of these, some have, five hoods, some seven, some ten and some a thousand. The gloom of the nether regions is lighted up by the splendour of the excellent gems gracing their hoods.

The capital of the serpent-world is Bhogawati, a city famed for its wealth. The serpents there are in possession of the nest precious stones in the worlds.

The *Nagas* are said to be the progeny of Kadru (one of the wives of Kasyspa) and mortal enemies of their half-brother Garuda. Because of its habit of sloughing its skin, the serpent is believed to be immortal. It is said that once when Garuda was taking ambrosia from heaven to Patala, he happened to drop some of the nectar on the earth, which fell on Kusa grass and snakes greedily kicked it up and became immortal. They, however, burnt their tongues and hence they have forked tongues.

The chief of the serpents is said to be Ananta, the thousand-hooded hydra, on whom Vishnu sleeps. The earth is poised on one of his hoods. The word *Ananta* means endless. The serpent, particularly one eating its tail, is indicative of eternity.

While Ananta and Vasuki (Shiva wears this serpent as his girdle) are objects of veneration, Kaliya is said to represent sin. This cobra inhabited the river Kalindi (Jamuna) and was a cause of anxiety

to the herdsmen among whom Krishna lived. The boy Krishna, one day, entered the river and after a fierce combat, subdued the monstrous reptile. At the request of the wives of Kaliya, Krishna spared his life but made him depart from Kalindi. The story of this combat is very popular among the Hindus, and Krishna is very often represented as a boy dancing on the hood of Kaliya.

Nagapanchami, the fifth day of the Hindu month of Shravan (July-August) is sacred to snakes and they are particularly worshipped on this day.

In Indian literature and lore, a serpent or King Cobra *Naga* represents a positive force, sympathetic to like. A snake is often a guardian figure. According to Zimmer:

> Serpent Kings and queen (Naga, Nagin) personifying and directing the terrestrial waters of the lakes and ponds, rivers and oceans, the goddess of the three sacred streams...[2]

As per the popular lore, a Naga

> bestows the boons of earthly happiness - abundance of crops and cattle, prosperity, offspring, health, long life...[3]

The *Mandala* of the title suggests a circular area or a cyclic time. As such, *Naga-Mandala* denotes a world dominated by *Naga*. The reference to circular time and space evokes an image of concentric circle in motion that move outwards only to start all over again.

The story of *Naga-Mandala* draws its concept from the snake stories deeply rooted in our myths and folklores. The sinister hissing of snake, its slithering movements, glittering eyes and fatal poison, its sudden appearance and disappearance has always aroused the interest and fear of mankind in this mysterious species. Our Bollywood film producers also took interest and made some box-office hit movies on such subjects. They added fuel to the fire of belief and imagination of the people of the nation. Lord Shiva is seen with a Cobra around his neck. Our religious books have also added the element of curiosity to and eagerness of the people. The study of ancient life in India reveals that Nagas (Cobras) were sacred beings whom it was forbidden to touch and whose complex character made them equally feared and adored. Their aggressive tendencies were proverbial, and their vengeful spirit made them quite capable, supposedly of exterminating an entire population by exuding the fatal poison contained either in their fangs, or by suffocating their victims in their coils. They were also capable of blinding people with their foul breath or killing them with the fire of their glance. Indeed their gaze was so powerful that it could easily reduce a whole town to ashes. Yet, despite this, they were equally capable of coming to the aid of humans and could, like the *Yakshas*, make women fertile. They also guarded treasures buried in the ground. The skin they sloughed was supposed to have the power of

granting invisibility to the one who picked it up, and to ensure him long life, or even immortality, since the process of sloughing off symbolize the soul liberating itself from evil and cycle of rebirth. It is also a wide spread belief that the cobra can transform into a man, a bird or a wolf. However, the main transformation in *Naga-Mandala* is that of the cobra assuming the form of Rani's husband, Appanna to make love to her. The playwright traces the movement of Rani (or the Indian women, in general) from enslavement to empowerment. Into this metamorphosis are woven the themes of patriarchal tyranny, female and male sexuality, adultery and chastity. There are multiple levels of transformation in the play. There are transformations at the physical level - the flames assume female voices, the story transforms into a young woman and the snake into a man. Besides these, there is psychic and emotional transformation of different characters. Metamorphosis also leads to self-knowledge, revelation, and role shifting.

Pranav Joshipura writes:

> ...Girish Karnad, while using mythology, has put forward a question mark to some of the values of today. While we are busy satisfying ourselves, our desires, thirst, we forget or overlook certain values, which may lead us towards a stage from, where we feel satisfied with ourselves, with what we have, what we possess. Although we live in so-called 'society' where we are closely

"related" to one another, we are very 'alien' to each other. Our 'Brihadaranyaka' Upanishad' describes the formation of human beings as following: "In the beginning, this universe was nothing but the self in the form of a man... He was as large as a man and woman embracing. This Self divided itself into parts; and with that, there were a master and a mistress." This symbolizes the split of a whole human being into a man and woman. The same symbolism can be found in the creation of Adam and Eve by God as described in the 'Bible'.

We are born whole human beings, but gender-based divisions of labour break us into male and female fragments. Each fragment retains only half of the human potential. The retained part overgrows to compensate for the other part, which remains underdeveloped. These two polarized, deformed fragments are called men and women. Gender deformities are thus caused and gradually 'canonized' by socio-cultural programming of sex roles.

> It is significant to note that the title of the play comes not from any human character, but from a snake - Naga. The story of the Cobra suggests that the play not merely dramatizes the folk tales in modern interpretation; it also implies a deeper meaning at various levels. In our Hindu mythology, the Naga represents several images. In South India many houses have their own shrine, which is, often a grove reserved for snakes, consisting of trees, festooned with creepers, situated in the corner of the garden. Snakes are also the symbols of human maleness and strength. Nagas are sometimes portrayed as handsome men, or as half-man and half-snake, the top half using the torso of a man, the lower half a coiled snake. Karnad in 'Naga-Mandala' has made use of the folk tales and the "mixing of human and non-human worlds" as a distancing device, which brings in the element of alienation in the play...[4]

Naga-Mandala is the story of a young girl, Rani, newly married to Appanna, and their gradual understanding of the role, function and responsibilities of the institution of marriage. This story is presented in the play by a woman-narrator, a *flame* that has come to tell a story. The play begins with a Prologue in which one is taken to the inner

sanctum of a ruined temple. The temple is very old and the idol in it is broken and therefore cannot be identified. It is night and a man is sitting in the temple, yawning involuntarily. He turns to the audience and confides:

> I may be dead within the next few hours. I asked the mendicant what I had done to deserve this fate. Moreover, he said, "You have written plays. You have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who came trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs that all that abused mass of sleep has turned against you and become the Curse of Death." (NM 22-23)

The man is sad because a mendicant has told him,

> You must keep awake at least one whole night this month. If you can do that, you'll live, If not, you'll die on the last night of the month. (NM 22)

The man has been dozing off every night, and tonight is the last night of the month. His guilt is that he has written plays and thereby caused so many people

> to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs. (NM 22-23)

Hence, there is *the Curse of Death* (NM - 23) on him. He swears that if he survives this night he will

> adjure all story-telling, all play acting. (NM 23)

Suddenly he is shocked to see naked lamp flames entering the temple, talking to each other in female voice. All the *flames* have come from different households in the village, who, after lights have been put out for the night, escape their houses, to collect gossip and have some entertainment. Each flame is a female, a storyteller, sharing with the others her observations and new experiences. Then a new flame enters and is enthusiastically greeted by the other flames. This new flame tells the others:

> My mistress, the old woman, knows a story and a song. But all these years she has kept them to herself...This afternoon...The moment her mouth opened the story and the song jumped out. (NM 24-25)

The story took the form of a young woman and the song became a sari: this young woman wrapped herself in the sari and stepped out.

The identification of the flames with young, sprightly, and *vocal* women and stories that they tell each other is a brilliant device used by the playwright for creating a particularly female context and content in the *man-oriented* folk tale.

