

Historico-Mythical Analysis of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* and Swarajbir's *Krishna*

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By

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation titled “Historico-Mythical Analysis of Girish Karnad’s Tughlaq and Swarajbir’s Krishna” has been prepared by me under the guidance Dr. Alpna Saini, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that Disha has prepared her dissertation entitled “HISTORICO-MYTHICAL ANALYSIS OF GIRISH KARNAD’S TUGHLAQ AND SWARAJBIR’S KRISHNA”, for the award of M.Phil. degree of the Central University of Punjab, under my guidance. She has carried out this work at the Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab.

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ABSTRACT

Historico-Mythical Analysis of Girish Karnad's Tughlaq and Swarajbir's Krishna

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The present study proposes to do the comparative analysis of two plays –Tughlaq by Girish Karnad and Krishna by Swarajbir. Both the playwrights go back to ancient sources to conceive their plays. Karnad exploits the history of intelligent, sharp but unsuccessful Muslim ruler Tughlaq who is popularly known as “mad Muhammad”. Swarajbir has used the mythical and historical character of Krishna to construct his play. The thread that unites both the plays is the negotiation of mythical and historical personages used in the plays with the contemporary reality. Both the plays transcend the periods they belong to and emerge as examples of metaphoric depiction of modern times. This study explores how these plays are charged with a contemporary flavour and to analyse these texts from a poststructuralist perspective comprising of various streams of thought such as archetypal criticism, Marxism, Historicity, Discourse analysis, Culture Studies and Gender Studies that further allow the texts to unravel and allow for a multifaceted research.

(Name and signature of student)

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Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

Myths and history have reappeared and been reinterpreted from new and different perspectives to provide new insights into both these disciplines as well as literature. The most obvious and significant association between mythology and history is that they have inspired literature and art. As Robert A. Segal rightly comments in his book titled *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, “A standard theme in literature courses has been the tracing of classical figures, events and themes” (84). All great literary men from Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Byron and Keats to T.S. Eliot, Joyce etc. have successfully exploited classical mythology and history in their works to afford new magnitude to literature. Mythology and history can be used in literature directly, with some literary expansion, or in a suggestive way to symbolise something else. The oldest civilization of India is a beautiful amalgam of diverse cultures and religions that have enriched Indian mythology and history endlessly. Writers are revisiting this old treasure to portray the continuation between past and present by transcending the boundaries of time and space. This is the reason that many great Indian writers have used our age old tales in their literary creations. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Shri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Girish Karnad, Dharamveer Bharti, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Khushwant Singh, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh are some writers who have profoundly exploited mythology and history in their literary creations. The oldest civilization of India is blessed with diverse cultures and religions that have influenced Indian mythology continuously. Many Indian authors look back to Indian mythology to comment upon present social and political scenario. Writers are revisiting this age old treasure of myths and history, to redefine the society by linking past with present.

The major sources of Indian Mythology are four Vedas-Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas. The hymns sung during Vedic period (1400BC) were collectively called Vedas among which Rig-Veda is the oldest one. Great Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are the products of classical age. Puranas were also composed at that time. These myths are so popular with common people that even children are familiar with major mythical heroes and stories. They are infused with

ethics, culture and even religion of people. Being so close to collective consciousness of society, it is quite obvious that literature cannot escape the labyrinths of Indian mythology. Mythology is now interpreted through different perspectives. The unnoticed and mute mythical figures are given voices. These tales are retold in literature from the point of view of ignored characters as Chitra Banerjee in her famous novel *Palace of Illusions* retells the tale of Mahabharata from Panchaali's point of view. Her desires, dreams and sufferings are put forward from a feministic perspective. She herself says in the introduction to the novel that women do not have their deserved share in history. The novel becomes the powerful critique of patriarchal constructedness of society which does not give freedom or liberty to a woman to take her own decisions and confines her to the four walls of house. Githa Hariharan in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* reinterprets the mythological tales and gives voice to silent female characters. Mahasweta Devi also revisits mythology in her stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" to depict women's powerless position in a patriarchal social set up.

Myth is also used to satirize the present social condition. Shashi Tharoor uses myth to depict the complexity of modern times in his novel *The Great Indian Novel*. The renowned actor, film producer and playwright Girish Karnad, whose plays are truly groomed in mythology, addresses certain existentialist questions and challenges accepted notions with the artistic use of myths in his plays like *Hayavadana*, *Yayati*, *Naga-Mandala* and *The Fire and the Rain*. His mythical themes are often identified with the contemporary reality. A very prominent example of use of mythology in Punjabi literature is Guru Gobind Singh's literary masterpiece *Chandi Di Vaar*. In this heroic couplet the war between Devtas and Asuras in which Devi Durga leads Devtas to victory is projected to serve the purpose of awakening the masses. *Chandi Di Vaar* had a "magical effect" on psyche of masses to fight against rulers of the time. Shiv Kumar Batalvi's *Loona* is based on *Kissa Pooran Bhagat*, in which poet describes the longings of young Loona, who is married to much elder king Salwan, for genuine love and companion of her own age. Like mythology, history has also reappeared in our literature since ages. Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Gita Mehta, Vikram Seth, Dharamvir Bharati, Kiran Desai etc. are some contemporary novelists

and dramatists who have witnessed the emergence of historical themes in literature. Vijay Tendulkar's Ghasiram Kotwal and Mohan Rakesh's Ashad Ka Ek Din are examples of use of mythology and history in Indian drama. The novels like Such A Long Journey, Hungry Tide Shame, Shadow Lines uphold the historical themes. Shadow Lines is a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel by Indian -Bengali writer Amitav Ghosh. The novel is woven around the historical events like Swadeshi movement, Second World War, partition of India and Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta. Shame is Salman Rushdie's third novel, published in 1983. Like most of Rushdie's work, this book was written in the style of magic realism. It portrays the lives of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harappa) and General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (General Raza Hyder) and their relationship. Ghashiram Kotwal is a Marathi play written by playwright Vijay Tendulkar in 1972 as a response to the rise of a local political party in Maharashtra. The play is a political and historical satire, based on the life of Nana Phadnavis.

Today's age is the age of comparative literature when the literatures written in vernaculars are being paid due attention by critics and readers. The works of regional languages are rapidly translated into English to make them accessible to vast audience. The study of literature written in regional languages also serves as a medium to resist the domination of main stream culture and language. The aim of this literary research is to analyse and compare the plays titled Tughlaq and Krishna, written by Girish Karnad and Swarajbir respectively. Both Karnad and Swarajbir are writing in regional languages, Kannada and Punjabi. Girish Karnad himself translates most of his plays in English. He is the writer who has successfully secured his place among iconic Indian playwrights. On the other hand, Swarajbir is gaining rapid literary recognition in Punjabi literary circles. In spite of all the differences in their literary styles and complexity of the subject matters, both the playwrights have many comparable features. The use of Indian mythology and history along with contemporary interpretations is a feature which is visible in both the writers. History and mythology is referred back to probe into the present social, political and cultural scenario. These playwrights are clearly on the side of underdogs of the society. The issues like the degradation of personalities with power, the plight of marginalized and

Dalit section of society, condition of women, the poverty and hunger etc. are brilliantly touched upon by the playwrights. In plays like Tughlaq, Tale- Danda, The Fire and the Rain and Naga-Mandala, Yayati, Hayavadana and Tipu Sultan all these issues are tackled beautifully by Girish Karnad. Swarajbir also deals with same issues in plays like Krishna, Dharam Guru and Medani. He seems deeply touched by mythology and history as his literary creations are overlapping with mythical and historical tales of India. Both the plays create a convincing synchrony between pre modern and contemporary India. Although the source which Karnad has referred to is the historical and legendary figure of Tughlaq but the play is not merely a historical account of last five years of Tughlaq's reign but has contemporary associations as well. Similarly Krishna is a play based on the amalgam of mythical and historical character of Krishna. The myth used in the play is the myth of Mahabharata in which Khandava jungle was burnt down by Krishna and Arjuna to acquire the land and the natives of jungle were burnt alive. The similarity of both the plays lies in the fact that along with other themes, both are sharp political comments on power grabbing mentality of ruling class which results in shameless intrigues to secure the throne. The religion is used very cunningly to create an illusion that all sufferings of masses are divinely conceived. The very striking feature of both the plays is indulgence of protagonists- Tughlaq and Krishna in this race to grab the power by hook or crook. Tughlaq, who otherwise claims to be secular and pro-people, proves himself a ruthless tyrant. Same is the case with Krishna who is worshipped by people as a benevolent god.

This study aims at the reinterpretation of historical and mythical themes of both the plays in contemporary contexts to find how these themes are charged with a contemporary flavor and to analyse these texts from a poststructuralist perspective comprising of various streams of thought such as archetypal criticism, Marxism, Historicity, Discourse analysis, Culture Studies and Gender Studies that further allow the texts to unravel and allow for a multifaceted research. Any Post-structuralist reading is incomplete without taking into account the multifariousness of the text concerned and in this particular case, both the texts give in to a multi-layered and

complex reading which further produces a variety of interpretations which cannot be ignored if the texts are to be fully understood.

“Myth” is a word derived from Greek word *mythos* which can be defined as utterance. On first place, myth can be defined as a story, a narrative usually concerned with supernatural events, gods and goddesses or even human beings. Mythology can be categorized commonly in three types of tales on the basis of their subject matter: Sagas, legends and folktales. Saga is a tale based upon great historical or supposedly historical event. Although the basis of saga is distant historical event but its dramatic structure and characters are the product of story teller’s imagination. Legend is a tale that is associated with some historical person or a place. Many great historical figures have many legends associated with their lives. Folktale can be defined as simple narrative of adventure, often containing elements of ingenious trickery and of magic, perhaps involving superhuman creatures, e.g. monsters and giants.

But to limit mythology only to a story will be to reduce its importance. Mythology is a tale of our remote past; those narratives which are held dear and meant to be preserved by people are carried forward to next generations in form of mythology. Mythology is not only the index of primitive man’s mode of thinking but also reflects the psyche of people. In creation of mythology, unconscious and collective mind operates instead of conscious and individual mind. So myths are the stories formed by a particular cultural group handed over from one generation to another generation. Romila Thapar defines mythology in her essay “Origin Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition” in following words:

Events concerning the more remote periods often take the form of a myth. Myth is in a sense a prototype history since it is a selection of ideas composed in narrative form for the purpose of preserving and giving significance to an important aspect of past. Although myths cannot be used as descriptive sources on the past, their analysis can reveal the more emphatic assumptions of a society. Myths record what a people like to think about their past. . . (754)

Myth is of high importance for historians or sociologists because it reflects the cultural, beliefs and values and the way of living of the society from which it emerges. It serves as the index of our past, particularly the past which has no written account as such. Romila Thapar says that mythology is the means of preserving the information in societies where the oral tradition rather than the use of literature was the means of communication. In this way, myths make our past “intelligible and meaningful”. (Thapar 756) Mythology is deeply rooted in social reality of a particular time period is evident from the fact that there is constant modification in mythology with changing social and cultural scenario. This constant modification of mythology establishes a link between past and present. Romila Thapar calls mythology a “charter of belief” which

Serves to protect cultural continuity and provides through its theme a point of cultural equilibrium. In a historical tradition therefore the themes of myths act as forces of continuity (756).

Mythology, in this way records what is permanent and eternal in humanity and establishes continuity between past and present.

George Thompson in his book *Essence of Humanism* says that “Mythical thinking is the mode of thinking of primitive man” (64). Man is very curious by nature and seeks explanation of every natural phenomenon: how the vegetation grows, how rain falls from the sky, how the seasons change and how the sun rises and sets at fixed time. Narrow sphere of primitive man’s knowledge developed some sort of explanation for all bewildering phenomena of nature. His life was full of uncertainties and dangers of natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, wild animals, diseases etc. On the other hand beauty and blessing of nature in the form of waterfalls, flowers and fruits laden trees, cool breeze, fertile soil, filled man with a sense of gratitude. This life of primitive man was perfect to generate the idea of some supernatural power which controls the entire world, the civilization. Out of this grew these stories about Gods and Goddesses, good and bad spirits and passed into mythology. Myths explain very basic questions as how the world came into existence, what is the relation between the divine and the human world. Karen Armstrong proposes four things about myth:

Firstly, a myth is nearly always rooted in the experience of death and fear of extinction. Secondly mythology is usually inseparable from ritual. Thirdly, the most powerful myths are about extremity, they force us to go beyond our experience and finally, all mythology speaks of another plane that exists alongside our own world and in some sense support it (4).

Mythology operates “in and through imagination” (65). Imagination enables us to think about something that is not immediately present. Thomson calls it a childlike act of make believe in which the fantasy is mistaken as reality. Myth is a word derived from “mythos”. In Greek language “mythos” was considered inferior to “logos” which essentially means wisdom. As the name indicates, Myths are considered inferior to scientifically proved knowledge. Even today myths are considered fairy tales created by primitive people to explain the natural phenomena which was otherwise unexplainable in the absence of science and philosophy. But this imagination is not completely devoid of reality as mythology emerges from the social reality itself. Mythology is so deeply infused with the culture of masses that it becomes the index of their way of living and beliefs. Mythology can be studied from the perspectives of various disciplines with myth as a subset. Robert A. Segal says, “There are no theories of myth in itself for there is no discipline of myth in itself. . . . There is no study of myth as myth” (2). Myths can be studied from social, psychological, scientific, religious and literary point of view; every discipline studies myth differently. What unite the study of myth as Segal says, are the questions related with origin, function and subject matter of the myth.

According to myth–ritual theories, mythology is inseparable from ritual. Myth is not just a story but there is always some action that is associated with that story. There are many myth-ritual theories. William Robertson Smith grants the primary place to ritual and opines that myth describes the conditions under which the ritual is performed, “‘Myth’ itself was secondary. Where ritual was obligatory, myth was optional” (qtd. in Segal 62). Although imagination is the basis of mythology but it is manifested in some rituals which were a part of primitive man’s life. But for E.B.Tylor myth is not just the explanation of the ritual as W.R.Smith says, but the explanation of

the physical world. Contrary to the theory of Smith, for Tylor ritual follows the myth. As “ritual is the application not the subject of myth” (qtd. in Segal 63). The author of *The Golden Bough*, J.G.Frazer divides the cultural progress into three stages-magic, religion and science and myth rituals are to be found in the intermediated stage of magic and religion combined (64). Rituals performed for their own sake became art. Slowly the religious perspective of the ritual vanishes and people start performing ritual as an end in itself.

