Karnad's Theatrical Exploration of Historiography in His Representation of Four Rulers of Southern India

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Abstract

The article proposes to make a brief survey of four plays by Girish Karnad, *Tughlaq*, *Talé-Daṇḍa*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* and *Crossing to Talikota*, in order to receive an idea about Karnad's use of his historiographical sources for these plays. The paper shall also take a look at Karnad's re-presentation of the remarkable rulers who are the protagonists in these plays.

Keywords: Deccan, Bijjala, Basavanna, Tughlaq, Rama Raya, Tipu Sultan.

The intriguing historiography of India has sufficient potential to provide material for theatrical re-presentations which invite audiences to re-visit known sites of history on a guided tour with fresh information / perspectives, which facilitate other perspectives of the vista of the site. Always alert to contemporary events, Girish Karnad (1938-2019) had the instinctive aptitude to discern this kind of theatrical relevance of certain historical events in the Indian subcontinent which he adopted for some of his very successful plays—*Tughlaq* (Kannada, 1964; English, 1972), *Talé-Daṇḍa* (Kannada, 1990; English, 1993), *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (English, 1996; Kannada *Tipu Sultan Kanda Kanasu*, 2000) and *Crossing to Talikota* (English, 2019; Kannada *Rakshasa-Tangadi*, 2018). A brief look at these plays[1], which deal with different crucial time frames in Indian history due to the various ramifications associated with them, shall be the focus of this article which attempts to make a brief survey of the personal and public agenda of four remarkable rulers in southern India. Therefore, the order of the plays according to the time-line, that is, *Talé-Daṇḍa*, *Tughlaq*, *Crossing to Talikota* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, shall be more conducive for the present discussion about rulers like Bijjala, Tughlaq, Rama Raya and Tipu Sultan.

Certain commonalities among them may be discerned. Each play focuses on a very crucial time in the history of the Deccan, which has had tremendous impact upon the subsequent course of Indian history. The religio-political disturbances in Kalyan, the transfer of the capital of the Delhi Sultanate to Devagiri (Daulatabad), the overnight collapse of the

proverbially invincible Vijayanagara and Tipu's defeat and death in Seringapatam have their decisive positions in Indian history. Each one of the rulers involved in Karnad's semi-fictional re-presentation of historiography has arrived at the power he enjoyed via means which have not been smooth. Bijjala II revolted against the Western Chalukya Empire and established himself as the Kalachuri ruler in 1157. He shifted his capital to Kalyan in about 1162 after driving Taila III out of this Chalukya capital (Ramanujan 43-47; Wikipedia Bijjala II). Muhammad bin Tughlaq's father, Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, was the son of a Turkish slave and his mother was a Hindu. His original name was Ghazi Malik. In 1320 he launched a coup against the last Khilji ruler, Khusro Khan, killing him. Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq was allegedly murdered by his son Ulugh Khan who arranged for the collapse of a temporary wooden structure built on posts when the emperor was inside. Ulugh Khan ascended the throne as Muhammad bin Tughlaq, and ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1325 to 1351(Majumdar 306-318; Eaton *Persianate Age* 66-68). Rama Raya was the son-in-law of the powerful Vijayanagara ruler Krishnadeva Raya. Aliya (son-in-law) Rama Raya was the de facto ruler of the Vijayanagara (Karnataka) Empire from 1542 to 1565 during which period the young ruler, Sadasiva Raya was merely a puppet in his hands. However, he remained 'Aliya', and not the emperor, till his death, owing to complex political reasons (Eaton *Persianate Age* 164-167; Eaton *Social History* 78-104). Tipu Sultan's father, Hyder Ali, was a military officer in the service of Krishnaraya Wodeyar II, the King of Mysore. But, he had become the de facto ruler by1761. After a successful reign which also involved many victorious battles, Hyder Ali died in 1782. Tipu had to curb an attempt by one of his uncles to place Tipu's brother Abdul Karim on the throne, before he became his father's successor in the same year (Majumdar 677-680). However, all these men were able administrators whose governance aimed towards peace in their domain and prosperity for their subjects. The world of politics being exceptionally liquid in its equations also alerted these men that they were hard pressed to make their visions a reality. The razor's edge on which they treaded was a constant reminder of the mode of their ascendance to power. The incessant intersections of contemporary events, which made them vital players in the making of Indian history, can neither be marginalised nor brought to the centre. These form the tapestry against which these men must be assessed as rulers whose governance became determining issues with respect to the future of the subcontinent.

