

I: Girish Karnad and *The Fire and the Rain*

This research attempts to study Girish Karnad's play *The Fire and the Rain* as a representation of violence based on a little known myth from *The Mahabharat*. The action of the play is centered around a seven-year long sacrifice designed to persuade the gods to send rain. Though the background is that of the drought and the fire sacrifice undertaken to appease the gods for ingratiating them into providing the rain, the real drama of hatred, intrigue, betrayal, jealousy, as well as of love, faithfulness and forgiveness takes place around various arch suitors and lovers. In particular, the female characters like Vishakha and Nittilai are forced to bear the brunt of the conflict. The dramatization of the men's rivalry upon the honor of the women invests the play with a feminist interest, and this paper has therefore undertaken to examine the various socio-political and contemporary significance of the play from a feminist viewpoint.

The narrative is taut and the play fraught with unremitting tension, as betrayal, violence and seduction enmesh the characters who live out their destinies in a tumult of elements passion. The land has been in the grip of a ravaging drought for ten years. In order to appease Indra, custodian of rain, a grand fire sacrifice is being conducted at the palace under the guidance of the Chief Priest, Parvasu. As the sacrifice draws to its close, the story begins. For seven year he has watched over the holy fire, forsaking his wife, family and every earthly pleasure. Parvasu's young brother Arvasu is in love with a tribal girl, Nittilai. Arvasu prepares to marry outside his Brahmin caste- but for this, according to the tribal custom, he has to present himself before Nittilai's village elders. Parvasu's cousin and bitter rival Yavakri has just returned triumphant after ten years of practicing austerities in the jungle, with the gift of universal knowledge from the gods. To seek revenge, Yavakri seduces Parvasu's

lonely wife Vishakha. This sets off an irrevocable chain of events that lead to Aravasu losing his love, Parvasu desecrating the great sacrifice, the creation of a demon and the death of Yavakri and Raibhya. Finally, the purity of Aravasu and Nittilai's love brings salvation to the land.

Girish Raghunath Karnad (born in 19 May 1938) is a contemporary writer, playwright, actor and movie director in Kannada language. He is the latest of seven recipients of Jnanpith Award for Kannada, the highest literary honor conferred in India. For four decades Karnad has been composing plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. His plays has been directed by eminent directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B. V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan and Amal Allana.

Karnad is also active in the world of Indian cinema working as an actor, director, and screenwriter, earning numerous awards along the way. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. His plays, written in Kannada, have been widely translated into English and all major Indian languages. Karnad's plays are written neither in English, in which he dreamed of earning international literary fame, nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannada. When Karnad started writing plays, Kannada literature was highly influenced by the renaissance in Western literature. Writers would choose a subject which looked entirely alien to manifestation of native soil.

In a situation like that Karnad found a new approach like drawing historical and mythological sources to tackle contemporary themes. His first play, *Yayati* (1961), ridicules the ironies of life through characters in Mahabharata and became an instant success, immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages.

Tughlaq (1964), his best loved play, established Karnad as one of the most promising playwrights in the country. Karnad himself has translated all his plays into English. A large number of his Kannada plays have been translated by Dr. Bhargavi P Rao.

Kavita Neagpal says in *Hindustan Times*:

Girish wrote the play in 1989 when the mandir and masjid movements were beginning to show how relevant the questions posed in the 12th century are today. The anger of society, unwilling to abandon the safety net of the caste system, turns to frenzy when a Brahmin sharana girl is married to a Chamar sharana boy. They are lynched and kalyan is rift with war cries... Arvind Gaur repeated his *Tughlaq* technique. Bare sets, symbolic costumes, letting words and characters hold the reins of dramatic power... Bright scenes of lucid argument... house was packed and very responsive (4).

In contemporary global scenario everything is governed by the market economy which is more or less like a vicious circle and everyone is in the rut to squeeze the maximum and leave nothing behind for the posterity. This leads to the question raised by Karnad through his plays: 'Who controls whom? Whose images we fall into?' The oppressed gender asks the same question, but with the definitive knowledge of who controls whom. Only, they probe into the question of how they control, and how the mechanisms of control and oppressions are propagated, given continuity under the garb of religion, custom, family, duty and what not.

Comparing to the characters of Karnad's plays, in *The Fire and the Rain*, it is Vishakha who stands for her boldness even after committing adultery with Yavakri. Her long speech is a kind of whiplash given to the male chauvinistic and male-dominated society. Paravasu gives much importance to his profession- a seven year

fire sacrifice- and totally ignore her inner feelings. At this juncture, her ex-lover Yavakri comes and deceives her through his honeyed words. The dry tender woman Vishakha becomes his victim; of course, she does not get deceived. Her seven long year loneliness makes her yield to his love. According to her, men are experimenters who experiment the body of women in the name of married life.