The evaluators of myth from social point of view consider myth more than mere explanation of physical phenomena. Myth teaches human beings to reconcile with hardships of life. It teaches us to do this because it is always being done. Myths justify something on the basis that it is long standing in part of the tradition:

Myths are not explanation for their own sake. Yet explanation they must still be, by only explaining phenomena do they serve their conciliatory function (Segal128).

George Sorel rejects the view point of Malinowski that myth legitimizes society, but asserts that it is an ideology to reject society:

By myth he means a guiding ideology, one that preaches an imminent end to present society, advocates a fight to the death with ruling class (qtd. in Segal 129).

Mythology and psychology have a very important relationship. Myth has always a very significant stance in understanding human psychology as it reflects the ways of the primitive man. According to Iros Vaja, Mythology is, “The record of the experience of multitudes and generation of people. The myth expresses a general truth, acceptable to all” (37). Myth is true not because it gives us factual information, but because it gives us deeper insights into life. It reveals the regions of human mind that would otherwise remain inaccessible. It was an early form of psychology and perhaps that is the reason Jung and Freud refer back to classical mythology to explain their insights and give ancient myths new interpretations. Armstrong writes:

The stories of gods and heroes descending into the underworld through labyrinths and fighting with monsters, brought to light the mysterious working of the psyche, showing people how to cope up with their own interior crises. (11)

The relationship between myth and literature has taken varying forms. In myth natural and social phenomena have been assimilated by people “in an unintentionally artistic manner” (Thompson 65). Myths are told and retold by many generations and being continuously remolded. Although it is not conscious art but it has achieved the status of natural perfection. Like literature mythology has its roots in imagination. In primitive society myths were credited with the magical power of controlling reality by a mere word or command, illusion, a childlike act of “make believe” was there (Thompson 65). Even when myths are refashioned into art the element of illusion is still there, “But now it is objectified, readers are aware of it as illusion” (Thompson 65). Art is the world of conscious makes believe. Mythical thinking gives place on one side to rational and scientific thinking and on the other hand to religion. Thompson writes that Instead of these two developments, there is also a third one - art and literature, in which myth becomes the raw material. The power of human beings to imagine something that is not immediately present produces both literature and mythology.

Segal writes that there is a twofold relationship between myth and literature-

- Mythic origin of literature
- Use of myth in literature (79)

The approach of mythic origin of literature was pioneered by Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray and F.M. Cornford. When ritual and myth are performed for their own sake, they become art. Drama is an obvious example of it. Harrison, Murray and Cornford applied this theory to origin of Greek epic, tragedy and even to Shakespearean drama-

For literary myth – ritualists, myth become literature when it is severed from ritual. Myth tied to ritual is religious literature; cut of from ritual is secular or plane literature (qtd. in Segal 79).

These theories do not reduce literature to myth and vice versa only but offer an explanation of transformation of myth and ritual into literature. The relationship between myth and literature is so close that some critics argue that not only drama but all genres of literature are derived from myths. In his book *The Idea of a Theater*, Francis Fergusson, finds the roots of sufferings of tragic hero in myth of vegetation God in which king is killed and replaced for the prosperity of kingdom (qtd. in Segal 81). As in *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus has to sacrifice his throne, if not life, for the sake of his subjects. Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye goes even beyond what Fergusson said by comparing the life cycle of tragic hero with other cycles in myths:

Frye associates the life cycle of hero with several other cycles: The yearly cycle of seasons, the daily cycle of sun and the nightly cycle of the dreaming and awakening (qtd. in Segal 80).

Each main genre of literature parallels at once a season, a stage in the day, a stage of consciousness and above all a stage in heroic myth. Northrop Frye says that there may be found genres of literature that conform with major phases of the seasonal cycle.

- The mythos of spring: comedy
- The mythos of summer: romance
- The mythos of fall: tragedy
- The mythos of winter: irony (qtd. in Segal 81)

There are some universal symbols in different mythologies. These symbols carry the same or very similar meaning for a large portion of mankind. Symbols like earth mother, sky father, light, blood etc. recur again and again in mythologies of diverse cultures. Perhaps literature also borrowed its imagery and symbolism from mythology.

Claude Levi-Strauss, prominent structuralist anthropologist, raises an important question regarding mythology in his book *Myth and Meaning*, by saying that mythology of some areas is perfectly coherent and organized which seems to be the work of learned anthropologists and philosophers who later on improvise prevalent myths (35). These improvised myths do not purely remain the work of collective psychology but becomes a scholarly work. On the contrary, myths prevalent in some other areas are very disorganized and incoherent. These disorganized and incoherent myths are purely the reflection of way of thinking of masses of a particular time period. The examples of the former are our Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata which are much organized works. Bhagavad Gita is a perfect example of organized and coherent work of mythology authorized by Brahmin class of the time period when kingdoms were establishing and the ruling class of the time required justifications of warfare for expansion of kingdoms. Thus, mythical works of scholars of the time can also be aimed at the serving a particular function.

Mythology and history share a common thread as mythology can be called the continuation of history. Mythology helps in recollection of history of remote past, of the time of which no archives are available. Mythology presents the reality of society out of which it emerged in symbolic form; rather history presents the truth authentically and factually. While history presents a higher form of truth with authenticity, myths contain a symbolic truth (Nayak 24). Discussing about the difference between mythology and history, Claude Levi Strauss calls mythology a closed system in which same mythical elements appear over and over again, as contrary to history which is an open system. He further claims that in our society, history has replaced mythology and fulfills the same function which mythology does for the societies without written archives (34). Study of mythology of any historical period contributes in verifying and strengthening the conclusions about history of that period. Moreover, myths are part of psychological history of mankind which is essential and integral part of overall history.

The concept of history has undergone various changes with the time. History of the concept of history can be traced back to the German philosopher Hegel who

gave the concept of dialectics- the progression through oppositions. He viewed history as the history of ideas rather than viewing it as the series of facts. Marx drew considerably from Hegel's theory of dialectics and proposed the idea of dialectical materialism or historical materialism. Marx views history after primitive communism as the history of class struggle. For Marx the economic base of society is of primary importance which determines the history of society. With the origin of private property, the society is divided into two classes- exploiters and the exploited. As the mode of production of a society changes, the relations of production also undergo change. In feudal mode of production there are relations of production between landlord and peasantry but in capitalist mode of production, the relations of production are between the bourgeoisie and labour class. Historian D.D. Kosambi argues in his article titled "On a Marxist Approach to Indian Chronology" that according to Marxist viewpoint the history should be viewed as:

Only the fullest agreement can be expressed with the main principle namely that historical periods must be demarcated according to the means and relations of production, not by fortuitous changes of dynasty (49)

Being the oldest civilization of the world, India has a long history. D.D. Kosambi, in his article titled "Stages of Indian History" has broadly outlined the history of India on the basis of "development in chronological sequence of essential stages in the means and relations of production" into following parts:

- The urban Indus valley culture (3000-1500BC)
- Aryanization- pastoral tribal organization based on two caste system, developing into four caste classes by (800 BC)
- Clearing and settlement of heavily forested Gangetic plains (500BC), a primitive feudalism, emergence of private property.
- Pure feudalism ,beginning in later Gupta period in later Gupta period (1200AD)
- Modern capitalism, culminating in the rule of a new indigenous bourgeoisie (57-70)

Instead of emphasizing the chronological order of monarchs and battles, Marxist historians emphasize that only common masses are the creators of history.

Marxist literary doctrine views literature and art as a tool for social change and opposes “art for art sake”. Emphasizing the point that the origin of art and literature lies in long development of society, Marx and Engels views man’s capacity of aesthetic appreciation as not something inborn but a socially acquired quality. That’s why form and content of literary works goes on changing with the changing social circumstances. Social structure of different historical periods determines the content as well as genre of literary work. Epic poetry of ancient Greece cannot be written in present era. This statement also gives us clear indication that literature of a particular historical period cannot repeat itself. Marx talked about the relation between different forms of social consciousness and economic structure of a society in his much quoted base superstructure model. Economic base of society is constituted by relations of production and means of production which becomes the ultimate determinant of superstructure. Superstructure includes all cultural and social institutions as law, religion, art, education, literature and so on. The working of this base superstructure model is not as simple as it appears. It is quite dynamic system of many factors influencing each other, economic base determines only in final instance. This relationship of base and superstructure is not one folded; superstructure also influences back the economic basis. These forms of social consciousness, including literature also affects back the social structure and social reality out of which they emerge. This model is later revised by French historian Louis Althusser, who introduced the concept of ideology, ideological state apparatus and oppressive state apparatus. He also modified the model of economic determination of literature and art by giving literature relative freedom.

Literature, being the part of superstructure, is determined by economic base but is not a passive reflector of economic base. It enjoys relative degree of independence and economic base only plays determining role at last analysis. Literature has its own distinct features and autonomy which makes the appeal of genuine works of art beyond the historical period they belong to. Marx explains our

love and admiration for Greek epic poetry which reflects the naive and at the same time healthy, normal perception of reality characteristic of mankind in those early stages of its development, the period of its childhood; it reflects the striving for natural veracity, with its unique attractiveness and special charm for all. According to Marxist doctrine literature can never be innocent and neutral. Unintentionally or intentionally it reflects the ideology of a particular class. But genuine work of art, far from being propaganda literature, reflects the ideology in a very artistic and subtle manner. They place the realistic literature as the method of artistic creation on a very high pedestal. The realistic literature, far from being the photographic representation of society, is a way to capture the essence of the traits of a particular age. Valuing the artistic appeal of a work of art along with its content, both Marx and Engels criticized the propaganda literature. Literature should possess a truthful depiction, and a concrete historical approach. But the work should communicate not through direct moralization but “by vivid images which affects the reader’s consciousness and feeling by their artistic expressiveness” (Marx24).

The major opposition to this school of thought is put forward by the postmodern assumptions of “end of history”, that indicates, as said by Paul Hamilton in his essay “Reconstructing Historicism”:

In a sense nothing new can happen; our repeated success in translating past aspirations into their current forms has identified perennial human nature. Further, if historicism is allowed to persuade us of the increased efficiency of our understanding of human purposes in history . . . then a definite technological and ideological view of how to facilitate human flourishing emerges. History, in the sense of discovering anything different from this, is at an end. (388)

The main proponents of this view are Jacques Derrida and Foucault. Michel Foucault, well known French philosopher and historicist, denies the possibility of any objective understanding of past. Opposing the traditional view of history, he rejects the straight forward narratives of progress in history. The metanarratives are replaced by the

ruptures and breaks and periods of discontinuity. A monolithic version of a given period gives way to an analysis of how any given period reveals:

. . . several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves. (Foster 185)

The dominant discourses decide the dominant narratives of a given period and with the change of dominant discourses, the dominant narratives also undergo a change. He used the term archeology to designate his method of historiography. He criticized the history of ideas or whatever is going through the minds of critics and philosophers consciously as less important than the underlying contexts in which they tend to think so. This is the root of marginalization of subject in Foucault's theory of history. In postmodern world the difference between fiction and nonfiction is diluting; even the superiority of literary writing over historical writing exists no more. It aims:

Rather to offer an internal account of human thinking without assuming a privileged status for the conscious content of that thought- thought for a privileged role for thinker, parallel to writing without a privileged role for writing. (Hamilton 36)

His approach to history is of viewing history as the history of "problem" instead of traditional approach of viewing it as history of events. Upholding the micro or identity politics, postmodernism throws away the possibility of collective emancipation of humanity with class struggle as upheld by Marxism. John Bellamy Foster writes in his essay titled "In Defense of History" that post modernism proclaims "the end of history": the eternal triumph of capitalist institutions worldwide and the end of the class struggle, along with the "end of ideology" (184). Marxist thinker Aijaz Ahmad claims in his article "On Postmodernism" that postmodernism emerges as a movement in 1950's in USA and one decade later in France. Aijaz Ahmad further

claims that this was the time period of extraordinary capitalist stability and prosperity along with defeat of labour movement in France. These historical circumstances are held responsible by Aijaz Ahmad for the concept of end of class struggle, propagated by postmodernism.

Recent critical theory takes into account slippery signifiers and signified where the real meaning is permanently deferred resulting into a decentered universe where there are only truth claims and even the notion of fact is under question. Postmodern conception of history is also decentered; it emphasizes the micro and marginalized aspects of history. John Bellamy Foster points out that in the same essay that for Foucault “the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without landmark or a point of reference”(190). While talking about the contradiction inherent in concept of death of history, he further argues that “the irony of post modernism is that while purporting to have transcended modernity, it abandons from the start all hopes of transcending capitalism itself and entering a post capitalist era (193).

The depiction of social reality in both the texts is not only different but diametrically opposite to the world view which advocates the end of class struggle. The texts under study present the instability and crisis of class society. The so called prosperity and mitigation of gap among classes is shattered by living portrait of class antagonism in these texts. History and mythology emerge as devices to symbolize and indicate contemporary reality in both the texts in spite of the specific nature, qualities and subjective intentions of respective rulers, i.e. Krishna and Tughlaq in both the texts. The class antagonism and other contradictions of society assert themselves forcefully and throw the protagonists into a pitiable condition. The plays describe the society crying for change and the circumstances compelling for change. The climax of both the texts is not an end point in itself. The curtain falls only on stage but not in the minds of spectators. The overall impact haunts with an urge for a way out from present circumstances. In this way, the texts fall in line with social viewpoint of Marxism in an artistic manner. Swarajbir is conscious and particular that the forward march of society does not come to an end. Every social formation is bound to

get outmoded and in a time and ultimately give way to some new social formation. He provides conscious gestures about this ever living phenomenon in this play. Girish Karnad symbolizes anti-masses nature of the ruling class, their lack of real conviction in values like secularism, their deceptive and conspiratorial nature which creates wide spread anger and dissatisfaction among large parts of population. The challenge to contemporary political setup clearly comes to light. Though future course is not depicted but it is very much clear from the text that present setup is standing on a very slippery ground.

Both these texts stand on a ground different from “art for art sake” view, inspite of this demarcation these are forceful artistic creations which are not reduced to mere propaganda or message of some sort. They do not impose any sermons but provide a vivid portrait of society, human values and emotion.

Critical studies on *Tughlaq* and *Krishna*; Survey of Work done

Girish Karnad and Swarajbir both use Indian history and mythology in their works. There is much critical work has been done on the entire literary creation of Girish Karnad and on *Tughlaq* in particular. The play has been studied from various perspectives like the appropriation of history in present context, the contemporary significance of the play, the existential crisis of the protagonist. Swarajbir is comparatively a recent signature in Punjabi literary circles but his work is getting rapid critical acclaim these days. There is not much work has been done on *Krishna* till now. The play has been studied from the perspectives of portrayal of *Krishna* contrary to his popular image of benevolent God, the conflict of the tribals with ruling class and the contemporary relevance of the myth used. Here is a brief introduction to the works done on the topic which I came across during my study.