The flame begins her story of Rani and Appanna. Act One begins with the Story addressing the audience:

> A young girl. Her name... it doesn't matter. But she was an only daughter, so her parents called her Rani, Queen. Queen of the whole wide world... (NM 27)

Rani is beautiful beyond words. She is the queen of the long tresses. When her hair is tied up in a knot, it is as though a black King Cobra lies curled on the nape of her neck. Rani's father finds her a suitable husband, Appanna (Any man) who soon comes and takes her to his village. Rani enters her wedded life like most girls with a lot of expectation but is shocked by Appanna's neglect. Marriage is a milestone in a person's life and since it presents a hostile environment; her mind indulges in dreams in order to calm her troubled self. Rani's problem in Appanna's house could be the problem of any bride in a Hindu family. Both Rani and Appanna do not know how they can relate to each other. The young girl misses her parents, feels home-sick and lonely, while Appanna comes home only in the day, asks for food, stays for sometime and then goes away. Every night he visits concubine, which reflects his awareness of the biological aspect of sex. Rani is mentally a child craving for parental affection. So she moons *Oh mother, Father!* in her sleep. The next day before Appanna leaves, she expresses her plight.

Rani : Listen - (Fumbling for words) Listen—I feel frightened - alone at night -

Appanna : What is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you. Rice!

Rani : Please, you could -

Appanna : Look, I don't like idle chatter. Don't question me. Do as you are told and you won't be punished. (Finishes his meal, gets up) I will be back tomorrow for lunch. (NM 28)

Rani's miserable days roll by in this manner. Appanna treats her as if she were a non-human thing, without any feeling and a robot-cook following his instructions without uttering a single word of complain. He locks her in the room, and scolds the old woman Kurudavva and her son Kappanna when they attempt to become friendly with Rani.

One day it so happens that Kappanna (the dark one) enters the street carrying his mother Kurudavva (the blind one) on his shoulders. Kurudavva is the intimate friend of Appanna's mother. She has come to visit the new daughter-in-law who has arrived in the house. She talks to Rani and feels her through the window. She learns that Appanna still visits his concubine though he has a beautiful wife. The elderly woman bursts out:

> I'll tell you. I was born blind. No one would marry me... One day a mendicant came to our house.... He was pleased with me and gave me three pieces of a root. 'Any man who eats one of these will marry you', he said. (NM 33)

Therefore, Kurudavva used the middle-sized root and got her loving husband. She gives Rani a piece of aphrodisiac root and instructs her to grind the root and mix it in Appanna's food. Rani for the first time has someone to speak to her sympathetically and she is granted a miraculous thing to solve her problem. So she feels very happy. When Appanna comes, Kurudavva expresses her wish to talk to Rani. He says:

> She won't talk to anyone. And no one needs talk to her. (NM 34)

Later he brings a watchdog to prevent people from talking to his wife. It is clear that Appanna does not want Rani to come into contact with other people. While he enjoys extra-material relationships, he does not allow her to enjoy even the affection of others. He mercilessly keeps her starved of affection and love, which are indispensable for the growth and sustenance of human mind. Sudhir Kakar rightly points out that

> the dominant psycho-social realities of a woman's life can be condensed into three stages. First, she is a daughter to her parents;

> second, she is a wife to her husband (and daughter-in-law to his parents); and third, she is a mother to her sons (and daughters). It is through these three important relationships that a woman realizes her self and social significance. Rani's developmental struggle meets the first obstacle, as she lives with a man who does not give her the full physical and emotional relationship that should exist between a husband and wife...[5]

Rani grinds the aphrodisiac root into a paste and pours it into the curry. The curry boils over, red as blood. Rani is so terrified that she goes out and pours the entire curry into the anthill where lives King Cobra. Rani as a typical wife does not want to cause her husband any harm, which she fears, will be caused by the root though her husband has been treating her badly since she came. Appanna as a typical husband punishes her severely even for a small thing like her going out though she has been serving him without any grudge since he brought her.

The charm has worked now. A King Cobra consumes the paste and falls in love with Rani. King Cobra lifts his hood, sees Rani and follows her at a distance. When it is very dark, the Cobra enters Rani's house through the drain in the bathroom. As the Cobra is supposed to assume any form it likes, it takes the shape of Appanna. He visits Rani at night. He takes pity on Rani for her miserable condition. He

behaves very differently. He becomes so affectionate, compassionate and full of love that Rani cannot comprehend the situation. Yet she willingly suspends her disbelief and enjoys the concern and affection of Naga who is in the guise of Appanna and thus Act One ends here.

Act II continues with the same scene. Their meeting at night continues; Rani cannot understand why Appanna so nice at night is rough and rude hissing like a stupid snake during the day. Rani tells Appanna (who actually is King Cobra):

> You talk so nicely at night. But during the day I only have to open my mouth and you hiss like a...stupid snake. (NM 42)

On one night, Rani sees wounds on Naga's cheek and so brings the mirror box for ointment. Naga had received these wounds in a fight the previous night with the dog, which Appanna had brought to keep a watch on Rani and to keep everyone away from her. She sees an image of a cobra in the mirror and screams with fright. At once, she shuts the box and pushes it away. She says, by miming, that she has seen a cobra in the mirror. Then she gently touches his wounds and finds his blood cold. She advises him not to wander in cold weather and spoil his health. In spite of the hints, she fails to suspect the real identity perhaps because she is very innocent, immature and inexperienced in every matter. She is totally ignorant of sex also. She feels that sex is mean and sinful. After the love - making, she goes to a corner and starts weeping as if she has committed some crime. Then Naga explains to her that sex is natural and enjoyable but not sinful. Yet Rani is not convinced. Then it is almost dawn and he is about to

go. She expresses her unhappiness over his going out. Before leaving, he repeats his injunction that she should not ask why his behaviour at night is different from that during the day. She accepts it like a dumb animal.

Kappanna and his mother Kurudavva come in the morning. Kappanna sees Naga and mistakes him for Appanna. Both of them find the front door locked. Kurudavva thinks that Appanna is doing like this just for the sake of fun. She is delighted that the magic root has worked. She speaks to Rani. They are not in a position to understand how Appanna has gone out while the lock is still there. Kappanna sees a cobra coming out of the house. Kurudavva instructs Rani to block the drain to prevent the entry of reptiles.

When Appanna comes, he finds the dog dead. Rani is also surprised to see that there was no wound on his face! After lunch, Appanna goes out, locking her in as usual. He brings a mongoose to keep a watch on Rani. The mongoose gives a tough fight to the Cobra before it dies. Naga thus receives severe injuries and does not visit Rani for fifteen days. When he comes back after fifteen days, his body is totally covered with deep wounds. During the day, Appanna has no such wounds on him. This very much surprises Rani but she has no courage to ask any question.

Naga visits Rani regularly and cures her of frigidity with tact, patience, and affection. Rani, too, starts enjoying pleasures. The days roll by. Rani becomes pregnant and she thinks that she has conceived for her husband. When she gives this good news to Naga, he is not happy because Rani's pregnancy can reveal his identity. He advises

her to keep it secret from him as long as possible. Rani is too much confused at this type of behaviour of her husband. When Appanna (the actual husband) comes to know about Rani's pregnancy, he is furious. He curses and kicks her.

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

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

Appanna : You haven't? And yet you have a bloated tummy. Just pumped air into it, did you? And you think I'll let you get away with that? You shame me in front of the whole village, you darken my face, you slut - ! (NM 52)

Appanna does not accept Rani's innocence. He drags her out and tries to throw a huge stone at her to smash her illegitimate child to be born. Now, the Cobra comes out and hisses loudly. Appanna throws the stone at the snake, which escapes into the ant-hill. He then goes out to request the Village Elders to sit in judgment and punish

her. That night Naga comes and Rani asks him with flood of tears in her eyes:

> Why are you humiliating me like this? Why are you stripping me naked in front of the whole village? Why don't you kill me instead? I would have killed myself. But there is not even a rope in this house for me to use. (NM 53)

Naga says,

> Rani, the Village Elders will sit in judgment. You will be summoned. That cannot be avoided. (NM 53)

He advises her to take snake ordeal. He assures that everything will be all right:

> All will be well, Rani, Don't worry. Your husband will become your slave tomorrow. You will get all you have ever wanted. (NM 54)

She suddenly runs to him and embraces him. She says:

> Please hold me tight. I'm afraid. Not of the Cobra. Nor of death! Of you. For you. You say you'll become my slave tomorrow. That we will be together again. (NM 54)

The village elders sit in judgment and Rani swears that she has not touched anyone except her husband and the Cobra, nor has she allowed any male to touch her.

If I lie, let the Cobra bite me. (NM 58)

The Cobra does not bite her, but slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. The crowd is stunned, while the Elders declare her a Devi, a divine being.

Elder-I : A miracle! A miracle.
Elder-II : She is not a woman, she is a Divine Being.
Elder-III : Indeed, a Goddess —!