This brief survey shall make an attempt to delve into Karnad's special interest in the historiography of failure and defeat which he carefully selected for creating his plays. In an interview with Deepa Ganesh, Karnad admits, "I have always been obsessed with history. Both my father and I were voracious readers of history." (web) This avid interest was expanded to his research before and during the writing of each of these plays reached out to available sources, and took years to gather into the form of a theatrical re-presentation—which is also a re-assessment of historiography.

The first of these is unravelled in *Talé-Daṇḍa*, positioned during Bijjala II's reign in Kalyan. This play shows how Basavanna's Virasaiva movement is destroyed by shrewd political interests in capturing power. Termite-like, casteism eats into one's self which seeks acceptance in a higher order than that ordained by birth. The acceptance-seeking powerful man is fully aware of the impossibility of such an expectation, and yet cannot restrain himself from hankering after it, which is clear from Bijjala's utterance:

> BIJJALA: For ten generations my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight. Bribed generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so they could have the caste of Kshatriyas branded on their foreheads. And yet you ask the most innocent child in my Empire: what is Bijjala, son of Kalachurya Permadi, by caste? And the instant reply will be: a barber! (14)

For this reason Bijjala venerates Basavanna, the Virasaiva saint who initiated the Lingayat Movement in the twelfth century in the Carnatic region. The Lingayats do not believe in the caste system, treating all human beings as equals. This is why Karnad immediately recognized the similarities between the contemporary issues and the Virasaiva movement, about which he tells Deepa Ganesh, "When the Mandal agitation took place, we were yet again struck by issues of caste and class. This was exactly what had triggered the 11th century movement of the vachanakaras. A.K. Ramanujan's From this perspective Basavanna would naturally observe:

> BASAVANNA: Kingship is a calling. A source of living, yes, but also a duty and a service to humanity. It is not an inheritance, not a family gift but a right to be earned, to be justified by diligent application. (20)

Therefore, Basavanna's perspective of governance based on equality, although egalitarian, cannot match the traditional monarchical diplomacies and ruthless anarchy which always waits behind the screen to plunge upon the unsuspecting and weak, wreaking havoc out of the debris of which emerges a new power structure, which is usually more sinister in its panopticonic surveillance than the former. Bijjala has a fundamental problem: he wants to be treated as a Kshatriya (the ruling class) and yet cannot overcome his barber-background in behaviour and language. His lack of noble refinement gets expressed in outbursts when he finds matters becoming contrary to his desires:

> BIJJALA: But let me warn you, Basavanna, if you think I have ascended the throne merely to sit back and scratch my arse you are in for a surprise. After sixteen years, how little you know me! You and those *sharanas* of yours! Just because the city of Kalyan has fallen into your hands, you think you can twist my arms behind my back and push me around with impunity? I

> am Bijjala! Know that and be on your guard. If you insist on driving me to the limits of patience, I shall stamp all of you out like a cushinfull of bed-bugs! (49)

Bijjala's son, Sovideva's incapacity as a would-be ruler is overshadowed by his greed for power, which he actually cannot handle, and which in turn is exploited by those who have no duties and responsibilities towards statecraft, and yet have complete hold over him. In Scene Eleven, with Bijjala dethroned and Basavanna gone from Kalyan, the political arena is left open for Sovideva, who is powerfully manipulated by the couple of Brahmins, Damodara Bhatta and Manchanna Kramita. Manchanna wants the Sharanas to be curbed by violence; Damodara, shrewd opportunist that he is, advocates a circumspect and less violent method of restricting them. Manchanna is ambitious. He knows that the Brahmins can have an absolute control of the ruler. Political power is absolute, but the politically powerful can conveniently be manipulated by the socially superior Brahmins. In his explanation, to Damodara, of the significance of a coronation, can be discerned his shrewdness for which Damodara is no match:

> MANCHANNA: And what's a coronation, pray? The gross body is cleansed of its lowly birth and made worthy of receiving Vedic mantras and the Brahmin's salutations. The King partakes of the divine. Who dare judge the King? We are there to interpret the sacred texts. The King is there to implement out advice" (79).

Bijjala and Sovideva are shown as immersed in deceit and distrust, which are adequately exploited by the opportunists like the Brahmins, Damodara and Manchanna. Bijjala tries his best to trust Basava, his Chief Treasurer, who thrives upon faith and trust. Sovideva, humiliated publicly by his father, gradually seeks revenge upon Bijjala, which is encouraged by the pair of Brahmins, who see their power slipping away because of the rise of the Lingayat movement. Bijjala's support makes the Sharanas powerful—the no-caste movement gains momentum. It is impossible for the two sides (Bijjala, Basavanna and the Sharanas on one hand, and Sovideva and the Brahmins on the other) to be compatible. So, the inevitable happens. Anarchy ensues and Kalyan is set ablaze. A flourishing mercantile empire, gradually built by the efforts of the Lingayat *sharanas*, is completely destroyed. In *Talé-Daṇḍa*, Karnad brings forth from historiography the fundamental issue around which the play is constructed thematically—how religious opportunists machinate and manipulate the weak and unsuspecting for their personal aggrandisement which bulldozes the firm economic development of a kingdom, bringing inevitable disaster. The deep rooted and inevitable impact of a revolution is what is relevant for Karnad's own time, about which he says, "See, you train disciples for a revolution. They get trained and take over. It is a problem, and unstoppable. That is what attracted me when I wrote *Talé-Daṇḍa*. You see

disaster, but it has gone beyond your control... I love history, and I try to think like a contemporary." (Interview Deepa Ganesh)

While reading Ishwari Prasad's *A Short History of Muslim Rule in India* (1931), Karnad recognized the theatrical potential of Tughlaq's reign, particularly his personal contribution to his administration. This inspired further research in historical documents, their appropriation for theatrical presentation and assimilation in Karnad's own way, for a refracted artistic presentation on the proscenium stage. Karnad tells Deepa Ganesh in the same interview that "the eminent Kannada critic Kirtinath Kurtkoti says we hardly have historical plays. I was gripped by that observation." *Tughlaq* was the result of Karnad's response to Kurtkoti and his reading of Prasad. Karnad's Tughlaq had a personal existential crisis for which he used his power as a ruler over his subjects, causing distress for them in the attempt to provide them with greater democratic ease. U.R. Anantha Murthy, in his Introduction to the play's English version, succinctly observes that "the play has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughluq's character" (viii), adding further that "Karnad's treatment of the theme is not historical" (ix) since the play is "structured on [the] opposites: the ideal and the real" (*Tughlaq* ix) The deep fissures in his vision were cleverly discerned by the cunning opportunist Aziz, who used for his own advantage every administrative measure that Tughlaq initiated. By introducing the character of Aziz (and also Aazam) Karnad injected the potential for the externalization of a dynamic conflict inherent in Tughlaq's policies. The couple of policies Karnad has deliberately selected for his play, namely, the introduction of copper coins as currency and the transfer of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad in the Deccan, are the most popularly known of his many policies, possibly for the immensity of their disastrous failures.