Abhishek Kosta in his book *The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Study in Myths and Gender* analyses the plays of Girish Karnad from the perspective of use reinterpretation of mythology in context of gender issues. Giving a detailed view of myth and gender theories, he discusses the plays of Girish Karnad in this context. The main purpose of the study is centered on the gender perspectives of mythical

plays of Girish Karnad. Karnad's work, life and influences have been discussed to give a background to the study. The critical study is aimed at bring forth Karnad's genuine concerns to bring real justice for ending patriarchy that has always subjugated women. The beauty of these plays lies in fact that women in these plays deviate from mythology and refuse to be treated like commodities.

Iros Vaja has offered the mythical and historical reinterpretation of Girish Karnad's plays in his book *Myths in Girish Karnad's Plays*. Giving a detailed bibliographical sketch of the playwright, Iros Vaja discusses in detail the origin, meaning the literary use of mythology. He critically evaluates in detail his plays like Hayavadana, The Fire and The Rain, Naga-Mandala, Yayati and Tughlaq. He writes about the contemporary social relevance of plays of Girish Karnad along with the mythical and historical themes he used. Talking about the contemporaneity of Tughlaq, the writer comments that reign of Tughlaq draws a striking parallel to first two decades of Indian Independence. The play also offers psychological study of Tughlaq. The book draws the attention of readers towards the present and past perfectly fused in Karnad's plays. His themes are contemporary but the vehicle to express the themes is history and mythology.

An article, written by R.P. Pradhan, titled "Historical Perspective in Karnad's Tughlaq" also deals with the same theme. He discussed the play from the perspective of contemporary interpretation of historical account of Sultan Tughlaq's reign.

Aparna Dharwadker, the well-known critic on Indian drama, analyses Tughlaq as a historical play from the perspectives of Post-colonial concerns of the playwright in her essay titled "Historical Fictions and Post-Colonial Representation: Reading Girish Karnad's Tughlaq". Her essay is a study of Tughlaq from contemporary perspective in context of its resemblance to Nehru era. She also discusses the play in context of its striking parallel to the time of emergency, imposed by Mrs. Gandhi in 1975. According to her, the play becomes a comment upon the chaotic political state of India after independence. She also opines that the sources through which the history of Tughlaq have reached to us are biased. She critically examines the

portrayal of Sultan Tughlaq by orthodox Muslim historians like Barani and later by British historians.

Another essay titled “Semiotics of History and Literature: Girish Karnad’s Tughlaq”, written by Parminder Singh views Tughlaq as a discourse about the absolute power of state and existential crisis of the person in power. He views play as a comment upon the functioning of the state full of intrigues, manipulations, murders and violence. The play becomes an account of the problematic condition of state. The essay is aimed at bringing out the meaning of Tughlaq as from within its text as mediated by the actual historical conditions during the period of Sultan Tughlaq. The author of the essay thus, views Tughlaq as significant signature in historiography and draws the attention towards need to reread play in from interdisciplinary approach.

Priya Srivastava discusses the existential alienation of Tughlaq in her essay “Social Alienation in Karnad’s Tughlaq”. She opines that Tughlaq is an alienated personality, not only from the society but also at interpersonal level. He alienates himself from the society in his mad race to prove himself superior and different from others. This causes the dehumanization of Tughlaq and makes him a tyrant king.

Rajesh Kumar Sharma compares the vision of Tughlaq with the vision of Nietzsche in his article titled “Girish Karnad's Tughlaq: A Nietzschean Enigma” Both Nietzsche and Tughlaq are much ahead of their times. Like Nietzsche, Tughlaq also goes mad when he realizes that the people around him are not able to understand his vision. He tries to shape up history but cannot succeed.

Alpna Saini, in her book *Subjectivity as a Locus of Conflicts in Girish Karnad: A Discussion of His Plays* emphasizes to read Tughlaq on historical and on personal levels. She evaluates the subjectivity of Tughlaq in context of formative historical contexts.

Sarabjit Singh in his article “Krishna: Rajneetak Pravachan” discusses Krishna in its political context. he discuss mythology as a discipline very close the human life, dreams, desires and social reality, He emphasis that mythology is not emerged out of vacuum but has a close relationship with society. Discussing Krishna as a

mythological figure, he also talks about the play as a political comment on contemporary politics.

“*Swarajbir de Natak : Myth da NavSirjan*” is an article by Guriqbal Singh who opines that along with the psychological portrayal of Krishna, the play also presents the conflict between natives and colonizers, between Aryan and non-Aryan people. The play goes back to the time when feudal society won over the tribal society. So the play is about the struggle of two societies to control the sources of production. Another perspective that emerges from the play is that the society that wins this battle for sources of production becomes superior and worth worshipping.

Desh Raj Kali and Rajnesh Bahadur Singh offer the study of Krishna from the perspective of marginalized sections of society in their articles “*Swarajbir de Natak: Vichardharak Adhaar*” and “*Krishna: Dalit Drishthi*” respectively. Desh Raj Kali draws the attention of readers towards the subjugation of culture, language and believes of Jara and his mates by the Aryan rulers. Mr. Singh also acclaims the play as the portrayal of struggle of subaltern sections of the society against the main stream dominant political and cultural powers.

Manmohan Singh in his essay “*Krishna: Mythehasik Vidambnavan di Rajneeti da Pravachan*” analyses the formation of myth of Krishna from political point of view. Krishna is a play which exposes the real political face of Krishna, contrary to his image as a God incarnate and innocent, charming cattle herder. The Krishna of Swarajbir is fully involved in intrigues to maintain his kingly powers. Uma Sethi touches upon the issues of reinterpretation of myth from the contemporary perspectives in her article “*Natak Krishna: Myth da Visthapan*”. The age old myth of Krishna is revisited from a very contemporary perspective which gives the play universal dimensions.

But none of these works takes into account the mythico-historical basis of Tughlaq and Krishna together. The uniqueness of this research work lies in the comparative analysis of Tughlaq and Krishna which is not done before. In spite of all the differences in their literary styles and complexity of the subject matters, both the

playwrights have many comparable features. The use of Indian mythology and history along with contemporary interpretations is a feature which is visible in both the writers.

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Chapter Two

Tughlaq: Revisiting History and its

Underlying Relationship with Contemporary Reality

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Girish Karnad has secured his place among the first row Indian dramatists with many well-known and successful plays. Girish Karnad along with playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Rakesh Mohan revive the vogue of Indian theatre by using Indian mythology and history in their plays. Along with presentation of contemporary themes, his plays are also flavoured with rich cultural fabrics of Indian. Karnad hunts for the less known myths and stories, discovers their significance in contemporary scenario and relates them to the chosen story. Regarded as the pioneer of new trends in Indian drama, he is the writer who has profoundly used the Indian mythology and history along with new western techniques of drama. His plays are beautiful blends of Indian and western styles of theatre. Profoundly influenced from western theatre and Indian art techniques, Girish Karnad on the one hand he exploits the motifs of folk art like masks and curtains but on the other hand he carefully used the techniques of the theatre of Brecht to shatter the illusionary effect of drama. The theatre of the Absurd also influenced him a lot. The plays of Girish Karnad have two distinct sequences, first start with *Yayati* (1961) and continue till *Hittina Hunja* (1980). The second sequence starts with *Nagamandala* (1988) to the recent plays *Broken Images* and *Flowers*. He has profoundly exploited the Indian mythology and folklore in the plays like *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*. He also successfully revisits Indian history in plays like *Tughlaq*, *Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Tale-Danda* etc. Karnad is not only a playwright but also an actor, director and screenplay writer, although he is at his best a playwright. He himself says:

I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I've been an actor, a publisher, a film-maker. But in none of these fields have I felt quite a much at home as in playwriting. (qtd. in Shukla 6)

He has won many prestigious awards for his writings. He is conferred by president of India Padma Shri in 1974, Padmabhushan in 1992 and Gubbi Veeranna Award from the Government of Karnataka in 1997.

His first play Yayati is woven around an ancient myth of Prince Puru who exchanged his youth with his father Yayati's old age. The newly wedded wife of Puru commits suicide. It is only after the death of Chitrlekha, his daughter-in-law; Yayati takes back his old age from his son. So the play touches upon many relevant existentialist issues regarding life and death, responsibility. The play clearly shows the effect of existentialist theatre of Sartre and Camus. Another very famous play of Karnad, Hayavadana is also a mythical play. The play is all about the questions of human identity in a world where the relationships are quite complicated. The play also raises questions such as whether the body or the head is the most important part of human body. The intellect and intelligence can rule over the body and can change it accordingly. The playwright has used the technique of story within a story in the play. The play is the story of two friends named Kapila and Devdatta, both these friends fall in love with a girl named Padmini. Padmini marries with Devdatta but gets attracted towards Kapila after marriage. Both Devdatta and Kapila commit suicide in the temple of Kali and their heads are transposed on one another's body by mistake. The subplot which runs through the play is the story of Hayavadana, a man with the head of horse. His play Naga-Mandala is a feminist play which narrates the story of Rani, a young girl. The play is about the love between a girl and king Cobra. The play depicts the plight of a married girl whose husband treats her very callously. Deprived of genuine love, she falls in love with a snake that comes in disguise of her husband at night. The Fire and The Rain is excellent creation of Girish Karnad which is woven around two different myths. The play is so beautifully woven that the myths used in the play do not seem different stories but appear as well knit single story. The playwright does not blindly imitate the actual myth but modifies it according to the needs of the play. To interrogate the established value system of society through the use of age old tales deeply rooted in the same value system is characteristic feature of Girish Karnad's whole literary creation and this particular play as well. The play does not only deal with the existential issues regarding the existence of man in this universe, but also offers a critique of Vedic social set up which upholds the social evils like casteism, unequal treatment of women, the moral degradation of priest class, fatal greed for power and fame etc.

Tughlaq, Dreams of Tipu Sultan and Tale-Danda are famous historical plays by him. Dreams of Tipu Sultan is a historical play about the relationship between Tipu Sultan and the British Government. The play also reveals the less known aspects of Tipu Sultan's personality through the depiction of his dreams in detail. Tale-Danda is a play written about Mandir and Mandal movements prevalent in India. So it is very relevant to touch upon the issue like discrimination on the basis of caste. The play goes back to the life of poet saint Basavanna of the twelfth century who was active in the city of Kalyan. The importance of being Girish Karnad lies in the fact that although he goes back to ancient sources to conceive his plays but his themes can be completely identified with present socio-political and cultural concerns. His plays do not only present the Indian values and culture by referring back to our age old treasure of mythology and history but also give a critique of orthodox value system of India.

This chapter deals with famous historical play of Girish Karnad, titled Tughlaq. Tughlaq is a play woven around Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq who ruled medieval India from 1324 to 1351. The play goes back to the phase of Islamic imperialism in India known as the sultanate period (twelfth to early sixteenth century), with which the political authority of Hindu rulers came to an end and Islam was introduced as a major force on political and cultural fronts. Karnad refers back to historians like Ishwari Prasad and Zia-ud-Din Barani's text Tarikh-i-FiruzShahito portray his central character. The play presents a protagonist who has been constructed by medieval Muslim and nineteenth-century British historiographers as an exceptionally intelligent yet incapable ruler who caused his own ruin with his impractical decisions and vision that was much ahead of his times. The play is full of political intrigues and manoeuvrings to establish and maintain the power to rule the majority of masses. The existential issues like the absurdity and uselessness of life, religion and power are also touched upon in the play.

Tughlaq reigned twenty six years and has since then inspired so much attention and criticism, that perhaps no other king was able to evoke. His reign seems like a tale of badly executed political and religious policies which tore his vast empire

into pieces. Once an ambitious and powerful emperor, having the dream to establish India as a united nation, he was reduced to a tyrant ruler near the end of his reign and became known as mad Muhammad for his whimsical political decisions. Although a historical personality, but his controversial decisions and personality has drawn so much attention of historians, social critics and common people that many fictional and mythical connotations are associated with him and he has acquired the stature of a legendary figure.

He came to throne after Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq and was known for his controversial political policies which caused the ruin of his empire. Mohammad Habib and K. A. Nizami give the account of major upheavals of his reign as well as his major political decisions in his book entitled A Comprehensive History of India (Vol. five). To fulfil the vision of political integrity of India, soon after succession he won the Kalanaur and Peshawar, soon followed by rebellion by Bahauddin Gurshap who was later executed. He took two major important political decisions in this time period which were severely condemned. He ordered to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and introduced the token currency in 730/1328-29. This token currency was withdrawn after three years due to major collapse in economy of country. In 1333, failure of monsoons caused famine which continued for a long period resulting in the imposition of extra taxes on the peasants of Doab. Plague worsened the condition and half of army of Sultan was swept away with this. The last years of his reign were marked with endless rebellions, out of which rebellion of his close friend and confident Ain-ul-Mulk, rebellion of Shihab-ud-din Nusrat Khan and rebellion of 'Sadah' Amirs are important. The closing years of his reign were directed towards dealing with revolt of Sadah Amirs which paved the way for emergence of independent Bahmani kingdom. The last years of his life were full of utter pessimism, gloom and frustration resulted from shaking of his ambitious dreams. He breathed his last on 20th march; 1351. Tughlaq is the account of last years of reign of Tughlaq along with depiction of many historical characters, incidents and rebellions which are portrayed with historical accuracy flavoured with imaginative garnishing of the playwright. The playwright makes only a few changes in historical lines to make the play relevant in contemporary context. The important political decisions and incidents

like issuing token currency, shift of capital from Delhi to Daultabad, rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk, rebellion of Shihab-ud-Din, rebellion of Amirs, abolition of jiziyah from Hindus and some historical characters like Zia-ud-Din Barani, Ain-ul-Mulk, Najib, Sheikh Imam-ud-Din are portrayed with some fictional expansions. The comic pair of Aazam and Aziz is purely a work of author's imagination.

Aparna Dharwadker writes in her essay titled "Reading Girish Karnad's Tughlaq" figures out that history of Tughlaq came to us through two sources: medieval Muslim historian like Amir Khusrau(1253-1325) and Barani (d. 1357) and through the works of British Orientalists historians (46). She claims that Peter Hardy is first to point out these two levels on which the history of Tughlaq is shaped. Barani, who is a famous historian of Tughlaq's reign as well as an important character in the play, portrayed Tughlaq in his famous work Tarikh-I- FirozShahi as an intelligent, yet incapable ruler who caused his own ruin by his clumsy plans. Zia-Ud-Din-Barani lived in court of Tughlaq for seven years, had written about him in his book named Tarikh-I- Firoz Shahi that there are two major factors which caused the ruin of Sultan Tughlaq:

A series of misguided 'projects' that effected the ruin of the sultan's empire, and a series of rebellions in the provinces that indicated that the minds of all men, high and low, were disgusted with their ruler. (qtd. in Dharwadker 44)

Dharwadker points out that the history written by Barani is shaped by his religious orthodoxy as he belongs to the class of Ulemas. The overall purpose of Barani is, as Hardy comments "to educate Muslim sultans, and in particular Sultans of Delhi, in their duty towards Islam" (qtd.in Dharwadker 48). His critical judgement towards historical decisions of Tughlaq to shift capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and abolishing of Jiziyah from Hindus is certainly flavoured with his orthodox perspective.

Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami in their book titled A Comprehensive History of India (Vol. five) strengthen this observation by calling Barani "reactionary in politics and a traditionalist in religious matters" (498). Barani explains the indiscriminate cruelty of Tughlaq as the result of his lack of religious faith. Another perspective we get is of the British historians who used the political turmoil and

instability during Sultanate period as a tool to justify the necessity of British colonial rule. British historian Henry Elliot's comment from his book *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India* is worth quoting here:

We should no longer hear bombastic baboos, enjoying under our government the highest degree of personal freedom and many more political privileges than were ever conceded to conquered nation, rant about patriotism and degradation of their personal freedom. (qtd. in Dharwadker48)

The cruelty and barbarism of Tughlaq is severely criticized by Barani as unprincipled and un-Islamic and British historians take it as a plea to justify their own colonial rule in India. The Indian historians after independence like Mohammad Habib and K.A. Nizami have portrayed Tughlaq in much positive light. Nizami comments that Elliot's presentation of medieval India has "blackened the Indian past to glorify British present and used medieval Indian history as an instrument for implementation of the formula, of counterpoise of Indian against Indians" (qtd. in Dharwadker 49). K. A. Nizami and Mohammad Habib, in *A Comprehensive History of India* (Vol. five) call Tughlaq essentially a soldier who spend most of his life in battlefield and emphasize the necessity to scrutinize his policies by considering this fact. His decision of shifting his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is praised by calling it an effort to achieve the political and cultural unity of India, as "from Delhi to Daulatabad it was now one world" (491). Other features of his rule like cordial international relations with neighbouring kingdoms and use of counterfeit currency of copper are praised as progressive and farsighted decisions.

Tughlaq is a multi-faceted creation which can be read on various levels. The play is a powerful depiction of existential persona of once a mighty Sultan whose condition deteriorates to the extent that his subjects start to recognise him as mad Muhammad. On historical level, play fictionalizes the ups and down Tughlaq and his entire kingdom went through. But to view the play merely as an account of last years of Tughlaq's reign will not be justice with the writing. The depiction of some important historical happenings like the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad,

abolishing of jiziyah from Hindus, rebellions of Ain-ul-Mulk and other courtiers transcends the temporal and spatial boundaries and emerges as a critique of functioning of present state stuffed with endless intrigues and politics which finally leads towards the deteriorating condition of common masses along with existential crisis for the persons at the peak of the power. Parminder Singh in his article “Semiotics of History and Literature: Girish Karnad’s Tughlaq” writes:

The text of the play . . . develops into a discourse about the dialectical interplay between the absolute power of the state and the existentialist destiny of the persona of the ruler. In this way the discourse turns to be an analytical comment upon the formation, intricacies and the problematic of the modern state (63).

Instead of becoming a chronological sequencing of the reign of a great king, the play emerges as the fictional reconstruction not only of his political and religious policies and their effects but also of his existential persona. Girish Karnad deals with the historical theme of the play in a very political and contemporary manner. The contemporary concerns of the writer reflect through the comprehension and presentation of historical reality. Tughlaq can be better comprehended as a play concerned with the times in which it is written, than the time period it talks about. At literal level, the play is indeed a tale of a much discussed and controversial king but the significance of the play can only be analysed by viewing it flavoured with the historical realities of the time of its author. Tughlaq is a text which although deals with historical time period of sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq but also applicable to the contemporary political situation of our country. As Dharwadker also suggests:

Tughlaq invokes significant elements in modern Indian political and cultural experience by presenting an ostensibly un-polemical, self-sufficient historical narrative that a contemporary audience can apply to its own situation. (47)

As already mentioned, the play came in 1965 in Kannada, and in 1970 in English, the time period when Indian masses were disillusioned by the unfulfilled

promises of Indian leadership after independence. The hopes and desires given by newly found independence were shattering slowly. It is noteworthy that this was the time period when “the state had already begun to show its repressive tentacles after a period of about two decades known for its supposedly idealistic and democratic thrust” (Singh Semiotics 63). The play uses the narrative of Tughlaq by subtly giving a parallel to post-independence Indian scenario. This continuity between past and present, which should be the essential feature of a historical writing, is successfully kept intact by the writer. History is revisited from a contemporary perspective in this play. Dharwadker writes “In Western conceptions of historical drama, the synchronic force of parallels seems to depend on a sense of "the continuity between past and present” which Herbet Lindenberger calls a "central assumption in history plays of all times and styles" (47). So, Tughlaq can only be deciphered by putting it in the social, political and economic milieu of the period of its creation. The play is not very obvious comment on Tughlaq’s reign or an exact parallel of contemporary era but portrayal of the crudeness, cruelty and sharp plotting of modern states. This precisely is the element that frees it from boundaries of time and space. The play, although is a depiction of time period of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq but also very truly applicable to the present contemporary political situation of our country. Dharwadker writes:

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The decade of sixties is peculiar for betraying the underlying stability of Indian economic and political system. This decade gave concentrated expression to the disillusionment, dissatisfaction and anger among the masses against the established system and its representatives. The unchallenging rule of Congress party in centre as well as states except Kerala, up to that time, in a way symbolized the relative stability of political system. But in 1967, Congress party was defeated in assembly election of many states. It was an indication of disillusionment among masses about Nehruvian

claims about independent India. Secularism, democracy and socialism were watchwords of this phase which were later incorporated in Indian constitution itself. But the underlying reality of society was very much different. The dreams of a developed and prosperous country were shattered. For the audience of 1960's, the play was a political allegory of Nehru era that ended in 1967. Tughlaq is repeatedly compared to Nehru who is known as an idealist and visionary politician but whose dreams of prosperous India are not fulfilled. After a decade the play was also compared to very intelligent politician Indira Gandhi who is condemned for her imposition of emergency in 1975. It will be better to say that the play is concerned less with specific political figure but with general Indian political atmosphere.

There is not only one folded comparison between Tughlaq and Nehru or any other politician, but the entire play is quite comparable to the political, social and economic instability of India in decade of sixties, which has ironically continued till this age. Thus, this work of art acquires universal dimensions and becomes a satire on repressive state power. The play becomes an ironic commentary upon vision of India as a democratic, secular, tolerant republic. For which playwright goes back to the history of a Muslim king of thirteenth century popularly known as the educated fool. While talking about the contemporaneity of the work, Karnad rightly said:

What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. That fact that here was the most idealistic, most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi. . . and one of the greatest failures also. And within the span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone into pieces. . . . And I felt in early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction-the twenty year period seemed to me very much striking parallel. In a sense, the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that guided the movement for independence, and the coming to terms with cynicism and realpolitik. (qtd. in Nayak 156)

The reality of India of sixties was diametrically opposite to the promises and dreams of a self-sufficient, developing and affluent nation. There was poverty, hunger, diseases, unemployment and communal drifts resulting in the wide spread resentment and disillusionment among the masses. Rudder Dutt and K.P.M. Sundaram give some statistical information about the inflation during the period in their book Indian Economy. During 1961-1966, the rise in price of food stuffs was over 40%, in cereals it was over 45% and in pulses it was over 70%.the price position during third five year plan (1961-66) deteriorated badly (515).Years of 1965-66 witnessed serious famine conditions all over the India. Next two years were years of acute inflation. India has to import food from foreign countries. The condition of Indian economy was so fragile that it had to devalue its currency in mid-sixties under heavy pressure which had adverse implications on economy. This economic and political condition later on led the country towards many agitations by farmers, students and labourers. The armed peasant revolt of Naxalbari reached its peak in second half of sixties during which peasants were united around the slogan of “land to land tillers” against the feudal lords. This peasant revolt was shortly followed by Srikakulam and other armed struggles. These agitations were brutally suppressed by state using utmost violence. Tughlaq has successfully captured this atmosphere of chaos, dissatisfaction, disillusionment, political and economic instability, state repression culminating into agitations and revolts of masses.

The play is divided into thirteen scenes. The play opens with the announcement of compensation for a Brahmin whose land was confiscated wrongly. Later this Brahmin is exposed as a Muslim washer man named Aziz. The play progresses with the declaration of Sultan to move the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Scene Second introduces some major characters like Barani (historian of his court) Najib (vizier) and step mother of Tughlaq along with the news of rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk and Sheikh Imam-ud-Din. The real face of Tughlaq and other courtiers is exposed with much crafted murder of Imam-ud-din and defeat of Ain-ul-mulk and other Amirs along with Shihab-ud-din. Next part of the play deals with the shift of capital, the sufferings of subjects on the way and autocracy of bureaucrats. The last scenes of the play portray the assassination of Ghiyas-ud-din by Aziz, orders of death

penalty for stepmother who is accused of planned assassination of Najib and grim pitiable condition of sultan. The kingdom is full of lawlessness, chaos and endless rebellions to which the Sultan is unable to suppress.

The play is a commentary upon certain issues like the repression of state to exert and maintain its power, the alliance of religion and politics, the moral degradation of personalities in power, the dissatisfaction of masses with leadership. As the play opens, in the very first scene the commentary on the leadership begins. There appear contradictory opinions about the Sultan. In the first scene people criticize their ruler for posing to be secular. They mock their Sultan who wants to be one with his subjects. They suspiciously interrogate his act of abolishing jiziya for Hindus. A Brahmin wins the case against Sultan himself and is given due compensation. But this secularism of Sultan is suspected by common masses, even a sentry ironically announces to the crowd gathered to hear the judgement “the show’s over! Go home” (10). This is very surprising that neither Hindus nor Muslims are satisfied with this decision. As the play progresses, the judgement of his subjects comes true and his mask of secularism evaporates. With the progress of the play this dissatisfaction of the masses with ruler and his policies goes on increasing. In second scene, there is news of riots in Kanpur. This dissatisfaction reaches its culmination in the eleventh scene which is a heart rendering portrayal of hunger and disease. The vivid portrayal of deteriorating condition of masses is drawn in the conversation of some men:

Third Man: he says the roads are linked with skeletons. A man starved to death right in front of his eyes. In Doab, people are eating barks of the trees, he says. Yes, and women have to make do with skins of horses. (82)ⁱ

The orders of Sultan to vacate Delhi and to shift Daulatabad adds immensely to the miseries of his subjects, as hundreds of people died on the way due to heat, long distance, lack of arrangements starvation and dishonest officials.

This dissatisfaction is not only visible in common masses but also in influential people Ulemas and Amirs of the kingdom. Rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk and Sheikh Imam-ud-din, which clearly hints that everything is not fine in the kingdom and there is resentment and dissatisfaction with the king. This dissatisfaction reaches its peak when some amirs and Shihab-ud-din conspire to kill the Sultan apparently because they find his policies un-Islamic. But their real intention behind the conspiracy is to usurp the power and to be more influential in Delhi. The comment of an Amir, justifying the proposed assassination of Sultan is Important here:

Why is he taking us to Daulatabad? Have you wondered about that? I'll tell you. He wants to weaken the Amirs. You see, we are strong in Delhi. This is where we belong. But Daulatabad is a Hindu city and we'll be helpless there. We will have to lick his feet. (39)

The play is full of political manoeuvrings to seize the right to rule. Tughlaq himself is a surprising intelligent craftsman of these conspiracies. In the second scene of the play, Tughlaq is rejoicing over finding a new move in chess. This is artistic indication of the playwright towards the chess like political moves and counter moves of Tughlaq and his Amirs. Tughlaq proves his unmatched skill to defeat his enemy by crafting murder of Sheikh Imam-ud-din and defeat of Ain-ul-Mulk. Sheikh Imam-ud-din, realizing that he is entrapped by Sultan acknowledges his remarkable capacity to conspire, "you know, Sultan, I'm just beginning to understand why they say you are the cleverest man in the world" (30). The dual standards and cunningness of Sultan is uncovered and situation becomes very dramatic when he announces a day of mourning in honour of Sheikh and says, "When men like Him die, it's sin to be alive" (28). Commenting upon the extent of crudity of political moves of Sultan, Barani says, "Oh God! Aren't even the dead free from your politics?" (53). The idealistic presentation of motives by Amirs and the secular, pro-people image of Sultan splinters and the perspective shifts to the exposition of real motives and purposes. The initial declarative and ideal speeches fill the atmosphere of play with irony as their real purposes lay bare. The real face of power politics is unmasked with the growth of the play. The world of politics emerged as, in the words of Barani, a "market

of the corpses” where even father and brother can be sacrificed to reach the throne(66). His most trustworthy courtiers and friends like Ain-ul-Mulkare proved to be traitors. In his conversation to Barani, he says with frustration, “All those persons in whom I reposed my trust have turned out to be traitors. What is happening?”(185). A very ironic example of this disguised evil is that of Aziz, a Muslim dhobi, who is very important and completely fictional character of the play. He is introduced in first scene, disguised as a Brahmin to obtain some monetary benefits by appealing against the Sultan himself. Later he kills and takes the place of Ghiyas-ud-din to obtain royal favours. Power is a licensed evil for Aziz. For him there is no use of raping a woman out of lust, in his views, “first one must have power and authority from the Sultan or high officers. . . . Then there is some meaning in raping” (69). For him, the definition of real king is “One should be able to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed. That’s called “class”- that’s being a real king” (69).

Some critics consider Aziz as Tughlaq’s alter ego as both play different roles and hide their real faces in masks. In this context P. Ramamoorthy says in his article “He That Playeth the Sultan: A Study of Tughlaq”:

The various roles played by Aziz-that of a Brahmin, of a victim, and more significantly that of Khalif-are pointers to the fact that Aziz converts life into a stage and goes on with his role-playing. Aziz is Muhammad’s “shadow”, his “other”. (159)

Like Aziz, Sultan is also an evil in disguise as there is widening gap between his hidden agendas and his promises of a just and liberal rule. Very dramatically the mask of a benevolent king split away and his real face of a tyrant, ambitious ruler comes to light. When his real identity is exposed, Aziz rightly claims to be true disciple of Sultan in the world of politics:

But may I say that since Your Majesty came to the throne, I have been your most devout servant. I have studied every order, followed every

instruction, considered every measure of your majesty's with the greatest attention. I insist I am Your majesty's true disciple. (93)

Seeing the reflection of his own misdeeds, Sultan himself feels unable to punish Aziz and forgives him, although he knows that he is acting "like a fool" (83). What is very crudely visible in Aziz is subtly hinted at in the personality of Tughlaq.