(They fall at her feet. The crowd surges forward to prostrate itself before her. Appanna stands, uncomprehending. The Elders shout, 'Palanquin! Music!' They lift her into the Palanquin. Then as an afterthought, Appanna is seated next to her. The couple is taken in procession to their house.)

Elder-I : Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate. Don't grieve that you judged her wrongly and treated her

badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were the chosen instrument for revealing her divinity.

Elder-II : Spend the rest of your life in her service. You need merit in ten past lives to be chosen for such a holy duty.

Elder-III : Bless us, Mother. Bless our children. (All disperse, except Rani and Appanna. Appanna opens the lock on the door, throws it away. He goes in and sits, mortified, baffled. She comes and stands next to him. Long pause. Suddenly he falls at her feet.)

Appanna : Forgive me. I am a sinner. I was blind... (NM 59)

Rani gives birth to a beautiful son, but Appanna is aware that he is not the father of the child. He is not convinced of Rani's chastity. The Cobra unable to bear separation ties a stress on Rani's hair round

its neck and strangles itself to death hiding in her hair. The dead Cobra falls to the ground when Appanna combs her hair. Rani, who now understands all about the Cobra, wishes him to be cremated by their son and rite to be performed to commemorate the Cobra's death. Appanna agrees to the wishes of Rani as he regards her the goddess incarnate.

Rani : (Almost to herself) A Cobra. It has to be ritually cremated. Can you grant me a favour?

Appanna : Certainly.

Rani : When we cremate this snake, the fire should be lit by our son.

Appanna : As you say. (NM 63)

Thus, in *Naga-Mandala*, the human and non-human worlds enter into one another's lives to reveal the playwright's vision of reality. A number of Indian habits and beliefs are reflected in Karnad's plays. In *Naga-Mandala*, Appanna marries Rani, locks her up in his house, and carries on his affair with his concubine. He is notoriously promiscuous but expects his wife to be chaste. He goes to the extent of lodging a complaint with the elders of the village for justice. Such a hypocritical attitude is common in many parts of the country, though women are liberated largely now.

Karnad has deployed all devices used with the folk-tale and/or mythic patterns, like the imputations of superhuman qualities to humans and non-humans, the use of magic elements, extraordinary ordeals. The flames, the Naga taking Appanna's form, the magic roots, the imputation of divinity to a woman - all confirm to the needs of folk-tale and myth.

The play proper seems a re-mythification of the Ahalya myth. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ahalya commits adultery knowingly but the folk mind equates Ahalya with the chaste women and therefore cannot allow her to sin deliberately. So Indra is shown to have perpetrated a fraud on her by impersonating her husband Rishi Gautam. In *Naga-Mandala* too, Rani is innocent. It is Naga in the form of her husband Appanna who makes love to her. She thinks that she bears her husband's child and does not suspect Naga's identity until the very end. How Naga comes to be her lover is based upon a fertility rite. According to Northrop Frye, *A ritual is a sacred manifestation or an epiphany of a myth in action.* In other words, myth rationalizes or explains a ritual by providing an authority for it. For instance, it is a common practice in our country that on a certain day of a certain month of a certain year, women perform the ritual of pouring milk on ant-hills inhabited by Cobras. It is believed that married women propitiate the Cobra to get over barrenness and unmarried girls to get good husband. Naga of the play *Naga-Mandala* is a supernatural being who reflects charisma and possesses the special powers of transformation. The scenography of *Naga-Mandala* is set in the aura of Naga, which is both beautifully terrible and terrifyingly beautiful. This mysterious quality of Naga permeates the entire play.

Naga-Mandala is a magico-religious ritual involving Naga, the snake-god of Hindus who grants the wishes of his devotes, especially the wish for fertility. In the play, Naga (Cobra) grants Rani all her wishes, which she does not express openly. She grows mentally and becomes a confident woman. She is cured of her frigidity. She gets a devoted husband. Her husband's concubine becomes a life-long servant-maid for her. Above all, she begets a beautiful son. Naga, in addition, makes Appanna's heart fertile with love and affection for his wife.

Naga-Mandala depicts the man and woman pass through several stages of doubt, uncertainty, and even failures before they become mature and learn to live harmoniously as husband and wife, within the family-fold. Appanna becomes a caring and subdued husband, accepting Rani's decisions, which may be at times, baffle him. This change in Rani's status comes through her motherhood, and the public trial, where her bold acceptance of *truth* gains her public respectability. This transformation of both Appanna and Rani presents the significance of the institution of marriage. It is through their adjustment that they gain a status within the life of the community.

Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* provides aesthetic pleasure, which in turn reforms the tastes of the people and changes their attitude to life. It has so absorbing a story that it can keep anybody awake the whole night as it forces the Man in the play to hear it. The audience is transported to a world of make-believe, without any reference to the mundane affairs. The Naga-episode, which is a mixture of romance and chivalry, is exhilarating.

Literature in essence is a criticism of society. Matthew Arnold has said in his immortal words,

> ... that poetry at bottom is a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, - to the question, How to live?

What he has said about poetry applies to all forms of literature. *Naga-Mandala* presents a tale of male chauvinism to give the message that it debilitates and degrades both sexes. In modern ambience, men and women have to work in tandem to maintain this pace of progress. Women have shown that they have drive to and enterprise as much as men have. Though to our misfortune we find that there are innumerable cases of exploitation of women, yet it is more than clear that Rani cannot be tortured any more. We shall be worse than blind Kurudavva if we fail to give women their due place in the society and worse than Cobra if we fail to appreciate their potential. Rani's and Naga's ultimate act of reconciling with the situation is edifying. It is no wisdom to remain stuck to the past, when future beckons us.

For Karnad mythology is never a dead past. He makes it relevant in the modern context. The modern men can learn and understand certain social values and morality from it. Myths, legends and folk forms function as a kind of cultural aesthesia and they have been used for introducing and eliminating, in our racial unconscious, cultural pathogens such as caste and gender distinctions and religious fanaticism. Karnad makes use of myths and folk forms in his plays to exercise socio-cultural evils. He says,

> The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. [6]

In *Naga-Mandala*, he not only exposes male chauvinism, the oppression of women, the great injustice done to them by men and patriarchal culture but also stealthily deflates the concept of chastity.

Literature is picture of the society drawn on a large canvas by persons of higher sensibilities to show the people their failings and foibles and also to inspire them to take remedial steps. In *Naga-Mandala* Karnad has made out a case for emancipation of women who, he thinks, are subjected to all sorts of invidious discrimination. The play is no doubt based on a deeply rooted Indian mythology but that is not all. It has become a sociological study of Indian women for whom freedom or independence is still an unfulfilled dream.

Let us take up the case of Appanna, the main male character of the play. He has nobody to take care of him. His parents are already dead. He has money to spend and spare. It is natural for an unguided youth to be wayward, more so in a society in which women are available for pay. Indian society somehow does not provide many channels to release one's energy. People do not have healthy pastimes. Appanna therefore starts going to a concubine who has held him fast in her trap. The question whether Appanna is guilty or the society confronts the readers. Even today, Indian society does not take responsibility of unguided or misguided youths. Naturally, such

youths become drug addicts, adulterer, or criminals. It is not the society worth the name, which leaves the youths to their own care. Bernard Shaw's Candida has a case in point. Candida saves the boy who has become a drug addict because he was neglected by his family. If Appanna had met a Candida, he would not have strayed from the path of righteousness. Appanna cannot be blamed for his lapses because there is none to guide him. He has missed the centre and nobody is there to show him the right track.

Rani, the most important female character of the play, too suffers due to social conditions, traditions and so called culture. She is brought up in a conservative society, which believes that a wife has to serve her husband howsoever depraved he may be, and that marriage is not a bond but bondage. The wife has to consider her husband a god (Pati Parmeshwara). She has to obey all orders without asking a single question. Rani is told on the very day she enters her husband's house that he will come only once in a day for lunch and she has to keep his lunch ready. He said,

> Well, then, I'll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go. (NM 27)

She is thus left to languish in a solitary cell. When she tries to speak to Appanna about her woeful state, he snubs her -

> Look, I don't like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand? I will be back tomorrow, for lunch. (NM 28)

She starts having hallucinations and dreams of her parents whom in contrast where caring and loving. She moans, *Oh, Mother! Father* in her sleep. She is so upset mentally that she talks to herself even while cooking food –

> Then Rani's parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and caress her. At night, she sleeps between them. So she is not frightened any more. 'Don't worry', they promise her. 'We won't let you go away again ever!' In the morning, the stag with the golden antlers comes to the door. He calls out to Rani. She refuses to go. 'I am not a stag,' he explains, 'I am a prince'... (NM 28)

Her shattered dreams visit her to make her miserable,

> ...Therefore, Rani asks him: 'Where are you taking me? And the Eagle answers: 'Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you. (NM 27-28)

The gap between her dream and the present state torments her. She is a caged bird. She wants the open sky to fly freely. However, Hindu customs and beliefs do not allow her to do so.