The possibilities of the resultant corruption inherent in these policies have been concretely represented by Karnad by his introduction of Aziz, a Muslim dhobi (washerman), who had no inhibition about a sinister exploitation of the emperor's administrative reforms. Just as Tughlaq took risks, so did Aziz—their contrapuntal moves collide in the ultimate scene when the duo come face to face—Tughlaq stumbles upon his metaphorical 'Frankenstein'. Commenting on this, U.R. Anantha Murthy writes, "In the end Tughlaq and his kingdom are one in their chaos, and he knows it." (x)

Zia-ud-din Barani, whose *Tarik-i-Firoz Shahi* (1357) was an important source for Karnad's *Tughlaq*, wrote his account of eight rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, including Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Barani's account, narrated from a strictly Islamist perspective, belies his displeasure with Tughlaq's lenience towards the Hindu subjects. Karnad uses this perspective of the historiographer to set off his own representation of Tughlaq as a ruler whose vision of governance anticipated tolerance towards subjects who subscribed to other religious faiths, thus making Tughlaq utter in his first appearance in the play:

MUHAMMAD: May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace—not just peace but a more purposeful life. (3)

This singular nature in the Emperor's entire outlook drew Karnad towards him—a man aware of his private self as a puny mortal in constant consciousness of the enormity of the expectations within and without himself about which Tughlaq observes:

MUHAMMAD: I have only one life, one body, and my hopes, my people, my God are all fighting for it. (10)

This awareness calls for strategies to live up to the expectations of the stakeholders around him:

MUHAMMAD: No one can go far on his knees. I have a long way to go. I can't afford to crawl—I have to gallop. (20)

He envisions the historical significance of the purpose, strategies and outcome of his mode of governance:

MUHAMMAD: I have something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history, but I have to do it within this life. I've got to make them listen to me before I lose even that! (56)

Tughlaq's secular humanity was openly derided by his Islamic compeers and treated with uneasy suspicion by the Hindus. This subterranean flow in Barani's account is identified and exploited by Karnad, who includes Barani as a character in his play in order to juxtapose the historiographical representation of Tughlaq by a nobleman who enjoyed privileges in Tughlaq's court and yet remained harsh upon him as a staunch follower of Islam, with later research which revealed the breadth of Tughlaq's perspective which was incomprehensible to his contemporaries, both plebeians and patricians. Aparna Dharwadker takes note of this in her postcolonial critique of the play:

> As with Tughlaq's politics of humility, Karnad both presents and ironically undercuts the secular ideal. Despite Tughlaq's enlightened policies, the society within the play is not an enlightened one; and despite his egalitarianism, his relation with his subject remains that of oppressor and oppressed. Karnad shows that communities marked by political inequality and religious difference survive through a negative equilibrium. Anyone who disturbs this balance arouses suspicion and hatred instead of becoming a liberating force. (web)

The genesis of Tughlaq's inheritance of totalitarian power with all its ramifications in the political boiling pot of the Delhi Sultanate pointed towards his continuation along similar lines. However, historiographical narratives indicate his unique difference, even deviation,

in this matter. The resultant chaos which he could not rein in has been personified in Aziz—a fictional character Karnad has created to serve his theatrical purpose of effectively critiquing Tughlaq's measures, making *Tughlaq* relevant for all times.

Karnad's last play, *Crossing to Talikota*, published posthumously, has taken a very long time to acquire the form of a theatrical text. In the same interview with Deepa Ganesh, Karnad speaks about his focussing on the Vijayanagara Empire: "Between [the] 11th and 18th centuries—that is between the plays *Tale Danda* and *Tipu's Dreams*—there was a gap. That is where this episode of the Vijayanagara empire came in" (web). His preoccupation with writing a play on "the last days of the Vijayanagara Empire" (Das 211) took him to various historical sources, like Mir Rafi-uddin Ibrahim-i-Shirazi, Ramaji Tirumala Harikare, Krishna Kolhar Kulkarni, Robert Sewell and Richard Eaton (whom he mentions in the interview with Deepa Ganesh) till he settled down for Richard Eaton's historiographical account of Aliya Rama Raya, the man who was responsible for the catastrophic destruction of the Karnataka Empire, which was much more than a simple clash between a Hindu Empire and a confederation of its Muslim neighbours. The de facto ruler of Vijayanagara during 1542-1565, Rama Raya, was the son-in-law of the late king, Krishnadeva Raya, whose successor, Sadasiva Raya, was the titular king whom Rama Raya had kept under strict custody, to be allowed public appearance on rare occasions. All diplomatic liaisons were engineered by Rama Raya. His ancestral lineage went back to the Chalukyas of Kalyan (those whom Bijjala had dispossessed) about which, now a fort, he was very possessive on the one hand and which he used at will for his oft-changing political strategies involving the neighbouring Islamic states of Hyderabad, Bijapur, Bidar and Golkonda, on the other. He warmly welcomes Adil Shah of Bijapur, who arrives with the earnest desire of becoming his adopted son. The wish is granted with the added gift of Kalyan, which he had formerly gifted to the Nizam of Hyderabad. His obsession with Kalyan is portrayed by his euphoric articulation:

> RAMA RAYA: Kalyana! Kalyana! The source of my lineage—the fountain from which my forefathers sprang—the city of the great Chalukyas! That's where the seed of my family took root, sprouted, branched out, blossomed, reached out for the heavens—But as fortune has ordained, today I bear the responsibility of looking after the empire of Vijayanagara. All I can do is look at my ancestral city of Kalyana from a distance, across the River Krishna, while my own arms are loaded with responsibilities my father-in-law, Krishna Raya, has nailed me down with. Can you imagine anything more heart-rending? But I cannot abandon Kalyana to aliens. I have to ensure its welfare. When Barid Shah started misbehaving, I took it away and gave it to Nizam Shah. But now that the bonds of Vijayanagara and Bijapur have been

soldered together again I shall entrust it to you. Kalyana! My Kalyana! Please, please, farzand, look after it with care. (25)

His obsession with Kalyan is set off by his whimsically entrusting it in the hands of his neighbours, instead of keeping it in his own! The control over Kalyan is symbolically represented in the play by the huge key which unlocks (and locks) the entry to Kalyan. The possession / dispossession of this key, manipulated by Rama Raya, is a mechanism adopted by Karnad to represent, on the stage, how Rama Raya exercised complete control over the political affairs of the Deccan. The importance of geography in political affairs, and subsequent historiography, is largely overlooked by scholars, as Karnad observes in the interview with Deepa Ganesh, ". . . if the standard version of history is correct, which is the Sultans attacking Vijayanagara, they should have travelled south. But what has actually happened is that the Vijayanagara army enters Bijapur. I kept thinking it was odd, but had not given it much thought. Historian Richard Eaton argues this brilliantly in his work. He makes geography central to his analysis and points out that Rama Raya was involved with fights . . . and in all these battles Kalyana was involved." (web)

Overconfident arrogance, which ultimately becomes his undoing, seeps from Rama Raya's treatment of Nizam Shah, whom he speaks to in this fashion:

RAMA RAYA: Surely I don't need to explain such an elementary point. There are four of you Sultans on my northern border. And I need to keep you under firm control. Vigilance is of the essence. Is that clear? Enough. (42)

His ruthlessness is projected when he mutters an aside to his trusted younger brother Venkatadri:

RAMA RAYA: If he [Nizam Shah] wasn't here as my guest today, I would've chopped off his arms and strung them round his neck. (46)

Keyed up with his political and diplomatic engagements, he expresses his impatience in dismissive arrogance in his discourse levelled at his wife, Krishna Raya's daughter, Satyabhama:

RAMA RAYA: It rankles, don't you know? The nomenclature. 'Aliya'. The Son-in-Law. Hired to be the Son-in-Law.... Me, Venkatadri here, Tirumala—we are Aravidus. We are of the great Chalukya lineage and yet we are not good enough for her royal relatives. What've we been doing all these decades? Playing watchdogs for the Tuluva marionette plonked on the throne. You talk of your father making us his sons-in-law. Well, by doing so he managed to ensure there will be lifelong guards for his royal family, didn't he? It was a stroke of genius.… Of

course, your generous, loving relations! For twenty years I have played their game. Now I shall take over. The entire horde of Krishna Raya's enemies coming together—not against Vijayanagara. Not against Krishna Raya's family, but me. Aravidu Rama Raya. It's an omen from heaven. For the Chalukya lineage to assert itself. No more Aliya Rama Raya! 'Rama Raya, the Son-in-Law' is dead. (54-55)