Another important theme in the play is alliance of politics and religion. Religious and political discourses are completely fused with each other and used to further their mutual objectives. Religion is merely an instrument in the hands of Sultan or his opponents to serve their narrow interests. Sheikh Imam-ud-din, who initially appears as ideological upholder of Islamic values and principles, is later exposed as an emblem of this alliance. The close analysis of conversation between Sultan and Tughlaq in chapter third reveals him as the mouth piece of Amirs and Ulemas. He says to Sultan, "But if one fails to understand what the Koran says, one must ask the Sayyids and the Ulema. Instead you have put the best of them behind bars in the name of justice" (26). Parminder Singh says about this acquisition of the Sheikh, in his essay:

This is not an innocently made charge against Muhammad. This is what his religiously oriented speeches at Kanpur and, as their aftermath, massacre of the innocents and burning of the city also stand for. Even for a justification of the later plans of the nobles to execute Mohammad, it is Sheikh's religious being which is made use of. (72)

The fact that speeches of the Sheikh results in communal riots in Kanpur proves him unconcerned about the welfare of masses. He deliberately raises the voice against Sultan to create an envious atmosphere in the kingdom. But Muhammad, cunning and clever as he is, succeeds in sabotaging the schemes of the Sheikh and uses him as a puppet to suppress the rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk.

After the shift of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, famine adds to the misery of people. Failing to provide the bread and butter, Sultan offers prayers to the starving masses. In eleventh scene the utter dissatisfaction of masses with Sultan is visible

through the conversation of some common men. On the royal announcement that public prayers, which were initially banned will be started again, a person remarks:

First Man: Prayers! Prayers! Who wants prayers now?

Second Man: Ask them to give us some food.

First Man: There's no food. Food is only in the palace. It's prayers for us.

Second Man: The Amirs have food.

First Man: We starve and they want us to pray. They want to save our souls. (82)

Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq cleverly arranges the sermons of Aziz who is in disguise of Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad to give spiritual justification of sufferings of his masses i.e. sufferings are the obvious and just outcome of sins. Sultan delivers a speech to his subjects while introducing the Sheikh:

We have waited long and our sins have grown and like shadows clung to our feet. They have made us dumb and have deprived us of our prayers. Our sins have become the fiery sun and have burnt our crops. (84)

In Tughlaq prayer is used, as Anantha Murthy points out, as leitmotiv of the play. Prayer is reduced to mockery when Sultan himself assassinates his father and brother during the sacred time of prayers. But later to win the trust of his subjects and to establish himself as a religious king, who is very genuine towards the doctrines of Islam, he makes prayers compulsory for every Muslim. The situation becomes more ironic when his courtiers also choose the occasion of prayers to kill their Sultan under the name of Islam. These persons of noble lineage wish to launch a holy war against Tughlaq under the name of Islam. The presence of holy man like Sheikh Shams-ud-din assures the credibility of their motive. But the whole situation takes an ironic turn with the decision of assassination of Sultan at the time of compulsory prayers. The readers start to suspect the real motives of conspirators. The comment of Anantha Murthy, in the introduction to Three Plays, about this incident is noteworthy:

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 violated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. (141)

Sultan banned compulsory prayers after the incident and prayers are reduced to mockery when Sultan again restores the right to pray with the arrival of Ghiyas-ud-din to give people spiritual justification of their sins.

This is a very well-known fact that politics and religion are fused with each other even in contemporary politics. This allegorical depiction of the modern concerns is not restricted only to the present political atmosphere but dates back to the period of colonialism. British rulers shrewdly played a game of 'divide and rule' and formed a communal drift to strengthen their rule in India. Political parties have always exploited religious sentiments of masses to strengthen their vote bank. The consequence of this is the emergence of corrupt and identity politics full of all sort of shameless intrigues. The incidents like demolition of Babri mosque, Delhi anti-Sikh Riots and Gujarat riots are some recent examples of this crude use of religion for serving political purposes. Punjab has also witnessed the agony of fundamentalist politics more than a decade. Some Hindu and Sikh religious fundamentalist parties are still actively influencing the political scenario of the country.

Aparna Dharwadker draws a parallel between the character of Tughlaq and contemporary Indian Politics:

The fall of Indian democracy is marked by many incidents like imposition of emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975, the problem of Sikh and Hindu fundamentalism particularly in northern states, assassination of Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi etc. Tughlaq offers the idealistic vision of Nehru, crude expression of power of Indira Gandhi, the narrow anti-people motives of religious fundamentalist leaders in the character of Tughlaq. (44)

Karnad's play uses the narrative of Tughlaq by subtly giving a wonderful parallel to post-independence Indian scenario.

Tughlaq is not only about historical and political tale of endless violence, manoeuvrings, murders and betrayals but also a psychological portrayal of a monarch and his existential crisis which deepens towards the end of the play. This work is a complex rendering of ideas of a king and his final crisis ridden situation in which he stands alone at the height of his power which is actually hollow from within. The crisis ridden situation of once a powerful monarch hints towards the weak foundations of a social setup on which the empire of Tughlaq is built. The monarch, once so powerful and ambitious reaches to a dead end in complete exhaustion at the end of the play. One of the major concerns of Karnad in exploring the history of Muhammad- bin - Tughlaq is to probe into his transformation from an idealist emperor into a tyrant ruler. His journey starts from a ruler “who is not afraid to be human” and invites people “to confide their worries in him” (15), ends in popularizing himself as mad Muhammad and “the Lord of the skins”(87).The person in power is supposed to be vindictive, prejudiced and unjust to correspond with the basic instinct of power. Power, directed against the powerless majority of people, leaves no room for idealism, purity and equality. Tughlaq seems the helpless victim of his own endless aspirations as a monarch which led him towards not only a political but moral and ethical crisis as well. Barani, revealing the real face of politics, suggests Tughlaq to quit this “world of corpses”:

But you are a learned man, Your majesty, you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry. . . .that’s where you belong Your majesty, in the company of learned man. Not in the market of corpses. (66)

Tughlaq's obsession with his failures and his own guilt has caused so much confusion that he offers his starving subjects prayers instead of food and refuses to punish Aziz even after the revelation of his severe crimes. Tughlaq's madness and tyranny is the reflection of his powerlessness which he poses as power. His brutality is the result of his futile attempt to overcome the anguish arisen out of his shattered dreams. R.T.

Bedre and Meera Giram comment on the life of Tughlaq in their essay titled “Girish Karnad’s Tughlaq: a Study in Existentialism and The Absurd”:

The Sultan’s journey is from idealism to madness via alienation, frustration and cruelty. His readings of ideals reflected in his policies and behaviour present him as an alien threat to the time honoured and acceptable conventions of kingship of his time. His exercise of impartial justice and equal human treatment to the Hindus alienate him from the mainstream Muslim subjects and priesthood. He is called ‘an insult to Islam’. (np)

Tughlaq’s nostalgia for his youth, when he dreamt of India as a united nation, is evident from his long speech addressed to his young watchman:

Nineteen. Nice age! An age when you think you can clasp the whole world in your palm like a rare diamond. I was twenty one when i came to Daulatabad first, and built this fort. I supervised the placing of every brick in it and i said to myself, one day i shall build my own history like this brick by brick . . . suddenly a sentry called far from. “Attention! Attention!” And to that challenge the half burnt torch and half built gate fell apart.

No, Youngman, I don’t envy your youth. All that you have to face and suffer is still ahead of you. (64)

Repeatedly Tughlaq is made to realize the vast gulf between aspiration and fulfilment, ideal and reality. His cruelty and tyranny can be seen as vehicles to help him to overcome his feeling of alienation and sense of absurdity. He is not only the subject of social alienation but also of self alienation. Tughlaq is left alone in condition of insomnia, in the last scene of play. He is completely exhausted and falls asleep. His conversation with Barani, which is the last dialogue of Tughlaq in the play, is significant to quote here:

I am suddenly feeling tired. And sleepy. For five years sleep had avoided me and now suddenly it's flooding back. Go, Barani. But before you go- pray for us (98).

Rajesh Sharma compares Tughlaq with Nietzsche in his article titled "Girish Karnad's Tughlaq: A Nietzschean Enigma". Both were ahead of their times. Tughlaq wants to reshape the history and seeks redemption in history. But he becomes the mere instrument of history, instead of making history his instrument. To be the architect of history is impossible. Hence, when Tughlaq seeks solace in history, he finds himself reduced to nothing. His passion to offer a secular rule to his subjects is an attempt to rediscover his lost spiritual vision. But this vision has broken down when he encounters the reality.

Alpna Saini offers another angle to view the subjectivity of Tughlaq in context of the formative historical situation as the political ideas of Tughlaq are way ahead of his times and his Amirs and subjects fail to recognize his motives and constantly suspect him. The play is not only about reading recent history in the light of the period of Tughlaq but also about the nature of subjectivity. She writes in her book *Subjectivity as a Locus of Conflicts in Girish Karnad: A Discussion of His Plays*:

The relationship between subjective consciousness and history is complex and dialectical. We have to consider the historical circumstances in which Tughlaq's thinking is embedded. His subjective consciousness and the circumstances of history are inextricably interconnected. Perhaps it is the problematic relation between two that what he thinks and where he finds himself do not match.(11)

The decisions of Tughlaq to replace silver and gold currency with copper ones, to abolish jiziya from Hindus, to shift the capital to Daulatabad to give the message of Hindu Muslim unity are some decisions of Tughlaq which are much ahead of his times and arouses the suspicion of his subjects and courtiers as well. Most of his political plans prove utopian, visionary and imaginary, end up in complete failure and cause untold sufferings to his masses. Thus, Tughlaq of Karnad experiences social

and personal alienation, partly because of his over ambitious nature and partly because he is at the top of a social-political system which is falling from within its own foundations.

Through Tughlaq, Girish Karnad has brought to readers a bygone era of history through his unmatched power of imagination. Far from being a factual representation of history, play is full of artistic imagination and creative insight. Through the historical tales, Tughlaq converses with the present political conditions in India. The past is presented through political scenario of present and the present is to be understood through past.

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ⁱ All textual quotes from: Girish Karnad's Collected Plays: Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Bali: The Sacrifice, Naga-Mandala Volume 1

Chapter Three

Reinterpretation, Exploration and Demythising of Myth in *Krishna*

Reinterpretation, Exploration and Demythising of Myth in *Krishna*

The oldest civilization of India is a beautiful amalgam of diverse cultures and religions that have enriched Indian mythology and history endlessly. Writers are revisiting this old treasure to portray the continuation between past and present by transcending the boundaries of time and space. This is the reason that many great Indian writers have used our age old tales in their literary creations. The prominent feature of recent Indian Theatre is the use of Indian themes and tales along with the western style and techniques of writing. Several modern playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Mahesh Dattani, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad are examples of this phenomenon. In Punjabi drama, Swarajbir is a prominent playwright who has profoundly exhausted Indian mythology and history in his plays. His works like *Krishna*, *Dharam Guru* and *Medani* are mythical in origin, but *Shayri* is a play which refers back to our history. Swarajbir is less concerned with the presentation of myth and history as such, but he focuses more on the reinterpretation of mythology and history from contemporary perspectives. He decodes the prevailing myths and gives them new meanings and insights. In the field of technique, he successfully experiments with the fusion of poetry and prose in his plays which is very innovative for Punjabi theatre. He has emerged as a playwright with immense capabilities and a profound literary style of writing. His intellectual treatment of mythical and historical themes and very subtle and poetic literary style is gaining rapid recognition in Punjabi literary circles.

Dharam Guru is the second play of Swarajbir, although published before his first play *Krishna*. The play exploits the myth of Prince Satyavrat who is popularly known as Trishanku. This myth of Trishanku is a part of Ramayana, Vishnu Purana and other ancient scriptures. This myth is about Prince Satyavrat who is the son of king of Ayudhya, named Triyavaran. Satyavrat falls in love with a Brahmin girl named Chitrlekha. But her father refuses to marry her with the prince and as a result Satyavrat elopes with her on the day of her marriage. Rajyaguru Vashishth calls a Dharma Sabha to punish Satyavrat. He deprives him from all his royal rights and banishes him from the kingdom. Satyavrat goes to live in a forest with his wife

Chitrlekha. Here, he meets the family of Rishi Vishwamitra who is suffering from starvation. He kills the beloved cow of Rishi Vashishth to give food to starving children. Rishi Vashishth again calls a Dharma Sabha to punish Satyavrat for this. A very heated argument between Rishi Vashishth and Rishi Vishwamitra takes place about the real meaning of Dharma and the concept of Karma. In this council, Satyavrat is freed from all allegations and his right to be the king is restored. The play deals with an important issue of blending of politics and religion. Politics and religion were fused with each other not only in Vedic age but this phenomenon is also prevalent in the present India. Religion interferes very strongly not only in political but also the social sphere of life. Religion is not merely to attain the spiritual satisfaction but used as a tool to sustain certain socio economic order in the society.

His first play Krishna is a play based on the amalgam of mythical and historical character of Krishna. Another myth that is used in the play is the episode of Mahabharata in which Khandava jungle was burnt down by Krishna and Arjuna. The play is a sharp political comment on power grabbing mentality of ruling class which results in intrigues to secure the throne. The religion is used very cunningly to create an illusion that all sufferings of masses are divinely conceived. Shayri is a historical play of Swarajbir with some fictional expansion. The play is about the first Sufi poetess of Punjabi language Peero Preman. The play gives a beautiful sketch of her life, her craving for love and real meaning of life. The play is the story of revolt of Peero against patriarchy and orthodox value system of society which does not allow a woman to express herself. Medani is another wonderful play of Swarajbir which is although not completely mythical like his other plays but the myth of Medani is used as the background to present the clash between the pure and selfless love of Mandeep and her mother's aspirations to rise in the world of politics.

History and mythology is referred to probe into the present social, political and cultural scenario. The sympathies of the playwright are clearly on the side of underdogs of the society. The issues like the degradation of personalities with power which is concentrated in a few hands, the plight of marginalized and Dalit section of

society, condition of women, the poverty and hunger etc. are touched upon by the playwright.