One more fact of our so-called cultured society comes before us is that a Hindu husband can enjoy any liberty but his wife is not to cross the threshold of her house, the Laxman-Rekha of social inhabitations and prohibitions and if she does, she does on the pain of social ostracism. Everybody knows that Appana goes to a concubine but none dares ask him to desist from going there, but he keeps his wife under lock and key lest she should get a company to abate her suffering. Hindu wives have no voice in anything. She is exhorted to follow the dictates of her husband. She is further told that lucky is the wife whose dead body is carried to the pyre by her husband, implying that the treatment she receives from her husband and in-laws. Rani, therefore, bears all the suffering without speaking a word of revolt. She is left by her loving parents also to fend for herself in her husband's house. It is really a very true observation, *A Cobra is better than such a husband.*

Hindu society has been perfectly reflected in *Naga-Mandala*. It is a very common practice among Indians in general and Hindus in particular that they look for a rich boy with a status for the match of their daughters and marry them away without the consent of the bride and bridegroom. Such marriages result in laceration of women. Many a time it so happens that the rich boy is found poor in morality. Rani is a victim of such a concept. It is not this that the marriage has been rocked, but a woman has been enslaved. Bernard Shaw has dealt with such a problem in his play *Arms and the Man*, in which the young woman, Raina, rejects her betrothed fiancé who is selected by her parents on the considerations of his riches and status, to marry with her *chocolate cream soldier* who is a fugitive, pursued by the enemy

and torn with hunger. She chooses him because she has found him a better man. When the two rivals speak of their wealth to get her hand, Raina says, –

> The lady says that he can keep his tablecloths and his omnibuses. I am not here to be sold to the highest bidder.[7]

But the fugitive tells her –

> I won't take that answer. I appealed to you as a fugitive, a beggar and a starving man. You accepted me. You gave me your hand to kiss, your bed to sleep in, and your roof to shelter me.[8]

The direct message that Shaw gives is that character of a man should be the primary consideration, not his wealth and status in matrimonial matters. It is correctly said, *The real dignity of a man lies in not what he HAS but in what he IS.* However, Indian society is too orthodox and reactionary to accept such a message. That is the main cause for Rani's suffering. Rani would have gone beyond seven seas and Seven Isles if she had been married to a man with moral values. But unfortunately, she gets a husband who does not know or care for even the alphabets of moral values.

Rani is, in a way, representative of Indian wives who crave for love of men and in the intensity of their passion; they accept any men that come in their lives. In most cases, people exploit such women for

physical pleasure, but Rani is lucky in having a sincere lover. Her case compels the guardians of the society to imagine what would have happened to her if the lover-snake had been a flirt or a procurer. Indian ethics does not permit a woman to have extra-material relations even if the woman is a deserted wife. Naturally, Rani is shocked when she realizes that she has copulated with a man other than her wedded husband. The author puts her case plainly –

> No two men love alike. And that night of the village court, when her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realize it was someone new? Even if she hadn't known earlier! When did the split take place? Every night this conundrum must have spread its hood out at her. Don't you think she must have cried out in anguish to know the answer? (NM 60)

The play examines the issues of adultery and chastity and questions the patriarchal moral code, which believes in the loyalty of a woman to her husband but not in the fidelity of a man to his wife. No hue and cry is raised when Appanna commits adultery openly and intentionally whereas Rani, who commits adultery unknowingly, is compelled to face the trial. She remains one of Sita in Valmiki's *Ramayana* who has to pass through the test of fire to prove her virginity. Rani is tormented by her husband who accuses her of infidelity. He utters imprecations on her,

> Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in and you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off? (NM 52)

When she undergoes the snake ordeal, she confesses swearing by the King Cobra that she has not touched any one of the male sex, except her husband and this snake. The cobra does not harm her and she is apotheosized into a divine goddess incarnate. However, Appanna is not convinced for her chastity and says,

> Have I sinned so much that even nature should laugh at me? I know I haven't slept with my wife. Let the world say what it likes. Let any miracle declare her a goddess. But 'I' know! (NM 60)

He undergoes great mental agony. It seems that Providence has punished him for torturing his wife and for being infidel to her. Chastity or virginity of a woman is one of the major issues in the life of a woman. Chastity is considered the most precious possession of a woman. Thomas Hardy's famous novel *Tess* is centrally based on the chastity issue. Tess, the heroine of the novel, had to suffer throughout because she was not virgin. Thus, this problem is not only limited to India but also spread worldwide. The question that arises before the readers is whether Rani is a chaste woman in spite of getting a child from the lover snake. The religions bigots will condemn her as depraved as Tees was condemned by her husband Angel Clare. Even Ahalya was outcast for a similar offence. Indians are generally

prudish. They do not rise above ready-made ethical mores. Hardy has tackled this question judiciously in his novel *Tess*! Tess becomes a victim of the prurient employer Alec. Towards the end of the novel Angel, her husband, realizes the worth of Tess and accepts her. Hardy himself calls Tess *A Pure Woman.* However, the Indian Tess, that Rani is, is caught in the steel framework of social ethics so strongly that she cannot rise above ingrained moral values. It requires a Rama to restore peace to the distraught Ahalya. It is therefore natural for Rani to suffer the arrows and slings of mind. Appanna has also to suffer mental agony because he knows for certain that his wife has had illicit relations with somebody. But the poor fellow is not in a position to speak a single word because Rani has successfully overcome the ordeal in the presence of Village Elders!

The play also poses some very relevant questions regarding the institution of marriage as it exists in India. We are introduced to Appanna who has brought home a wife but continues to visit a harlot. He leaves home after lunch everyday and returns only for lunch the next day. The two are psychologically and physically mismatched. Appanna, with his regular visits to concubines finds his inexperienced new wife uninteresting and leaves her everyday to herself locked in the house alone. Rani is totally ignorant about sex and so the only bond that exists between newlyweds is absent in the case of Rani and Appanna. The absence of this bond renders the marriage meaningless and Rani is reduced to the status of a housemaid who must cook for her husband and feed him every afternoon. The prince of whom she has dreamt, who was to bring her to his house turns into a demon.

There is no chance of return to freedom and she is inescapably trapped. She quakes to think of her fate in case of Appanna's death.

> Suppose something happens to my husband?" She ponders, "A little piece made him ill. Who knows...? No, no forgive me, God. This is evil. I was about to commit a crime." (NM 37)

Rani is the very image of an ideal Indian woman - demure, unquestioning, and uncomplaining. When Naga orders her not to ask questions, she obeys him until she gets pregnant. Only when she is to become a mother she realizes the grave injustice of the entire situation-

> I was stupid ignorant girl when you brought me here and now I am going to become a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or a sparrow. Why don't you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like a chameleon from day to night? Even it I understood a little, a tiny bit - I could bear it. But now - sometimes I feel my head is going to burst. (NM 51)

It is also clear that Rani is acceptable to her husband only as goddess. She is to him a whore, a goddess, or nobody, to be kept under lock and key. The ordinary woman with normal desires i.e. Rani as

she is-is rejected by him. Even the village elders refuge to take her seriously until they get convinced that she is an *Avatara* – Goddess incarnate.

The play deals with male female sexuality, too. Naga employs the myth of life to educate Rani about sex. Sleep (nindra), food (ahara), and copulation (maithuna) are common to man and animal. Naga as the phallic symbol performs as per his nature or *Swadharma* and initiates her into sex. He comes disguised as her husband but he cannot change what he is. This is artistically described by Karnad:

> Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows – even the geese! The female begins to smell like wet earth. And stung by her smell, the King Cobra starts searching for his queen. The tiger bellows for his mate. When the flame-of-forest blossoms into a fountain of red and the earth cracks open at the touch of the aerial roots of the banyan, it moves in the hollow of the cotton-wood, in the flow of the estuary, the dark netherworlds, within everything that sprouts, grows, stretches, creaks and blooms–everywhere, those who come together, cling, fall apart lazily ! It is there and there and there, everywhere. (NM 45)

Gradually, Rani grows and matures. By employing his erotic art, Naga cures her of frigidity and she starts enjoying erotic pleasures. Her ecstatic heart feels that her house is redolent of the blossoming night queen before her lover arrives.

