

# **Man, Myth and Mask: A Study of Karnad's Approach to Drama**

**Dr. Gullapelly Praveen Kumar**

Sammakka Sarakka Central Tribal University, Telangana, India

## **Abstract**

This paper with the title Man, myth and mask refers to the Dramatist in the context of himself, his mindset and persona respectively. In the beginnings the poet and dramatist are both wanderers in search of a pastureland to begin with, before arriving as wanderers in search of a space specific on their respective national axis, *Yayati* and *Tughlaq* for the New Dramatist. Trail and characterization-wise the respective personas have considerable similarities in their make-up. The mind-set is one of an Identity Crisis, in Tendulkar and Karnad since both of them are impelled by a need to be responsible, though lacking the wherewithal to tease out possibilities, and as such remaining nebulous. But it must be noted that the conscientious strife that “stretches its arms towards perfection;” is palpable enough to mark their attempts as earnest beginnings. In the middle they are both dramatists of the Self and the Other. In the end they are both visionaries and artisans in their smithy. Their personas are that of Transmuters with mindsets regulated/unregulated as Historians/ Alchemists, to tie both ends of an arrival from history and a translocation of that history into art.

**Keywords:** Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Man, Myth and Mask

## **1. Introduction**

The mindset is that of wanderers alright, but lost is the innocence of one who searches his dreams; instead, it is a deliberate choice to dream of a new search, the difference as conspicuous as is between the “*Chimney Sweeper*” in the Songs of Innocence and the “*Chimney Sweeper*” in the songs of Experience.

## **Themes Simple and Themes Severe**

In the beginning it is existential and heart mysteries as themes simple and themes severe respectively. In the middle existentialism becomes loves capes as well as history, while heart mysteries of romanticism that underscored the beginnings of their forays are transformed into becoming part of aestheticism. In Tendulkar imploration beggary is transformed into a national ideal while in Karnad even as the horse covers the entire expanse of the Nation, visiting almost all kinds of religious points what leaves its imprint behind is the begging for escape or relief. It would be useful to recollect the shrieking head of *Tughlaq* and locate it has having been split. In fact in this play everything is shared. The end is

marked by a transformation of Love-scapes and history into immortality, with the transformed aesthetic signaling an impotence or purposelessness.

Needless to reiterate ends are not aborted but constitute the basis for the beginnings of the next cone, though the points of repossessions are anterior to it. In the new beginning too it is obviously existential and “heart mysteries” which prevaricate, are in correspondence to the dictates of singing after experiencing.

### **Nation as Said and Nation as Unsaid**

Actually, the nation is inextricable from the muse and hence this point of intersection may be said to be the Muse Nation as a ‘said’ with its mask Muse Nation as an ‘unsaid’. In the beginnings it is at best a category accepted as existing as a said while as an unsaid the substance is on the body of a helpless woman and only her alone actually, since Benare is just an idea. If this is in the context of Tendulkar, in Karnad it is Chitrlekha and the stepmother. The contiguity is through the fact of both these female bodies staying anonymous with respect to everything else, having no substance to their beings other than as being substantiated by / in / through their begging to be seen and heard. Compared to an aggressive modern woman Benare Karnad’s warrior like Padmini, the Padmini who stood under the doorway for the one and the Padmini who was reduced to ashes, for the other. It must be remembered that Padmini, is the single female mortal protagonist, and she is composite in spite of being typecast in the mould of Vatsayana’s *Kamasutra*. On the other hand Benare behaves in concordance to such a prescription as mandated by the typecasting there are moments in the play where she exudes the stoicism of Chitrlekha, the passivity of Swarnalata, the deliberate impetuosity of Devayani and the volatile sustenance of Sharmishtha - characters from a certain other Karnadian play. So very evocative of

Yet a most gentle woman; who can tell  
Which of her forms has shown her substance right?  
Or may be substance can be composite

During the Middle the real quotient is provided by the post Nehruvian India. As regards the end it is an antinomical engendering of the Fire and the Rain. In the new beginning real and anti-real are shifting categories on mutually absent bases.

It is interesting to note how the leading symbols are arrived at in Karnad too. The Post Nehruvian era becomes a space laid waste by Mandal and Masjid in which the blood and mayhem of a *Tughlaq* returns. Such space as being a silent place laid waste by imperialism’s epistemic violence, or an agonistic space, marked on the bodies of women serving purpose as representations, has been already pointed out. Now the question is as regards a possible tangential reference to certain policies anterior to 1971 as having sown a seed of destruction, which following an empirical logic of cause and effect returns to level an honest Bijjala and his other, Basavanna. If this is the backward gaze, we find almost automatic the impulsion into The Fire and The Rain. The ending of the play *Tale-Danda* is significant in this context. Even as the dubious group crown a dubious prince king and propitiate him, the state of

things to come haunts one to yet another nightmare or is it better to word it as a continuing nightmare, just as constant in its tenacity as it was in *Tughlaq's* period, in fact gaining momentum and a new volatility, as history points out.

If we look behind the propitiation we do see the hidden cords that are there. Strings with which the puppets are made to jerk, gesticulate as in Brecht. Behind the "urn of a thousand holes" that jets water a thousand streams is the fire - tangential, symptomatic, symbolic. *Fire and Water. Fire and Rain*, one raging, one anointing - *Agni mattu male'*!

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