Hailed as the masterpiece of the playwright, Krishna is the first literary creation of Swarajbir. The playwright goes back to age old myth of Krishna to conceive his play. The whole play revolves around Krishna who is known as a beautiful notorious child, charming lover, mighty king and incarnate Hindu God. Another myth that is used in the play is episode of Mahabharata in which Khandava jungle was burnt by Krishna and Arjuna. This act of violence is referred to in Adiparva of Mahabharata. In original myth, this act is explained as necessary to cure the indigestion of God of fire caused by the sinful deeds of tribesman. Later Pandavas made their beautiful palace of Indraprastha on the land acquired by this vandalism. This vandalism is much praised as the act of bravery and there are elaborated references as to how Krishna weaved a dense net of arrows to prohibit the rain fall, how Arjuna and Krishna do not let anyone escape from the fire.

The perspectives of Krishna's personality have changed with time. Swarajbir himself writes in his introduction to his play, "In the present play I have accepted Krishna as an amalgam of historical and mythical heroes" (9). Krishna is the most celebrated deity of Indian mythology. His popularity is not surpassed by any other Indian Hindu God or Goddess. The mythical character of Krishna as it is perceived and worshipped today has two prominent aspects or phases of life which are surprisingly very different from each other. Swarajbir also draws the attention of readers towards the fact in his introduction to the play that popular myth of Krishna is a combination of two folk characters. He is portrayed as an ordinary cattle herder and flute player in the first phase of his life and the mighty king of Dwarka in the second phase of his life.

The important scriptures discussing Krishna's story are the Mahabharata, the Harivamsa¹, the Bhagavata Purana and the Vishnu Purana. Swarajbir acknowledges in his introduction to the play that he has exhausted all these sources to portray the character of Krishna. John Dowson in his book A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion outlines the myth of Krishna as he is worshipped today.

Dowson is a noted scholar of Hinduism who has taught in India for several years. He is also the author of works like History and Literature, History of India as told by its own Historians. The brief outline of Krishna's myth based on Dowson's accounts is as follow:

Krishna is said to be the eighth incarnation of lord Vishnu. This hero, around whom a huge mass of legend and fable has gathered, probably lived in the Epic age, when the Hindus had not advanced far beyond their early settlements in North West. Krishna was born in Yadava vansh to Vasudeva and Devaki who was the sister of King Kansa, Raja of Bhoj. His childhood days were spent in Gokul and Vrindavana where he defeated Indra and Naga Kaliya. Krishna killed his maternal uncle Kansa at Mathura. He fought from the side of Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war, after which Gandhari cursed him that his tribe would be killed in family warfare. He emerged as the King maker and chief strategist of the Kurukshetra war. Krishna drove out his people from Mathura to Dwarka in fear of king Jarasandha. In Dwarka, the curse of Gandhari caused Krishna's friends and relatives to kill each other in family warfare. Krishna himself was killed by Jara, a low cast forest dweller (160-168).

Literally Krishna may mean two things: it could either mean "Black" or originating from verb "Krish" it could mean "one who attracts". Black could either be associated with what is negative/unjust/wrong or in another sense, black colour is associated with sensuality and attraction which also goes with its other literal meaning, that is, "one who attracts". But in the case of the present text, the former aspect of the literal meaning comes across more vividly than the latter which only forms the basis of one scene in which Krishna repents the loss of purity. On the other hand, Khandava could literally mean breaking into khands or parts. From this perspective, since Krishna opposes the breaking into parts of his kingdom, he may be considered as emerging a positive figure as opposed to Bheels.

The first reference to Krishna occurs in Rig-Veda in context of his enmity with Aryans. As the name Krishna itself indicates, he is associated with pre-Aryans or Dasayus. D.D. Kosambi verifies the fact in his book titled Myth and Reality that black skin of Krishna is the symbol of his association with pre Aryans and the enmity

between Aryans and pre Aryans (16). Krishna is referred in Rig-Veda in the context of his warfare with Lord Indra who represents the Aryan God in Rig-Veda. Krishna is the Asura in Rig-Veda who is defeated by Lord Indra (Dowson 160). This might be taken as the symbol of victory of Aryans on pre-Aryan people. As D.D.Kosambi says “the legend of his enmity to Indra reflects in the Rig-Veda the historical struggle of the dark pre Aryans against the marauding Aryans” (24). After that, the first detailed study of Krishna is found in Chhandogya Upanishad where Krishna is portrayed as the son of Devaki who is given moral lessons by Ghora Angirasa. Krishna of Chhandogya Upanishad is a great scholar. Mahabharata is a text which portrays a very detailed study of the second phase of Krishna’s life. Here Krishna emerges not as a cattle herder but the mighty king of city Dwarka. Krishna of Mahabharata is a politician, king maker and a strategist. He destroyed Bhoja kings in war, destroyed Gandharavs, vanquished sons of Nagnajit, killed Ekalavya and the demon Jambha (Dowson 162). Krishna was the charioteer of Arjuna in *Mahabharata*’s war but the role he played was undoubtedly more than a mere charioteer. As the chief strategist of the war, he proved himself an experienced politician who very cleverly proposes the spiritual justification of warfare in Bhagavad Gita. Bhagavad Gita is ancient verse scripture that is a part of Mahabharata. D.D. Kosambi opines that the ostensible moral of Bhagavad Gita is: “kill your brother, if duty calls, without passion; as long as you have faith in Me, all sins are forgiven” (Myth 18). He further says:

The song divine is sung for the upper classes by Brahmins and only through them for others, is clear. We hear from the mouth of Krishna himself: “for those who take refuge in Me, be they even of the sinful breeds such as women, vaisyas, and sudras...” That is, all women and all men of the working and producing class are defiled by their very birth, though they may in after-life be freed by their faith in the god who degrades them so casually in this one. (15)

Krishna justifies the prevailing social and political order of that age. Krishna is the most appropriate deity to deliver the moral lesson of Bhagavad Gita because of considerable popularity of Krishna since 4th century BC. Moreover the Vedic Gods,

like Indra were not suitable for the purpose because of their image of “Barbarous Aryan war leaders who could get drunk with their followers and lead them to victory” (Kosambi Myth 24). Krishna of Mahabharata is a political hero who can even disobey the chivalric notions of war and can think of all sorts of means to win the war.

The play deals with the second phase of Krishna’s life portrayed in Mahabharata. Although he is identified with pre Aryans in Rig-Veda who fought with Aryan Gods like Indra, but in Mahabharata he emerges as an Aryan king and warrior who not only gives the spiritual justification of war but also suggests the most treacherous ways to win the war. But very surprisingly the image of Krishna that is rooted deeply in folk psyche is not of a clever politician or God incarnate; it is his image of a cow herder God that gives him the status of legendary hero. Today Krishna is remembered and worshipped as a mischievous child stealing butter, a flute player romancing with Gopis at bank of river Jamuna and as a cattle herder, symbolising his oneness with nature. These aspects which earned Krishna enormous popularity and love of common masses are incorporated later in the scriptures like Harivamsa and Bhagavad Purana. Later these two images collaborated and formed an image of ‘one single divine figure’ (Kosambi Myth18). But very surprisingly these lately incorporated episodes do not remain merely as episodes but acquired the primary place. Poets of Bhakti movement contributed much to popularise this later image of Krishna through their very melodious poetry. Krishna of the present play is entrapped between his lost past and his present where he is the king and politician.

The myth as it occurs in the play deviates from the original myth on two points, Jara of Swarajbir is not an ordinary bheel who killed Krishna mistaking him as a deer and later repented his mistake but is an awakened leader of tribals who tears down the illusion of divinity of Krishna and assassinates him. The playwright presupposes that the fate of tribals of other forests must be the same as the tribals of Khandava Jungle. The play joins the threads of Khandava massacre with the assassination of Krishna which is not connected in the original myth. Jara is shown as the leader of bheels who survived Khandava massacre. The play deconstructs these myths and reinterprets them from contemporary perspectives. By exploiting the ancient

mythology and history, playwright touches issues like class struggle in society, emergence of states leaving behind the tribal societies, violent face of oppressive state power, bonding of religion and politics, religious discourses strengthening political hierarchies.

The play starts with a prologue or prastavna which is a subtle declaration of the theme of the play. The half awakened atmosphere of the stage indicates that the play is going to explore a narrative with ambiguities and obscurities. By calling the narrative of play “Badi purani baat” in the choral song the mythical setting of the play is put forth by author (32). The author himself speaks through the Sutradhar in the prologue. The prologue is important not only because it hints about the upcoming events of the play but also because it discusses the problems of exploring mythology. While specifically talking about the myth used in the play, Sutradhar also comments on some fundamental questions regarding myth. The fact that exploration of mythology is a fairly complicated task is clear from the following lines:

Eh badi purani baat ae mittra

Badi purani baat!

Keekan labhiye, keekan vidiye

Keekan paiye jhaat?

Eh badi purani baat . . . (32).

(It's an ancient tale my dear friend

A tale from highly primitive age

Where to begin

How to explore

And go through the layers

Not an easy job)ⁱⁱ

The questions related with origin, function and subject matter of the myth are dealt with in the prologue. Origin of myth deals with how myth takes birth, function of the myth deals with how and why myth persists but subject matter deals with the perspective from which we can study myth. Swarajbir touches all these questions regarding the origin, function and subject matter of myth in prologue.

Myth is perceived as the amalgam of reality of life and superstition by calling it “baat lokan di parlokan di, te ved puraan shlokan di” (32). Although mythology is the outcome of imagination of primitive man in the absence of rational scientific explanations, but this imagination of primitive man is not completely devoid of reality. It can better be perceived as the reflection of collective and unconscious psyche of masses at some particular period of time. Myth is deeply rooted in the reality of life and it goes on changing as the social reality changes. Through the Sutradhar of the play, playwright talks about dynamic nature of mythology and its social emergence by calling it a story of:

Mitti chon uthiyan moortan di

Ban banke mitiyan soortan di. (32)

(Rising faces grown from the soil

With features shaped to fade away)

Along with the real world, divine world and divine beings are also a part of myths. Mythology is not all about human world but it is perceived by the writer as “Baat aadam te bhagwan di, Pratakh di, anjaan di” (32). Divine and supernatural connotations of mythology make it a discipline difficult to study and to understand. The comprehension and understanding of mythology is compared with passing through a dark forest where nothing is clearly visible. Following conversation between old man and a young boy is worth quoting here:

Birdh: Phir Dwarka de sardaar, bhagwan de samne hi, ik dooje naal
bhid paye! Ghasmaan di ladaai hoi! lothan de dher lag gaye !

Munda: Aidan bhagwan de samne hoeya? Baba, ohna ne kuch na keeta? (33)

(Old Man: The lords of Dwarka Clashed among themselves, in front of Bhagwan Himself. It was a terrible fight. There were bundles of corpses lying here and there.

Boy: And it really happened in front of Bhagwan's eyes? Did he remain unmoved Baba?)

Mythology is full of paradoxes: the assassination of a God as against the belief of immortality of Gods. Although folk psyche worships God as immortal and possessor of divine powers but their myths propose the idea of a God who is assassinated by a human being. The theme of reinterpretation of mythology according to contemporary perspective is delicately declared by the playwright in introductory choral song

koi kive theek pehchaan kare?

Baat eh same de haan *kare!*"(33)

(How to decode, how to reshape

How to make the tale

Speak through the present?)

The mythical setting of the play negotiates with the contemporary reality and transcends the time period it belongs to.

In spite of all these issues, the play also gives the psychological portrayal of Krishna who is fictionalized as a person caught between the conflicts of his all-pervasive powers as mighty ruler of city Dwarka and his lost oneness with nature as a cattle herder and flute player. Although enjoying his endless powers as a king, Krishna still longs for his lost past which is very dear to his heart. The arrival of Gopal,

his childhood friend reveals the nostalgia of Krishna for his childhood days spent at Gokul. His conversation with Gopal is noteworthy here:

Yaadan ton kaun picha chhuda sakda hai Gopal ?...te fir bachpan di
mitarta...eh tan oh patang ae...jo saari umar jeeven de ambraan ch ud
di rehndi ae ! ehda rang kade fikka nai penda ! dor bhaven tutt jaye
...par eh patang...eh tan fer vi chete di dumel te tikki rehndi hai ! kisse
jhaule, kise mrigtrishna vang ! (44)

(Who can escape the memories Gopal and the childhood friendship? It's like a kite which flies in the skies of life! Its colour never fades away! It may lose its rope but even then it continues to fly over the horizons of memories. Sometimes like an illusion . . . sometimes like a mirage!)

This mirage of lost past haunts him again and again. The situation becomes very ironic when Krishna, in spite of his very visible longings for Gokula, decides to stay amidst the labyrinth of political maneuverings. He conspires callously to maintain his kingly powers; deliberately creates internal conflicts among his political opponents to reduce their power and commands to oppress the hunger riots broken out in the city with an iron hand. All his actions go contrary to his image of a divine being who is supposed to be above all these trivial worldly affairs. This image of Krishna emerging from the play shatters the fantasy of his divinity and he emerges in the play as nothing more than a commonplace king. Krishna of this phase is also not in harmony with the first phase of his life when he was one of the tribesmen of Gokula and the sharer of all their sorrows and happiness. This conflict of his personality intensifies and reaches its climax in the twelfth scene of this play which is more like a dream sequence. This scene is employed by the playwright as a dramatic device to reveal the fragmentation in the personality of Krishna. The scene depicts the confrontation between Kaali and Gwalan. Kaali symbolises oppressive state power and the inhuman destruction and devastation it causes. The brutal and dreadful face of Kaali reflects from these lines:

Vagge lahoo ghar ghar

Vagge vich dareaawan

Khappar peevan bhar bhar

Main vich ratt de nawaan (76)

(Its blood and blood flowing through the homes

flowing in the rivers

the buckets fulll drink

And take bath in blood.)

The death dance of Kaali in the battlefield, who is addressed as “zindagi di sauten” the play, is dreadfully devastating and horrible (73). In sharp contrast to the death dance of Kaali, there is selfless and pure love of Gwalan. She symbolises love in its purest form, without any trace of wickedness:

Nahi mere Keshav! Nahi! vekh! mere angaan ch udeek de phul mehake ne. merian akhaan ch umang de deeve jagde ne! merean hothan te teri chahat di name ae!(74)

(No! My dear Keshav! No! . . . Feel the fragrance of flowers in my limbs! See the lights of yearning in my eyes! Dear Keshav! see! There are drops of your longing on my lips!)