> How it welcomes him! God how it takes me
> set each fiber in me on fire! (NM - 49)

In fact, every night she anxiously waits for Naga to arrive and wants the night to last forever. His intense and sincere love satisfies her and she finds her absolute in him. When she discovers that she is pregnant, which is a definite evidence to prove that Naga is not an illusion but a reality, she attains a state of heavenly bliss.

The passage recalls the creation myth of Uranus and Gaea, and of Heaven and Earth coming together: of the first male and female, Purusha and Prakriti, Yang and Yin. It is this law of life that Rani is ignorant of. The above passage is replete with images of sexual intercourse reaching orgasmic climax to the lazy falling apart.

In the sub-plot, Kurudava's son deserts his mother to gratify his sensual desires and goes in search of a girl who becomes the rival of his mother and like the serpent lover arrives from some other world. She might be a

> temptress from beyond? A 'Yaksha' woman
> -perhaps a snake woman? But not a human
> being. (NM 57)

In spite of all that has been said above regarding the necessity of having a reasonably liberal attitude towards such a case, our author gives the message that none of the three persons involved in a triangle of love can be happy. As has been discussed above, Appanna and Rani have reasons to be upset. The lover snake is also upset to find that his lady-love is in the arms of somebody else -

> Rani! My queen! The fragrance of my nights! The blossom of my dreams! In another man's arms? In another man's bed? (NM 61)

Well, we are the products of Indian ethos and would not accept an un-Indian situation in any case. Luckily, the Naga accepts the situation and withdraws from the contention.

Yayati

To understand the myth of Yayati more perfectly, it is very important to study the legends of Devyani, his wife. The story of the love adventures of Devyani, the daughter of a Brahman Priest named Sukra, represents a new phase in both human character and Hindu history. She is a self-willed and vindictive girl, who prides herself upon being the daughter of a Brahman priest, and occasionally meets with some mortifying rebuffs, for which she seeks to gain a pitiful revenge. The father of the morose young damsel is a fair type of the Brahman priest of both ancient and modern times, who occasionally keep a village or tribe in strict subordination, by preying upon their

superstitious fears, and arrogating to themselves the power of bringing rain form heaven or curing diseases, or securing victory in battle.

The period in which the events seem to have transpired may be easily inferred from the surrounding circumstances. The story contains no satisfactory traces of the Vedic age, and evidently belongs to an early period in the Brahmanic age; in as much as the interest turns first upon the Brahmanical rule that a pupil prohibited from marrying the daughter of his preceptor; and secondly, upon a primitive assertion of Brahmanical supremacy over a superstitious and barbarous tribe. There is one remarkable feature in the story, which is of some historical importance. It will be seen that Sukra, the father of Devyani, was not the priest and preceptor of a tribe of Aryans, or Devatas, but of a tribe of Daityas; and the Daityas were the dark - complexioned aborigines who are generally represented as the enemies of the Aryans. From this circumstance, it may be inferred that the Brahmans were not originally a tribe or a nationality, but a professional class of priests who were ready to officiate for one race as for another, for the Turanian aborigine of the country as well as for the Aryan invaders. The same circumstance also throws some light upon the means by which the Brahman missionaries, who made their way into the territories of the aborigines, established their ascendancy over the rude and barbarous tribes who appear in the Rig-Veda as the enemies of the Aryans.

Yayati is based on a tale found in the *Mahabharata*. Here is an extremely condensed form of the story of Yayati as found in the original.

Yayati's story begins with his wife, Devayani, the beautiful daughter of Sukracharya, the preceptor of the Asuras (*Demons*). Before her marriage, Devayani was insulted, slapped, and thrown into a (waterless) well by Sharmistha, the daughter of the king of Asuras. Yayati, who happened to pass by, had rescued Devayani by holding her right hand and pulling her out of the well. Devayani had then asked Yayati to marry him. However, the prevailing custom of the day forbade a Kshatriya to marry a Brahmin girl (this was called the *Pratiloma* marriage); Yayati refused, stating the Pratiloma rule as the obstacle for their marriage.

Seething with rage, Devayani complained to her father about Sharmistha. Sukra, who loved his only daughter dearly, told the king that he would leave the kingdom if his daughter were not appeased.

Devayani set her condition for revenge. Sharmistha had to be her *Dasi* (handmaid) and serve her in the house she would occupy after her marriage. Sharmistha agreed in order to save her father's honour. Yayati later married Devayani after Sukra agreed to make an exception to the Pratiloma rule.

In the meantime, Sharmistha was attracted to Yayati and asked him to marry her. A bewitching woman, Yayati found it hard to resist. He married her without Devyani's knowledge. Before long, Devayani discovered the secret and complained bitterly to her father. A furious Sukracharya cursed him with old age. This is the crucial juncture of Yayati's story. An extremely sensual king, Yayati believed in enjoying all pleasures that life affords a king. In addition, this highly apt curse left him distraught. When he later mollified Sukra, the sage

told him that if anybody were willing to exchange his old age, his youth would continue as before. Yayati approached each of his sons and asked of them this barter. None except Puru agreed. When a delighted Yayati embraced Puru, the transfer was complete.

Puru became a ripe old man in the prime of his youth while Yayati regained his youth.

Yayati pursued pleasure with a renewed zest. The original *Mahabharata* tells us that the more he indulged, the thirstier he grew. In his words, (crudely translated) told to Puru, Dear son, sensual desire is never quenched by indulgence any more than fire is by pouring ghee in it. I had so far heard, and read about this. Now, I have realized it: no object of desire-corn, gold, cattle, and women-nothing can ever satisfy the desire of man. We can reach peace only by a mental poise that goes beyond likes and dislikes. This is the state of Brahman. Take back your youth and rule the kingdom wisely and well. Yayati then retired to the forest to perform penance. In due course, he attained the perfect state of Brahman.

Here the story of Yayati and Devyani virtually ends. Devyani declared that she would live no longer with the Raja, and carried her complaint to her father Sukra, who there upon pronounced a curse of old age upon Yayati. The curse is said to have taken effect, but Sukra offered to remove it by transferring it to any one of Yayati's sons, who would agree to accept the infliction. Yadu, his eldest son by Devyani, refused and was cursed that his posterity should never enjoy dominion and he ultimately became the ancestor of the Yadawas, or cowherds. Then all the other sons of the Raja refused, and were cursed in like

manner, excepting the youngest son by Sarmishtha, who was named Puru, and who agreed to bear the burden of his father's old age for a period of a thousand years and who ultimately become the ancestor of the Pandava's and the Kauravas.

The legend of the marriage of Devyani and Yayati seems to be cumbered with some mythical detail for ennobling the tribe of Yadavas, to which Krishna belonged, by representing them to have been descended from one of the ancient Rajas of Bharata and the daughter of a Brahman. In the genealogical lists, Yayati appears as the great grandfather of Raja Bharata.

Karnad's *Yayati*

Karnad's first play *Yayati* was published in 1961. It has not been translated into English. The play received the Mysore State Award in 1962. *Yayati* and *Tale-Danda* (Raktkalyan) have been translated into Hindi by S. R. Narayan and Rajpal Bajaj respectively. Karnad's *Yayati* re-tells the age-old story of the king who in his longing for eternal youth does not hesitate to usurp the youth and vitality of his son, Karnad invests new meaning and significance for contemporary life and reality by exploring the king's motivations. In the *Mahabharata*, Yayati understands the nature of desire itself and realizes that fulfillment neither diminishes nor eliminates desire. In the drama, Karnad makes Yayati confront the horrifying consequences of not being able to relinquish desire; and through the other characters, he highlights the issues of class/caste and gender coiled within a web of desire.

The play was an unexpected outcome of the intense emotional turmoil Karnad experienced while preparing for his trip to England for further studies. He was the first boy from his traditional family to go abroad for higher studies. The uncertainty of his future course of action and the struggle ahead made him aware of his responsibility. To escape from his stressful situation he began writing a play retelling a myth from the *Mahabharata*. The play that reflects his mental condition at that time is a self-conscious existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility.