Rama Raya's crooning to prove his might made him biased, leading to the octogenarian's loss of cool-headed consideration of all the parameters and possible combinations for and against Vijayanagara; it was a luxury which he could not afford to indulge in, as portrayed by Karnad. The play carries more implications than what its deceptive brevity depicts.

The Dreams of Tipu Sultan actually proposes an alternate historiographical discourse which challenges the Eurocentric interpretation (even mis-presentation) of Indian history. Karnad introduces a discussion between the characters of Kirmani (the official historian of Tipu's court) and Colin Mackenzie (the official surveyor of the British East India Company whose personal assortment of various pieces of information on the region have served as one of the important databases for subsequent historical documentation as well as presentation of Tipu Sultan in literature and theatre) in order to depict how the suppression / unavailability of authentic sources can affect historiography. In the Preface to the English version of the play, Karnad points towards his selection of "Tipu Sultan, one of the most politically perceptive and tragic figures in modern Indian history" for a commissioned radio play to commemorate sixty years of India's independence from British rule. The main source for this play is a small diary in which Tipu recorded his dreams. Some of these dreams have been judiciously used by the playwright, and these have been flanked by the accounts of Kirmani and Mackenzie. Tipu Sultan's perspective of governance empowered him to look beyond religious issues, which surface in his recorded dreams, and are articulated when he says, "many faiths in my Kingdom will depend upon me for protection and succour." (20) Yet, historiographers have represented him as an intolerant Islamist fanatic.

Tipu's visions and policies bear components which had the capacity to pose as a potential competitor to the British trading interests in the subcontinent. Discussing with Poornaiya, one of his chief counsellors, about Lord Cornwallis' appointment as Governor General of India, soon after his defeat in the war in America, "To a farmer called Washington" (28), Tipu makes an exceptionally insightful observation, which reveals his farsightedness as well:

TIPU: He understands nothing but the ignominy of defeat, of surrender. Can't you imagine the whispers, the shy smiles, the nudges that must have greeted the Lord in London? Even if no slights were intended, he would have imagined them. He must if he is a soldier! Can't you see him tossing and turning in bed thinking

only of refurbishing his honour? And he knows—and I know—that to get the stain off his reputation he needs to vanquish one man in India—only one—Tipu Sultan! (28)

He has also studied the behaviour and attitude of the Englishmen who have come to India with a specific purpose which they pursued single-mindedly—something he finds grossly absent in the petty self-centredness of the Indians who went as far as betraying him. Yet, he had to keep going the pretence of trust, since he had no other alternative. This gets reflected in one of his recorded dreams (which Karnad adopted) in which he has a conversation with his dead father Haidar Ali:

TIPU: When our fort was besieged by Cornwallis, I knew several of my officers had already started secret negotiations with him. I even knew who they were. My trusted officers. Yet I couldn't expose them without bringing the whole edifice down. I had to keep saying they were the true pillars of my kingdom, that I depended on their loyalty to me and my family—and hope for the best. Hope that when the moment came, they wouldn't stab me in the back. But the English fight for something called England. What is it? It's not a religion that sustains them, nor a land that feeds them. They wouldn't be here if it did. It's just a dream, for which they are willing to kill and die. Children of England! They have conquered our land, plundered its riches. (52)

He enlightens the comparatively short-sighted Maratha leader, Hari Pant Phadke, about Cornwallis' strategies:

TIPU: Rubbish. Cornwallis has saved me because without me in south India, you Marathas would become too powerful. You are being carefully contained. No, don't reply. (55)