Gwalan personifies the past but Kaali is the personification of present and future of Krishna. The conflicting and tense atmosphere of the scene is successfully set by the playwright from the very first dialogue of the scene when Kaali calls Krishna her Rajkumar and Gwalan addresses him as Kanhaiya and Keshav. This tension grows with the progress of the scene and reaches its climax when Kaali overcomes Gwalan and takes a bewildered Krishna with her. Unable to escape the net woven by Kaali, entrapped Krishna even views sky as dull and lifeless. His loneliness haunts him:

Par eh akash aina peela kyon ae!...jive saare panchi udd gaye
hon!...jion srishthi chon saare rang khur gaye *hon!...main...main aina*
ikkalla kyon haan? (75)

(Why the sky is pale as if all the birds have disappeared? As if all the
colours of universe have lost their shine? Why do I feel so lonely?)

Krishna, the God incarnate and possessor of immense kingly powers, appears a
plaything in hands of Kaali. The mask of his divinity evaporates and the readers find
him unable to come out of the labyrinths of monarchy.

One of the important features of the play is the demythicisation of the divine
aura of Krishna as God incarnate. The hero of an epic like Mahabharata is portrayed
in unconventional light in the play. Like any other commonplace king he is utterly
unable to prove himself a successful king. His masses are starving and his political
opponents are conspiring against him. After being wounded with the arrow of Jara, a
dying Krishna tries to explain his defeat by calling it his own divine decision. But Jara
declines his claim of divinity and reduces his fate to the level of any ordinary person:

Tu change tarah janda hain Krishna koi nirna devi nirna nahi
hunda...har nirna manukhi nirna hai aad ton ant teek! (88)

(Krishna! You know very well no verdict is ever a divine verdict . . .
every verdict is human from beginning to the end)

He further says to Krishna:

Apne aap nu mahaprabhu akhwaun waale! Aad te ant sab de sanjhe
ne! main tan aina e janda ke mera arambh ik cheek naal hoye si te
mera ant vi ik cheek naal *hovega!* ...*te ehna dona de vichkar uljhiya*
mera jivan jis vich main jitt javanga jan haar *javanga!* ...*par ajj...ajj main*
jit ke ja rehan ! (88)

(Oh self-proclaimed God of Gods! Birth and end are common to all. I
only know that I was born with a shriek and am going to disappear with

a shriek. My life is a dilemma spread between these two shrieks. I may win or lose in life, but I am the winner of today!)

Krishna celebrates this victory of Jara over Krishna. Portrayed as an impressive warrior with dark complexion; Jara seems like a living black stone statue. Jara calls himself the progeny of the jungle which symbolises his complete identification with the tribal life. Jara who repents the assassination of Krishna in original myth, in this play unites the Aheers against Krishna and Arjuna and rejects their religious justification of Khandava massacre,

“...te chhal di att vekho! ...jinha ne aggan laiyan, kehar dhaiya...apne aap nu dev kahaunde ne! ...bolan da kautak vekho...oh manukh ho gaye...te asin rakhshas!...bolaan da krishma ...oh devte ho gaye te asin danav...!”

bolli...bolli tan ohna di baandi hai...marzi de bol marzi de shalok..jive chaho ghad lo..jive chaho sajjaa lo! (36)

(And see the extreme height of deception . . . those who did ignite the fire, the champions of calamity called themselves Gods. See the miracle of words . . . they are called men and we are known as rakshas! Such is the magic of words! They got established as Gods and we have been condemned as devils.

Poor language! Nothing more than a slave! It is their will that shapes words and shlokas according to their whims. They mould and present the words according to their wishes.)

He is well aware of the fact that religion and language are constructed discourses to serve the class of exploiters. He is a politically awakened leader of tribals who knows that to resist the oppression is the only way to survive. Fury and rage caused by tribal uprootment results in complete rejection of these discourses and a firm decision to get armed and fight back.

The play goes back to the phase when society was converting into a food producing society from a food gathering society. This phase is clearly marked with the brutal devastation of small tribes to acquire the land for agriculture. The time was marked with very prominent changes as large kingdoms were establishing and the time of small tribes was being left behind. RomilaThapar, in her book *The Early India*, draws attention towards the fact that with the decline of clan based society; the land which was initially cultivated by a clan was divided among smaller groups or families called kulas (121). A number of families together formed grama which is a word used for villages. The most capable man was elected the chief but later these elected chiefs started to enjoy some privileges over other members of society. These privileges later prepared a ground for immense power of kingship. The word king is derived from, as RomilaThapar suggests, a root which means “to shine” or “to lead” (120). She further says that change to kingship from the chiefs was linked with two phases:

There is first the performance of major sacrifices –yajnas- as discussed in later Vedas, when the priests not only initiated the chief into a status above the ordinary but also imbued him with elements of divinity; the second phase has to do with the emergence of the state, which was a departure from the earlier organization of society and governess on the basis of clans. (Thapar *The Early* 120)

Increasing dependence of economy on agriculture led to major social changes as well. Even the war of Mahabharata was marked with the extinction of clan-based societies. With the arrival of Aryan people, the non-Aryan or Dasyus were considered inferiors. The black skin of non-Aryan people became the indictor of their inferiority. Later the word Dasyu was being used for slaves but this change in the meaning of word took some centuries. RomilaThapar comments upon this change in the meaning of the word:

The change in meaning would also be a pointer to the decline of pastoralism since pastoral societies have problems in controlling slaves, given the opportunity for running away when grazing the animals. (112)

The conflict between Aryan and non-Aryan people were the conflict of natives and colonizers, as Gurikbaal Singh indicates in his article named “Swarajbir De Naatak: *Myth Da Navsirjan*” (14).Envy for immense cattle wealth of non-Aryans and the need of Aryans to acquire the land for agriculture resulted in uprootment of natives. The literature of that age which includes Vedas is the medium of Aryan people. Natives are portrayed as rakshasas or evil spirits and Vedic gods are requested to assassinate them brutally. Along with this brutal devastation of their habitats, their culture, religion and language also suffered from a great setback. Jara says in his long speech in scene first:

Main sochda saan jungle sada ae! Sade karke e chashme gaunde ne!
hiraan bhaj de ne! sooraj wann di nookar chon sade karke hi ugda
ae...chann- tare sade karke chamkde ne! par *nahi!...nahi...eh lok*
aaye...tan sade deote peelee pe gaye! Saade mantar, sadi pooja sab
haar *gaye...main* isse haar di agg vich sarr rehan! (36)

(I used to think that the forests belong to us! The springs sing for us!
The deer runs and jumps for us! From the corner of the forest, the sun
rises for us. The moon and the stars shine due to us! But alas! There is
nothing like I used to think. They arrived and our Gods became pale.
Our mantras, our worship all got defeated! I am still burning in the agony
of that very defeat.)

At the end of the play the confident statement of badly injured Krishna appears historically true as the play belongs to the time period when kingdoms were flourishing and a long historical period of kings and kingdoms was yet to come:

“itehas main haan, itehaas Dwarka hai! Jungle vi kade itehaas hoeya?
Tere jungle da samaa vannvaasi muk *chuke*” (87).

(I am the history, Dwarka is the history! Forest can never be the history.
Tribesman! The time of your forest is no more!)

The theme of colonization of natives runs through the play along with the theme of class struggle between ruling and ruled classes. Thus by paralleling the contemporary political and economic exploitation with the exploitation of non-Aryan people by Aryan rulers, the playwright gives a new dimensions to this myth. Punjabi critic Satinder Singh Noor says about the play:

The play brings into light the conflict between two cultures and other questions related with social political and cultural aspect. The play does not focus upon Krishna's Raas-Leela or Mahabharata image but brings forth the conflict of Krishna and his courtiers (Aryan) with Non Aryan tribals and the triumph of tribals at the end. The playwright portrays how they become the symbol of people's power and transforms the myth into contemporary context. (Jacket Cover)

In the introduction to the play Swarajbir refuses to take it merely as an accident that an Aryan hero and God incarnate is assassinated by a low caste forest dweller. This is the revenge of exploited and tortured section of society who is denied of even basic human rights since ages. This fury against exploiting classes visibly left its marks on popular mythology of the time and created a myth in which even God, who is otherwise considered immortal, is killed by a bheel. This theme of the play is very visible even in the first scene of the play when the choral song is heard from the stage:

Koi suphne vich raaj kamaunda

Maharaja, adhiraaj kahaunda

Asin kahaiye daas te neeven

Keho jiha pasara

Eh kaisa suphna yaara!!(35)

(In the dreams

Some are blessed to rule and are acknowledged as kings,

But we are cursed to be looked down upon as lowly and slaves.

My friend! What sort of dream is this?)

Non Aryans are well aware of the fact that every war, whether direct or indirect, has its own strategy. In the leadership of Jara, their strategy is to get armed and to fight back against the kings and their courtiers particularly at the time when they are embroiled in their internal conflicts to grab power. In scene sixth the vandalism of Khandava jungle appears more like a boon to forest dwellers. They are filled with new hopes and dreams and their actions and lives become more motive-directed and meaningful. The choral songs of tribals in scene sixth sounds as the declaration of war:

Eh uthan da vela e!

Eh uthan da vela e!

Har rang uthe, har rukh uthe

Eh uthan da vela e! (60)

(Rise! Rise! Rise!

It is the time to rise.

Every colour must rise, every tree must rise

It is the time to rise)

The voice of dissatisfaction with state power is not only heard from far flung forest but also echoes from kingdom of Dwarka itself. Surprisingly, the masses of own kingdom of Krishna are in state of utter pessimism, dilemma and dissatisfaction. In the second scene, from the conversation between Chandu (clan of court of Krishna) and his friend Nandu, the disappointing state of working of state power is clear. Nandu pessimistically talks about exploitation of masses by state ministers, even the beauty of Dwarka fails to console him:

Ki dassan? Nadian ch paani nahi! Khaan nu ann nahi! Dangar bhukhe marr rahe ne! Te dooje pase dwarka de nayak !!...Saanu puch ke dekh jinna de ghar nitt lute jande ne! Pashu churae jande ne! Dhiyaan bhehna chukian jandia ne !...Vagaar karni paindi ae! Nayak te ohna de sainik ateyachaar *karde ne...te tu...tu* ohna di mehma ga rehan!! (39).

(What to tell? There is no water in the rivers! There is nothing to eat! The animals die of hunger and on the other side; there are prosperous heroes of Dwarka! Have a look into our hearts! Our homes are plundered, pets are stolen and women are abducted! We are condemned to forced labour! The heroes and their sepoy tyrannize us. Even then you dare sing their praises!)

This pessimism which is very apparent from dialogues of Nandu appears in the form of wide spread panic among masses in fourth scene. The situation gets intensified and there is state of common hysteria. The rumours of appearance of bad omens like Kaljogan and a strange deadly bird are used as a literary device by the playwright to show glumness among masses. The playwright writes in the introduction, “In Mahabharata and Purana these bad omens are projected as a prophecy of destruction” (10). Swarajbir views these types of rumours as psychological and social phenomena indicating deep rooted social crisis and the failure of the leadership of the time to cope up with it. The play uses these theatrical devices to portray the social and political instability of Dwarka and Krishna’s failure to overcome the situation. The scene opens with a very scared woman who claims to see a Kaljogan. Kaljogan is called “parchavva adharmi raaj da” (47). The bird is called “an illusion which sucks blood” by scared masses. Like Kaali of scene sixth, here the Kaljogan and the bird symbolize violence and brutality of state power and the ravages it causes:

Peeve ratt te khave miji

Vachitar ohde kaare!

Soorat ashubh di oh

Ohdi takkni tode tare!

Vekh vekh ke bee jivan da

Mith mith ke oh maare! (47)

(Blood and marrow her nourishment

Strange are her deeds!

Her face reflects doom

With stares, she plucks the stars!

Her chosen targets, the seeds of life

She searches and kills!

This scene fills the atmosphere of play with a strong sense of insecurity and fears; indicating towards upcoming destructive incidents. There were rumours among residents of Dwarka that these bad omens are the punishment for leaving their hometown Mathura or the time has arrived for Gandhari's curse to cast its effect. Even Rukmani, wife of Krishna is not free from this feeling of fear and has nightmares. This situation of uncertainty and pessimism reaches its culmination with the prophecy of unbelievable destruction and devastation by a Rishi in scene ninth. There is a situation of draught in the city and hunger riots break out:

Saalo saal fasal na hoi

Paani saade mukke ne

Bhukh naal ne baal vilkde

Saah sat saade sukke ne (49)

(The infertile years without any crops

Our water sucked by draught,

The childhood cries with hunger

The life is feeble with throats dry)

But very ironically, contrary to Jara and other tribesmen who are determined to fight back with kings and courtiers, residents of Dwarka still hold their faith in king. King is perceived as a divine figure, the origin and cause of everything, superior to all and one whose divine powers cannot be denied. His subjects view him as their saviour and themselves as modest slaves of their king:

Hey raja tu bahur bhlaa

Hey raja tu aa bhlaa

.....

Hey bhagwaan hey shaktivaan !

Asin tan tere daas haan

Tu hi mool te tu hi kaaran

Asin tan teri raas haan!!(50)

(Come! Come! Come! Our savior King!

Please do come!

Come our almighty God

Please do come!

You are the cause, you are the root,

And in your creation, slaves we suit)

Even this apparently unflinching faith in the king and kingship converts into fury and rage of subjects against state power towards the end of the scene. A Brahmin appears on the scene who refuses to perceive Krishna as God; rather he identifies him as the person responsible for massive bloodshed in the Kurukshetra war resulting in a situation of internal mutiny and chaos. In the very next scene, the image of

generous and savior king shatters with Krishna's orders to suppress the hunger riots with utmost oppression and cruelty. The symbolic portrayal of devastating state power implicit in kaali and kaljogan shows its practical implications here.

Althusser says that state power is maintained by repressive structures in which he includes law courts, prisons, police forces and army which operates by exhibiting external force (Barry 158). This awful side of state power is beautifully manifested in the play through the conflict between tribals and Aryan kings. The conflict between tribals and state power is particularly significant in present scenario of Indian politics when operation green hunt is launched against tribals of our own country under the name of operation against leftist violence. This oppression is aimed at the grabbing of abundant natural resources these forests possess. This struggle to possess the natural resources and land from the original habitants has continued from Dwaparyug to the present age.

The resistance of Jara and his mates is not only against the power directed against a few but also against very combination of politics and religion. Political, economic and social supremacy of certain classes is legitimized by creating the illusion that some are by birth bestowed with divine right to rule others. The supremacy of kings is justified as divine wish and the sufferings of common masses are justified as the outcome of their sins. Religion is always used as "opium" as Marx said, to create an illusion that all sufferings of common masses are divinely conceived. Surprisingly, the combination of politics and religion which is very evident in contemporary politics is not a new phenomenon but our mythology as well as history is witness that religion and politics have always been inseparable and have served reciprocal interests. In scene fourth, the comparison of King with almighty indicates towards the celestial status of king, "Raja hi bhagwan hai, sadi sab di jaan hai" (49). The play starts with the quotation from Adiparva of Mahabharata:

Main agni haan

Nahi lod menu sadharan ann di

Deyo menu ann jo hove mere yog

Jalauna chahunda haan main Khandava vann

Mere layi jalao eh!