In the Puranic lore, as it has been discussed in detail earlier, Yayati marries Devayani, the daughter of the sage Sukracharya, and takes Sharmistha, an Asura girl, as his wife, as required under certain niceties of dharma. His marriage to Sharmistha infuriates Devayani who in her anger and jealousy goads her father to bring a curse of senility and decrepitude upon Yayati. Yayati, who was cursed to old age for his moral transgression, whishes to exchange old age for money, land and even a part of his kingdom. None including his three elder sons accepts the offer, when Puru his youngest son with a great sense of filial obligation and respect for his father offers his youth for his old age and takes the curse on him. Puru has just returned home with newly wedded wife Chitralekha (an invention of the dramatist) and the nuptial bed is being prepared for them. The same bed is now used for Yayati to celebrate his wedding night with Sharmistha, his second wife, a lowborn girl, whom he had accepted under some niceties of dharma. Devayani, his first wife, jealous and furious seeing her husband with co-wife had brought the curse of old age on him. However, Puru's great sacrifice brings disastrous results. Puru's newly

married wife, Chitralekha, who wants to bear a child, is unable to bear her husband's old age. She wishes to offer herself to Yayati but, then, commits suicide out of shame. Yayati is horrified to see the disastrous results of his action. He finally takes back the curse from his son in a moment of remorse.

Karnad's Yayati is similarly stricken with an overwhelming desire for indulgence. However, because Karnad decides that he is an Existential king, he alters Yayati's character. Not content, he casts Puru in a similar mold: the eternal conflict-torn drama protagonist who in this play, vacillates between the desire to reclaim his youth and fulfilling his duty as a son. In Karnad's Yayati, the importance is skewed heavily in favour of Puru-not Yayati-which is a perversion of the original. In the original, Puru's role begins with accepting his father's old age with respectful dignity, and ends with returning it. Puru never thinks twice, he does not crib, and most important, is not in the throes of dilemma whether he made the right choice.

However, Karnad's Puru is despondent that about his loss of youth. He is as said earlier, in the throes of a dilemma, which desperately needs an outlet. He does vent in a few monologues, and asides. However, this poses a problem because in the original, there is limited emphasis on Puru's role and/or character. The playwright therefore needs to strengthen, enhance, and add more meat to Puru so that his presence can be "felt." In other words, Karnad's Puru needs crutches to make himself felt. Lo! A fine woman, Chitralekha, materializes as Puru's wife-a character absent in the original. One can argue that other dramatists did extend their poetic licenses: the ghost

in Hamlet and Julius Caesar. However, the important distinction is that these plays can be read /enacted even without the supernatural element with any difference in the impact on the reader/audience. Take away Chitralekha from Yayati and it falls flat. Worse, Chitralekha commits suicide in the play when she learns that Puru has traded his youth for old age. Karnad also conveniently hides Yayati's confession that indulgence does not lead to peace and happiness. With good reason, Karnad's hero is Puru, not Yayati. It however, exposes Karnad's shallowness.

Karnad's Yayati comes across as merely a pleasure-monger while in the original; his character is symbolic of a higher ideal, that of striving for truth, and eternal happiness. Yayati's long span of sensual indulgence is a symbol that indicates the futility of chasing happiness in things that have a definite end. Indulgence only increases thirst it does not quench it. Each climax of happiness ends with sorrow that it is over so soon, followed by a craving to renew, to repeat the pleasure once more. External causes of happiness never create real joy. Joy is an internal state of consciousness that determines how we perceive and experience the world. Yayati's disillusionment is complete only with saturation. He has had his fill but remains unfulfilled which is what plods him to seek a non-cyclical happiness.

In the original, neither Yayati nor his son suffers from any kind of confusion or existentialist disease. They are aware of their motivations, their choices, and have great conviction. They feel no guilt or remorse. Puru considers it his duty towards his father, adhering firmly to the dictum of *pitru devo bhava* (father is god).

Yayati comes across as straightforward when he expresses his desire to enjoy sensual pleasure; his strength of character is equally on for display when he speaks with conviction that he has had enough of that.

Drunk with Sartre and other negative philosophers, Karnad hideously caricatured what really is one fine tale. His crime in my perspective is that he chose to reprobate interpret what is a straightforward story. I would have had no problems if he had written the play on the same theme but with a similar, maybe contemporary, story and titled it Yayati. That could be taken as a product of his imagination and scrutinized for its worth. Then, critics would yell that he had stolen from the *Mahabharata*. The better way then is to proclaim that it indeed is from the *Mahabharata*, only his *exploration of Yayati /Puru's inner conflict.*

Influenced by existentialist drama, his first play Yayati (1961) explores the complexities of responsibility and expectations within the Indian family. Drawing on a myth from the *Mahabharata*, Karnad expressed in it a personal dilemma between his family's demands and his own wish for freedom.

It should be remembered that Yayati, before asking Puru, approached his other three sons who all refused. The expectation part falls flat. Yayati's was a request, not a command, which is why his other three sons were completely free to refuse. Moreover, the remark about his family's demands and his own wish for freedom can by no stretch of imagination be applied to the story of Yayati. Puru, like his

elder brothers was completely free to refuse Yayati's request. His freely chose to take on his father's old age.

The audience in the West at which Karnad aimed this missile is largely ignorant of the humungous Indian mythology and its various subtleties. For a man like Karnad, well versed in English literature and western philosophy, tailoring Yayati in an existential garb has proved rewarding. He gave them what they understood-and could understand.

In *Yayati* Karnad takes liberty with the original myth and invents some new relationships to make it acceptable to modern sensibility. In Karnad's play, Yayati has already married Devayani, and marries Sharmistha during the action of the play. Karnad invents two characters - Puru's wife Chitralekha and confidant Swarnalata. In Karnad's play, the whole action takes place in one night. Puru is shown coming home after his marriage and the bed is being prepared for the newly wedded couple. The same bed is used for Yayati to solemnize Sarmishtha. The curse falls and Puru loses his youth and suddenly grows old. Chitralekha, who wants to bear a child, is disillusioned. She decides to offer herself to Yayati and then she commits suicide. This shakes Yayati and act as a revelation. In a moment of genuine remorse, he takes back the curse from his son.

The playwright has given this traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today. The symbolic theme of Yayati's attachment to life and its pleasures as also his final renunciation is retained. The play reveals the existentialist view that each man is what he chooses to be or make himself. Karnad places individual at the centre of his picture of the world.

> The father is left to face the consequences of shirking responsibility for his own actions.[9]

Karnad reinterprets an ancient Indian myth from the Puranic past to make a statement in the form and structure he found in the Western playwrights. Karnad's originality lies in working out the motivations behind Yayati's ultimate choice. In the *Mahabharata*, Yayati recognized the nature of desire itself and realized that fulfillment does not diminish or finish desire. In Karnad's play, however, Yayati recognizes the horror of his own life and assumes his moral responsibility after a series of symbolic encounters.

Karnad's interpretation of the familiar old myth on the change of ages between father and son seems to have baffled and even angered many of the conventional critics. However, to others, who are trying to root their contemporary concerns in old myths, Karnad's unheroic hero Puru is a challenging experience. The playwright places the individual person at the centre of his picture of the world and shows that each man is what he chooses to be or makes himself. In his psychological exploration, Karnad shows an impressive insight and introduces concepts, which greatly extend the area of moral self-knowledge and self-awareness. It simply means that Karnad has indeed read wisely Sartre, Camus and others. The playwright himself says in an interview:

> I wanted to tell people I had read Sartre, Camus and others.[10]

Yayati was a big success on the stage, but Karnad's success was not without some surprise for him. He was deeply impressed by poets like Auden and Eliot and wanted to be a successful poet, but all of a sudden be became a playwright. Secondly, the play was not about contemporary life but about an ancient Indian myth from the *Mahabharata.* And finally, English was the language of his intellectual make up and he wanted to write in English, but, when it came to expressing himself, he found himself writing in Kannada, his mother tongue. Dante, the great Italian poet and critic, maintains that mother tongue could be the best vehicle for creative expressions. Karnad seems to follow the footprints of the great masters of literary art in writing all his plays in Kannada, his mother tongue.