The mastermind of the strategies of the British, Richard, Marquis Wellesley, Lord Mornington, has the capacity to make a penetrating appraisal of Tipu's policies:

MORNINGTON: Tipu is building a trading empire on the European model and succeeding eminently. We have driven the French and Dutch out of India, contained the Portuguese. Is there any reason why we should tolerate an upstart native? The longer the peace, the stronger will Tipu become. (56)

It is not coincidental that Karnad includes Mornington as not just an important character in his play, but as an observing strategist who, like Tipu, has the capacity to clearly see the strategies of his adversary. He has definitely read Kirkpatrick's eulogies in the Dedication of his book, *Select Letters of Tipoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries* (1811), made to Mornington, Marquis Wellesley:

> This is no compliment, my Lord, but a mere historical fact: for who does not know that it was your Lordship's political sagacity which penetrated, and your prompt and energetic measures which defeated, the hostile designs of Tipoo Sultan against the British Dominions in India? Who is ignorant, that it was those measures which led to the rapid annihilation of the most formidable power with whom we ever had to cope in that quarter of the globe, and which substituted in its place an order of things, redounding no less to the glory, than conducing to the solid interests, of your country? (ii)

The clear purpose of this postcolonial play is a relocation of Tipu in proper perspective, not as per others' historiography, but in terms of his personal confidential diary, the record of his dreams. Tipu Sultan's economic policies are pointers towards the capacity of this great visionary, whose dreams, evaluated psychoanalytically, are harbingers of indigenous progress in every sphere of life.

From this brief survey it may be noticed that Karnad brings out in each play the relation between the personal aspirations and public duties and responsibilities of the wielder of power, which serve as appendages to these activities involving the welfare of the subjects, the ruled. However, it is not wise to alienate the onus of governance from one's personal visions and perceptions. The latter usually define the former, resulting in different modes of governance as shown in these four plays, all of which deal with disastrous political events which have changed the history of India. These collapses at vital junctures of history, particularly of the Carnatic region, display numerous forces, visible as well as invisible, personal as well as public, which impinge upon the centrally located person in power with exceptionally complicated multi-dimensional liquidity of influences before which historiography (usually one person's interpretation) finds itself inadequate. For an aware and adept playwright like Karnad, re-presentations of such crucial historical events on the stage invites the audience to an engagement in a discourse involving some (if not all) of these issues, making these events relevant for the audience's contemporary times. Karnad's significant social role as a playwright may be understood from Richard Eaton's words about him:

> As an historian, I would simply say that any means of making people aware of their own history must be celebrated. My own work is through teaching and writing monographs, but that is not the only way of achieving that end, and perhaps not the most effective way. People gain their awareness of the past, and their understanding of the world, through stories first told by their mother—and later by known or unknown story-tellers. Playwrights have a special place among the latter. (email to the author)

Girish Karnad has left a legacy for living theatre to continue his conscious endeavours to bring to the audience of his plays the essence of crucial historical events, the patterns of which often become relevant for the audience's own times. Karnad's interest in historiography, which is narration of stories to him, had led him onward in his theatrical ability to discern critical historical events which could be used for constructing the four plays he has carefully written in order to revisit these significant events. Intense exploration of historiography has enabled Karnad to use documentary evidence in order to write his well-constructed plays.

End Notes

[1] Since all the plays, except *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, were originally written in Kannada, and the author has read them only in English translation, much of the intricacies of the original have been circumscribed by the limitations and vagaries of translation, albeit by Karnad himself. Karnad personally mentions this in many places, one of which is the note on *Talé-Daṇḍa* where he writes, "In Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his geographical origins, even his economic status.... For obvious reasons, this aspect of the problem is not explored in the English translation" (*Talé-Daṇḍa* n.p.). Another would be his conversation with Tutun Mukherjee, where, while he speaks about *Talé-Daṇḍa*, Karnad says, "Whereas the Kannada version of the playengages with these implications, the English version does not provide any scope for this." (Mukherjee 37) The author of the present article acknowledges this.

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