Menu chahida eh hi bhoj (28)

(God of fire I am! No simple food matches my hunger

Give me the food I deserve

Khandava Jungle baked in fire

The only offer I do require)

The lines quoted above hint towards the myth of massacre of Khandava jungle. This act of brutality is surprisingly glorified in ancient scriptures to hide the cruel reality of bloodshed of natives. Perhaps that was the accepted way to acquire land for agriculture. The fact that later Pandavas built their beautiful palace and their capital Indraprastha on the land acquired forcefully from original natives of jungle strengthens this view. As Swarajbir mentions:

It is clearly mentioned in Adiparva of Mahabharata how Krishna and Arjuna burnt the Khandava jungle (Whatever the mythical reasons might be) and killed the forest dwellers. . . . It is clear from details of Mahabharata that it was a brutal massacre of forest dwellers. (11)

Tribals and their leader Jara are no more lured by these constructed discourses of ruling classes to legitimize their powers and to secure their throws. Jara makes aware his comrades:

Aggan *launde ne...saanu* mitaun layi ! saanu haraun layi! Es layi ke asin ohna samne apne gode tek daiye! Iss layi ke ohna nu dharti mille! *Dharti...kheti layi !...dharti...mehal* banaun layi! Aggan aap launde ne te kehnde ne eh agni devte di karopi hai! (37)

(They ignite fires to eliminate us, to defeat us, so that we are forced to surrender before them, so that they may grab the land. The land for

farming, for erecting palaces. They themselves ignite fire and call it the rage of God of fire!)

Krishna is the character in which politics and religion are perfectly fused as he is worshipped as God incarnate as well as known as the king of city Mathura. He emerges as the symbol of functioning of politics and religion to serve mutual purposes. Entrapped between the internal conspiracies of his courtiers and mutiny of his subjects, he uses violent state power to overcome the situation by giving orders to kill the conspirators and rebels. Krishna, after all his attempts failed to suppress mutiny by power, tries to establish his supremacy by justifying his power through spiritual logic in scene fifth. The “benevolent God” feels the need to teach the lesson of “devotion” and “loyalty” to those who are “convict” of forgetting his heavenly powers, immorality and achievements as a king! To intensify the visual impact, Krishna acquires the gigantic shape and shlokas are heard with loud background music:

Aad madh ant haan main

Anant anant anant haan main

Aditya cho Vishnu, jotian cho sooraj

Marootan ch maarich, nachattran ch chandrma haan main!! (57)

(The beginning, the middle, the end

Only Myself! Myself! Myself!

Vishnu among Aditya, sun among shimmering lights

Maarich among winds and moon among planets!)

The conversation between Jara and Krishna in the last scene of the play is important in this regard. Krishna is reminded by Jara that tyrant king, no matter what divine powers he possess, can escape the rage of his masses.

This theme of religion versus politics also forms an important part of other plays of Swarajbir like DharamGuru and Medani. DharamGuru is conceived to highlight the issues of demarcation of politics and religion. The play is about the period when religion had a firm hold on politics. Rishi Vashishth is the symbol of unchallenged religious authority who decides the dos and don'ts for humanity. Religion is not merely to attain the spiritual satisfaction but also is used as a tool to sustain certain socio-economic order in the society. The concepts of right and wrong, good and bad are decided by religion. As the play opens, Rishi Vashishth is teaching children including Satyavrat in his gurukul. Here the playwright describes that from the very childhood we are conditioned to act according to religious code of conduct. Those who do not obey this spiritual code of conduct are thrown in hell.

This concept of hell and heaven, religious and spiritual code of conducts are not only used as a tool to sustain a spiritual conduct but more likely to maintain certain social order. In this social order Brahmins are the most sacred and spiritual beings and deserve the respect of all other communities. However, untouchables and women are the lowest creatures who do not have the right to even think of their life independently. Even nowadays elections are fought and won on some religious agendas. The sole aim of some political parties is to promote the agendas of a particular religion to consolidate their vote bank. The echo of highly controversial and sensitive issues, like demolition of Babri mosque or oppression Blue Star can be heard in political galleries even after much water has flowed under the bridge.

The purity, innocence and oneness with nature, which were the characteristic features of earlier phase of Krishna's life, are substituted with endless greed for power which results in inhuman political intrigues and violence. Althusser has said that State is essentially oppressive and works through different oppressive state apparatuses (158). So the person in power is supposed to be vindictive, prejudiced and unjust to correspond with the basic instinct of power. Power leaves no room for the basic human values like idealism, purity, equality and love. The statement of Kaali in scene twelfth is noteworthy in this context, "Prem! Prem kise raaje jaan bhagwan di

darbalta *nahi ho sakda*" (75). Swarajbir himself comments upon the theme of play as well as the character of Krishna:

This is a story of battles and intrigues for state power. The protagonist is hungry for power. To grab, increase and establish his own power and to reduce the power of enemy are his chief motives. . . . (13)

This notion of absolute power which provides space for free play of evil is also visible in Krishna. The tale casts a bitter satire on our politicians who are greedy to snatch power by hook or crook. It is truly heart rendering for Krishna that his most trustworthy friends and courtiers are plotting to reach the royal throne. Krishna, the Almighty, becomes a victim of political maneuverings. The very striking feature of the play is Krishna's own indulgence in intrigues to secure his throne. He plans a Hawan on the bank of Jamuna which was apparently for retaining the lost peace of city, but here he deliberately creates a situation in which his courtiers kill each other and he himself is killed by Jara. It becomes ironical that the person, who is on the pinnacle of his divine and political powers, is terribly alone and hollow from inside:

Varindavan main ki kraan? . . . main tera gwalaa *saan...hun main raja* haan! Bhagwan haan! Lok menu sarab shaktimaan kehnde ne! mere agge hath jod de ne! sukhna sukhde ne! sansaar di har cheez mere ton mange de ne!.....main vi apni gal kehni chahuna!...kise de gal lag ke rona chahuna!(66)

(What should I do, Varindavana? I was your cattle herder . . . now I am a king, a God. People call me Almighty, bow down to me. Make prayers before me. Seek every blessing of life from me but I also wish to reveal my mind. I also long to weep in someone's embrace!)

Although Swarajbir deconstructs the personality of Krishna, contrary to the popular belief that Krishna is God incarnate and a benevolent king, still in spite of all his callousness and tyranny, he retains the sympathy of audience as a victim of a world of politics which leaves almost no space for genuine human action.

The play deconstructs the myth of Krishna and Khandava massacre to interpret it from contemporary, scientific and rational perspectives. In the process of deconstruction of mythology, marginalized and ignored characters emerge as the most powerful ones and the divine aura of some characters tumbles down. The play does not only manifest the theme of class struggle between ruled and ruling classes but also hints towards the historical progress of society from tribal societies to state monarchies. In spite of all this, the plight of a person who outwardly seems at the peak of power but is utterly alone in absence of genuine human love and trust is portrayed in the play. The play is the tragedy of a person who loses all his humane aspects when he gains the infinite powers of monarchy.

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ⁱRuben, Walter (1941) "The Krsnacarita in the Harivamsa and Certain Puranas." *Journal of American Oriental Society*. Vol. 61, No.3. pp. 115–127.

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ⁱⁱ All translations mine.

Chapter Four

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

Mythology and history have reappeared in literature time and again. Indian civilization is full of diverse history and mythology. The association of mythology and history with literature is not a new trend. Mythical and historical themes have been endlessly exploited to enrich the literary writing. Mythology is particularly very close to literature because it not only appears in literature, but critics like Northrop Frye also suggest the mythic origin of literature. Mythology can be comprehended as the culture specific tales, which are the work of collective unconscious of people and are handed over from one generation to the other. Imaginative flight of primitive man in the absence of scientific explanation of all bewildering natural phenomena gives birth to mythology. But, as Claude-levis-Strauss suggests, mythology of some regions is completely coherent and organised which seems to have been improvised by learned scholars at a later date. History and mythology share a similar thread as history can be called the continuation of mythology. Mythology provides us historical information about the remote past when no written sources were available. Study of mythology of any historical period contributes in verifying and strengthening the conclusions about history of that period. The concept of history has undergone various changes with time. Marxism views history, after primitive communism as the history of class struggle. The recent worldview of end of History along with end of class struggle denies the scope of collective emancipation of mankind with class struggle. On the other hand, Foucault views history as a discursive construction which favours those in control of state power.

The playwrights under study go back to ancient sources to look for their stories. Karnad exploits the history of intelligent, sharp but unsuccessful Muslim ruler Tughlaq who is popularly known as “mad Muhammad”. Swarajbir has used the mythical and historical character of Krishna to construct his play. Tughlaq is a play woven around Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq who ruled medieval India from 1324 to 1351. The play goes back to the phase of Islamic rule in India known as the Sultanate Period (twelfth to early sixteenth century), with which the political and cultural rule of Hindu rulers came to an end and Muslim rulers formed their kingdoms in India.

Karnad refers back to historians like Ishwari Prasad and Zia-ud-Din Barani's text *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* to portray his central character. Muslim historians like Barani and British intellectuals present Tughlaq as an unethical and ambitious ruler who caused his own ruin with his unwise political decisions. Although Tughlaq is a historical Sultan, but he is so popular that many mythical and legendary connotations are associated with his personality.

Krishna deals with the second phase of Krishna's life portrayed in Mahabharata. Although he is identified with pre-Aryans in Rigveda who fought with Aryan Gods like Indra, but in Mahabharata he emerges as an Aryan king and warrior who not only gives the spiritual justification of war but also suggests the most treacherous ways to win the war. But very surprisingly the image of Krishna that is rooted deeply in folk psyche is not of a clever politician or God incarnate; it is his image of a cow herding God who is close to nature that gives him the status of legendary hero.

The thread that unites both the plays is the negotiation of mythical and historical personages used in the plays with contemporary reality. Myth and history are used as vehicles to comment on contemporary reality. The plays reflect the class antagonism and widening class gaps through the crisis ridden condition not only of masses but also of the monarchs who are at the peak of their powers. These plays deconstruct myths and history and reinterpret them from contemporary perspectives. History and mythology emerge as devices to symbolize and indicate contemporary reality in both the texts in spite of the specific nature, qualities and subjective intentions of respective rulers, i.e. Krishna and Tughlaq in both the texts. By exploiting the ancient mythology and history, playwrights have touched the issues like class struggle, emergence and functioning of the state, violent face of oppressive state power, bonding of religion and politics and religious discourses to strengthen political hierarchies. The plays emerge as a comment on the present political scenario. The similarity of both the plays lies in the fact that along with other themes, both are sharp political comments on the ruling class.

In both the plays there is portrayal of wide spread anarchy, hunger, riots, famine, starvation and wide spread dissatisfaction of masses with rulers. The religion is used very cunningly to create an illusion that all sufferings of masses are divinely conceived. Both the plays transcend the periods they belong to and emerge as instances of metaphoric depiction of modern times. Both the plays create a convincing synchrony between pre-modern and contemporary India. The contemporary concerns of the writers are reflected through the comprehension and presentation of historical and mythical realities. Tughlaq and Krishna can better be comprehended as plays concerned with the times in which these were written, than the time periods they talk about. At literal level, Tughlaq is indeed a tale of a much discussed and controversial monarch but the significance of the play can only be analysed by viewing it flavoured with the historical realities of India after Independence.

The decade of sixties is peculiar for betraying the underlying stability of Indian economic and political system. This decade gave concentrated expression to the disillusionment, dissatisfaction and anger among the masses against the established system and its representatives. The play successfully captures this disillusionment of masses after the dream of India as a prosperous nation was shattered. A comparison can be attempted not just between Tughlaq and Nehru or any such politician, but the entire play is quite comparable to the political, social and economic instability of India in the decade of sixties, which has ironically continued till this age. In a similar way, although Krishna does not have any parallel to any contemporary politician, but the perspective from which Swarajbir has reinterpreted the myth of Krishna is very contemporary. Far from giving the conventional portrayal of Krishna as almighty God, Swarajbir demythicises his divine aura and equates him with an ordinary monarch. These works of art acquire universal dimensions and become satires on repressive state power and degradation of personalities in power. These plays become an ironic commentary upon vision of India as a democratic, secular, tolerant republic.

Krishna specifically talks about the time period when the tribal life was disappearing and kingdoms were establishing themselves. Swarajbir seems fully

aware of this forward march of history and his protagonist is convinced that Kingship and Kings will survive till a very long historical period. This might be the reason that Krishna, even when he is dying at the end of the play, is quite sure about the bright future of Kings and Kingdoms. He boldly declares to Jara, his assassinator that the time of tribal society is over. Very surprisingly this social set up is threatened in the very initial stage of its establishment which indicates the slippery grounds on which this system stands. The state power is not only threatened from outside but from its internal conflicts as well. In Krishna the armed revolt of tribals, along with the dissatisfaction of the masses in the capital Dwarka causes a threat to state. The conspiracies of courtiers to usurp power deepen the crisis of society. Same is the case with Tughlaq, who is the target of endless intrigues of Amirs and his trustworthy friends. Here also the wide spread dissatisfaction of masses with their ruler is visible in Kanpur riots in which half of the city is burnt down. In Tughlaq this crisis of society is very prominent and on its peak. Besides this, the political policies and decisions of the ruler are under severe criticism from his subjects and courtiers as well. The dream of Tughlaq of a politically stable, large and prosperous Kingdom has gone to pieces. He knows that he is no more capable of keeping India intact.

The very striking feature of the plays is involvement of both the protagonists- Tughlaq and Krishna in a race to maintain their power. Tughlaq, who otherwise claims to be secular and pro-people, proves himself a ruthless tyrant. Same is the case with Krishna who is worshipped by people as a benevolent God. It demands a lot of courage for a writer to shatter the divine aura of a God and to portray Him in negative shades. On the other hand, Tughlaq is already portrayed by our historians in negative light. Both the plays are not only conceived as political allegories but also reveal the existential condition of protagonist resulting from their endless aspirations. Both Tughlaq and Krishna lose the purity, truthfulness and humane aspect of their personalities in the later phase of their lives. But the difference in the treatment of both historico-mythical figures lies in the fact that Swarajbir has deconstructed the personality of Krishna, contrary to the popular belief that Krishna is God incarnate and a benevolent king; but Tughlaq, in spite of all his callousness and tyranny, still retains

the sympathy of audience as a victim of an absurd world which leaves almost no space for human action.

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