It should also be noted that Karnad was not the first to use the myth of Yayati for his writing purpose. Rabindranath Tagore wrote his famous play *Kacha and Devyani* on this theme V. S. Khandekar, the eminent Marathi novelist, also used the Yayati myth in his novel *Yayati.* Published in 1959, the novel received several awards such as State Government Award, the Sahitya Akademi Award (1960) and the Jnanpith Award (1964). In his novel, Khandekar made Yayati a representative of modern common man who in spite of receiving much happiness in life remains restless and discontented. The mythical Yayati ran after sensual pleasures but Khandekar's Yayati runs after all kinds of materialistic pleasures - Cars, bungalows, fat bank accounts, beautiful clothes, dance, music etc. Though the tale is taken from the Puranas, Khandekar's Yayati is a modern man. The modern man mistakes momentary animal pleasure for eternal happiness and ponders over all the time how to get it. Karnad too, interprets the

ancient theme in modern context. Like Yayati of the *Mahabharata,* the common man of today is groping in the darkness of material and sensual pleasures. He finds himself in a world in which the old spiritual values have been entirely swept away and new spiritual ones are yet to be discovered. Blind pursuit of pleasure has become the 'Sumum bonum', the supreme religion in his life.

Karnad makes a few dramatic changes in this story but retains Yayati's love for life and his final renunciation. In the mythical story, Yayati realizes that fulfillment of a desire does not finish the desire itself. Happiness is a state of consciousness that already exists within us, but it is often covered up by all kinds of distractions. Just as a beautiful sunrise might be hidden behind clouds, so, too, our inner happiness is hidden behind our everyday concerns. In Karnad's play, however, Yayati recognizes the horror of his life and owns moral responsibility after his encounter with reality. Moreover, the liaison between Yayati and Devayani and the birth story of Puru remain the major dramatic deviation from the original myth.

It was music critic P. G. Burde, who first approached Shanta Gokhale with the proposal to direct Yayati for the ongoing Girish Karnad Natakotsav. The weeklong multi-lingual Natakotsav has been organized as a tribute to the Jnanpith award-winning playwright. Interestingly, Yayati is the first play written by Karnad when he was a 21 year old and was about to leave for England on the Rhodes scholarship, in 1962. To quote Karnad from one of his essays ...*going abroad was a much rarer experience in those days. Besides, I was the first member of a large close-knit family ever to go abroad. I wrote*

Yayati while preparing for the trip. The myth helped me to articulate my resentment at all those who seemed to demand sacrifice of my future.

Writer-journalist Shanta Gokhale was more attracted to Yayati, a relatively less-exploited script (as against *Tughlaq* or *Naga-Mandala*), for two reasons. First, the crucial place it occupies in playwright Karnad's life. Second, the status it enjoys in the Kannada literary circles. Yayati is hailed as the first modern play in the history of Kannada theatre. *I liked the way Karnad has re-told and altered a myth to elaborate on his predicament. I thought it was worth doing the play since every character offered a challenge,* she says.

While Indian mythology forms the backbone of the play, Karnad's modifications lend a special touch to the known story. The action takes place on a day in King Yayati's life. His son Puru (Paresh Mokashi) is expected to arrive at the palace. Queen Devyani (Manisha Korde) has asked two maids Swarnalata (Rajashree Tope) and Sharmishtha (Loveleen Mishra) to deck up his chamber. A quarrel ensues between the duo and leads to the unraveling of the old friendship of Devyani and Sharmistha. These developments culminate in the union of Sharmistha and Yayati. Soon the King is cursed to an untimely old age. Of course, there is a counter curse that he will become young if he finds somebody to take away the old age. Yayati does not find anyone willing to make this exchange. Toward the end, son Puru accepts the exchange and the curse. As the son becomes older than his father does, a complex relationship develops. The king is left to face the consequences of shirking responsibility. *Karnad has*

deftly explored various strands of the father-son relationship. Despite the mythological dramatic structure, I can easily relate to the Yayati-Puru entanglement. The playwright, who is questioning his past, has explored his insecurities through a classical plot, says Kulkarni.

For actress Loveleen Mishra, the English production of Yayati presents many challenges. First, the use of the English language to articulate an Indian classic is not easy. Then, the artistes come from varied theatre backgrounds and schools. Last, all the artistes are full-time professionals in either television or commercial theatre.

Tughlaq

Girish Karnad uses mythical and historical episodes to highlight problems, which confronts the modern India at various levels. In his first play *Yayati*, which is a story borrowed from the *Bhagavata*, he discusses the theme of responsibility. In *Tughlaq*, which came three years later, he has taken a chapter from the Muslim period of history and drawn striking parallels, between India then and India now.

Tughlaq is an abiding contribution to modern Indian English drama. It has been remarkably successful on the stage due to its appeal to audience and its dramatic excellence. The play deals with the life and turbulent reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq who ruled over India for about twenty-six years from November - December 1324 to 1351. For the sake of dramatic precision and brevity, Karnad spans only five years from 1327 to 1332. The action begins in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad.

To understand *Tughlaq* we must know some historical details of his reign.

The House of Tughlaq was the fifth Sultanate of Delhi. The founder was Ghazi Malik Tughlaq (1320 - 25). By dainty of merit, he rose to be the Governor of the Punjab under Ala-ud-din Khilji. The last of the Khiljis was succeeded by the slave, Khusru Khan, an immoral and faithless as a Muslim. With the war cry *Islam in danger* Ghazi Malik Tughlaq and his son, Malik Jauna, rallied a party of Turkish chief, defeated Khusru, and executed him. He accepted the crown offered to him by the noble and began his reign in 1320 with the title of Ghiyas-ud-din. He combined the rare qualities of a General and for-sighted statesman. He re-established peace and order in the kingdom and expanded it. However, he and his second son died in an accident, which was said to have been engineered by Malik Jauna, who after a State mourning, proclaimed himself, Sultan with the simple style of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq.

Muhammad Tughlaq was an ambitious ruler and he had a fancy for new policies or innovations both in foreign and domestic affairs. In foreign affairs, he desired to conquer not only the entire Indian subcontinent including its hilly regions in the north but also Characin outside its boundary. In domestic policy, he tried certain innovations in different fields of administration, which, though attempted with best intentions, affected adversely the fortuned of his empire.

One of the earliest measures of Muhammad Tughlaq concerned revenue administration. He attempted to keep the records of income

and expenditure of all the provinces with a view to introducing a uniform standard of land revenue throughout his empire. However, it seems that nothing came out of this scheme and it was abandoned. Besides, Muhammad Tughlaq established a separate department of agriculture and appointed a minister to look after it. He attempted state farming under the care of this department and a large tract of land, nearly sixty square miles in area, was acquired for this purpose. Cultivation was carried on this tract of land on an experimental basis for three years and then, when no fruitful result came out of it, the scheme was abandoned. However, the most serious schemes of reforms of Muhammad Tughlaq were taxation in the Doab, transfer of the capital to Daulatabad and introduction of token currency, which have been described by some writers as 'mad schemes' of Muhammad Tughlaq.

Karnad seems to be indebted to contemporary historians Zia-ud-Din Barani's *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi*, Ibn Bututah's *Travels*, Badoni's Tarikh-*I-Mubarak Shahi* and Al-Marshi's. *The Maslikal-Absar.* To large extent, Karnad has been faithful to recorded history. Only for the purposes of dramatic effect has he telescoped certain events in order to fit the two time sequences in the play - 1327 in Delhi and 1332 at Daulatabad. This makes chronology of the play to fall into two natural parts - the ambitious planning at Delhi and the fiasco in the south. Karnad closely follows the traditional sources, which present Tughlaq as combination of opposites - a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and godless. Tughlaq, in both history and Karnad's Tughlaq is a great scholar, idealist and visionary. He stands for administrative reforms, for implementing the policy of Hindu-

Muslim amity, recognition of merit, irrespective of Caste and creed; reorganization of administrative machinery and taxation structure; establishment of egalitarian society in which all shall enjoy justice, equality and fundamental human rights. A rationalist and philosopher, Tughlaq radically deviates from the religious tenets in matter of politics and administration. This departure from the holy tenets enrages the orthodox people and they condemn, oppose and rebel against Tughlaq. They think him a non-believer in Islam because he abolishes the jiziya tax, treats Hindus and Muslims equally. The Sultan was misunderstood throughout his reign. His intellectual capacity and love of philosophy were thought as hostility to Islam. His friendship with Yogies and Jains and his participation in the Hindu festivals were seen as his being Hinduized. His efforts to break the power of Ulemas and Sufies were thought anti-Islamic. His ambition to establish political contact with the world outside India was thought as madness. The old political leadership called him tyrant. The Ulemas said that war against him was lawful.

An idealistic, humanist and visionary Tughlaq was a shrewd politician who is guilty of parricide and fratricide. He killed his father at prayer time. Karnad, a great and gifted dramatist, uses prayer as a leitmotiv in Tughlaq, which has not been so employed in history. It creates a vivid dramatic effect. U. R. Anantha Murthy writes:

> Although the theme of the play is from history there are many plays in Kannada-Karnad's treatment of theme is not historical. Take for instance, the use Karnad makes of

> the leitmotiv of the 'prayer', in the scene where the Muslims chieftains along with Sheikh Shams -ud-Din, a pacifist priest, conspire to murder Tughlaq at prayer. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer, which is most dear to Tughlaq, is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. The whole episode is ironic.[11]

In 1326-27, Tughlaq decided upon a plan to make Devagiri the second administrative capital of his empire which was renamed Daulatabad. Different reasons have been given for this transfer. According to Ibn Batuta and Isami, the citizens of Delhi used to write letters containing abuses and scandals to the Sultan. Therefore the Sultan decided to lay Delhi waste in order to punish them. Sir Woolseley Haig has accepted the version of Ibn Batuta. Professor Habibullah has descried that the motive of the Sultan was to provide incentive to Muslim culture in the South. Besides, the prosperity of the South and administrative convenience were also his motives. Dr. Mahdi Hussain has expressed the same view. According to Dr. A. L. Srivastava, the desire of safeguarding the capital from Mongol invasions from the north-west, the necessity of consolidating the empire in the South and the temptation to utilize the rich resources of the South were primary considerations for the transfer of the capital. He was convinced that the Deccan kingdom could be controlled only

from a capital near them. The Amira and Sayyids were against the Sultan and by transferring the capital to Daultabad, a Hindu dominated town, he wanted to weaken their power. The reasons, which Karnad's Tughlaq gives for changing the capital, are based on historical evidence. He explains in the first scene:

> My empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital, which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well know, its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital, I will symbolise the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom.[12]

The Ulemas and the Sufis refused to co-operate. The Sultan was adamant. He forced all under threat of penalty. All historians have called this a mass exodus. Barani, the court historian records that Delhi was completely evacuated, *not a cat or a dog was left.* According to contemporary historians, the entire population of Delhi was ordered to leave it and it was laid waste. Ibn Batuta wrote:

> A search was made and a blind man and a cripple were found. The cripple was put to death while the blind man was dragged to Daulatabad where only his one leg reached.[13]

Isami also has written: *Muhammad Tughlaq ordered that the city (Delhi) should be set on fire and all the populace should be turned out of it.* Several modern historians do not accept this view. According to Dr. K. A. Nizami, the entire population of Delhi was not asked to leave. Only the upper classes, consisting of nobles, Ulema, Sheikhs and the elite of Delhi were shifted to Daulatabad. But Dr. R. C. Majumdar, Dr. A. L. Srivastava and Dr. Ishwari Prasad have expressed the view that there is no doubt in the fact that the Sultan had ordered all citizens of Delhi to vacate it. Karnad's Tughlaq says,

> Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately, every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I can see that now. They will only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.[14]

However, this seems an exaggeration because the Turkish historian, Ibn Batuta, declares that when he visited Delhi in 1334, it was as usual.

The Sultan arranged all possible measures for the comfort of the people during their journey from Delhi to Daulatabad. Shady trees were planted all along the route; free food and drinking oater were supplied to the people after every three kilometers of journey, all were provided means of transport, all were compensated for the loss, which

they incurred in leaving their assets at Delhi, and all were provided free residence and food at Daulatabad. Yet, there is no doubt that with all these comforts, the forty days' journey from Delhi to Daulatabad was an extremely tormenting experience for the people of Delhi. The march involved unspeakable sufferings to the unfortunate migrants. The forced exodus from Delhi to Daulatabad inflicted untold suffering, penury, hunger and starvation on men, women, children, young and old alike. Relief measures provided by Tughlaq were misappropriated by corrupt officers. The people, who had suffered hunger, starvation and other indignities for long, were rebellious and Tughlaq inflicted heavy punishment upon them. K. A. Nizami, a modern historian states in his famous book *Comprehensive History of India* - p. 528:

> The Sultan began to punish both the guilty and the innocent on mere suspicion in the hope that bloodshed on a large scale would terrorize his officers and make them obedient; on the other hand, his officers, knowing his military weakness, preferred rebellion to punishment without trial.[15]

The experiment proved a dismal failure and after seven years, Delhi was restored as the capital. This scheme of Sultan failed completely. It failed due to various reasons. The Sultan committed a blunder when he asked the people or even the elite of Delhi to go to Daulatabad *en masse*. He ought to have shifted only his court and the rest would have followed themselves. The common people were

neither prepared to shift themselves to an unknown distant place nor was there any necessity of it. Besides, Daulatabad was a distant city from the north-west frontier of the empire. It was difficult to resist invasions of the Mongols from there. Moreover, the consolidated north India provided better security to the empire as compared to the newly conquered South. Thus, the Sultan made a wrong choice of the place and adopted wrong methods to transfer his capital. Sultan's rash and reckless act of transferring the capital to Daulatabad made him very unpopular and he lost his people's sympathy.

Another important administrative measure, which Tughlaq implemented, was the introduction of Token currency, which was probably issued in 1330. A growing shortage of silver had led to the brain wave. According to Barani, the Sultan introduced token currency because the treasury was empty, while he needed money to fulfill his schemes of conquest. The Sultan had in mind the paper currency of China. His object was good. He issued the bronze coin, in place of the silver coin and demanded its acceptance as a token coin equivalent to silver tanka. But the new coins were immediately and successfully forged. According to Barani,

> the house of every Hindu became a mint.[16]

However, there is no reason to believe that the Muslims resisted the temptation. Rather, whosoever could afford to imitate the coins did it and the market was flooded with spurious coins. The farmers paid their revenue in token currency, the people paid their taxes in it and the traders too desired to give token currency while each of them tried to hoard gold and silver coins in his house. The result was that the

gold and silver coins disappeared from circulation and the practically valueless copper tokens flooded the economy. Trade almost came to a standstill. The Sultan says,

> Only one industry flourished in my Kingdom, only one and that's of making counterfeit copper coins. Every Hindu home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me to close my eyes...[17]

The token currency was kept in the market only for three or four years. The Sultan had the courage to acknowledge his failure and the honesty to give good silver coin in exchange for the depreciated token. The prestige of the treasury was maintained, but with great personal loss to Tughlaq. The Sultan's experiment miserably failed as the minting of counterfeit coins became very common and consequently the national economy was shattered. Tughlaq's plans were frustrated by the unimaginativeness and non-co operation of his officers and subjects.

Tughlaq's policy of taxation was disliked by everyone and especially by the farmers in the Lower Doab, which had the famine. He had advanced ideas regarding land improvement, education, medical relief and other welfare measures. But his aims were not realized in practice. Rebellions broke out. Amir II in Scene V of Karnad's *Tughlaq* scoffs at the Sultan's taxation policy:

> Look at what's happening in Delhi. Just look at it. You can't take a step without paying

> some tax or another. There's ever tax on gambling. How are we to live? You can't even cheat without having to pay tax for it.[18]

In 1353, Sayad Ahson, the trusted Governor of Malbar rebelled. This started a series of provincial revolts, which dismembered the empire. In 1338, Bengal became independent. In 1340 Ain - ul - Mulk, the governor of Avadh rebelled. In 1342, Sind revolted and in 1343, Vijayanagar broke away. The Amirs of Daulatabad revolted and in 1347, the whole of Deccan including Daulatabad broke away from the Delhi Empire and Hasan Gangu Bahmani proclaimed himself as Bahman Shah. The rebellion of Taghi in Sind in 1351 called the attention of the Sultan there. Pursuing the rebel, Muhammad died at Thatta. A later historian said, *The King was freed from his people and his people from the King.*

No ruler in our medieval history has aroused so much interest and controversy as that of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. He inherited a vast kingdom, which embraced not only the entire northern India but also the Dakhin. But his achievements were negative. Therefore, when he died, the Sultanate of Delhi was reduced in size. The Dakhin was almost lost. Sindh was almost slipping away from his hand when he breathed his last. Some of the modern historians opine that Muhammad was not responsible for his failure, as a ruler he failed because circumstances were not in his favour. His failure was due to his characteristic limitations and to some odd decisions. He had everything-intellect, power, and a kind heart too, but what he lacked was common sense and practical wisdom.

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