Yavakri hates Parvasu for his irresponsibility as a husband. Vishakha thinks that Yavakri as her world as he has satisfied her longings and becomes her consolation. Even she tries to save him from the wrath of her father-in-law. She dares to fight against him for the sake of Yavakri. But when she learns his crooked-mindedness, she herself becomes the cause for his end but not intentionally. Even when her husband returns home, of course, not to her. She daringly puts forth her argument that he is the sole cause for her adultery and further, she accuses his father as he is the root-cause for everything happened.

Through Vishakha, who is disgusted, suppressed, crushed, exploited and humiliated, the playwright shows the plight of most Indian women in a male dominated society. Where as in the case of men those who are devoid of power and value are exploited and oppressed in the society, in the case of women, everyone irrespective of socio-economic states is exploited and oppressed both at home and in society. Men are content with their power in the house, while women are content with their power on children and daughter-in-law. Taught to repress her own desires and trained to practice self-effacement women has come to articulate a male constructed definition which she has internalized. Therefore, when she speaks, it is patriarchy that speaks through her. She is not expected to go out and perform, but efficiently lurk around the threshold supporting the male endeavor.

Vishakha, who is a young maid, is badly treated as domestic violence by her husband and her ex-lover, Yavakri and even from her father-in law, Raibhya. Raibhya the father-in-law, who is the patriarch of the family, is lustful and gets his lust fulfilled through Vishakha his daughter-in-law forgetting his shameful act, asks his daughter-in-law, “Why are you so filthy? You look like a buffalo that’s been rolling in mud” (19). He grabs her by hair, beats her and kicks her. He calls her as a whore forgetting that he himself has committed the shameful, illegitimate act.

A woman in a traditional society is not even permitted to express her feelings of love to another man; she has to steal her heart within herself like a body within a grave. She is accursed and punished whereas men doing the same crime escape from the accusation and punishment.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Girish Karnad takes, as his subject, the concept of murder, revenge and jealousy within the learned families of Raibhya and Bharadwaja—a chain finally broken only by the nobility and generosity of Nittilai, a ‘Shudra’ girl, and her lover Arvasu. The central action of the play revolves round the motif of revenge, futility of superficial knowledge and the frailty of human nature.

Finally, it is a play, which is based on the myth of Yavakri, Indra and Vritra. The eternal conflict of good and evil continues from the period of the Mahabharata to the modern contemporary society. The myth of Yavakri is a story of ambition to achieve the universal knowledge directly from the Gods but not from the human gurus, which is unjustified and immature. Knowledge without experience is dangerous to humanity is the message passed on by Gods to Yavakri as well as to human beings on earth. The mythical play within play is enacted in the last section of the play and depicts Indra’s attempt to destroy Viswa, his stepbrother, in order to be unrivalled in all the domains. Indra considers himself to be the legitimate son of

Brahma; he cannot tolerate the existence of Viswa, the son of Brahma from an earthly woman or Vritra. It is a fight for supremacy. Viswa is played by the theatre actor; Vritra by Arvasu. Arvasu is a character in the original play and his task is to protect humanity. He is severely wronged by his elder brother Paravasu and falsely accused by him as their father's murderer. From the beginning to the end it is Indra that is rain, who plays the most vital role in the story of the play. Whether it is Yavakri or Paravasu or anyone else like the king or the actor-manager, all are seen trying their best to please Indra who grants the last will of Arvasu and gives rain to the world. In the plot dealing with the myth of Yavakri, Karnad has very intelligently incorporated the Indian myth of the slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra.

Critics' Views on *The Fire and the Rain*

Girish Karnad's bestselling play *The Fire and the Rain* has presented the full concentration of truth through his imagination. He successfully shows violence on the stage. Nothing is spared and he accommodates murder, bloodshed, adultery, treachery and impersonation all with his plots. The narrative is centered round a seven-year long fire sacrifice designed to persuade the gods to send rain and sweeps through seduction, murder and betrayal enmesh the characters who live out their destinies in a tumult of elemental passions which is unexpected as it is philosophical resonant. And all the tumult occur because of love, love between a man and a woman, so the woman can root cause can be seen as the root cause. Some critical views are presented below for a comparative perspective. The Editor in *Hindu* comments on the play:

[Karnad] is India's best living playwright, [whose] journey from *Yayati* to *The Fire and the Rain* holds a mirror to the very evolution of ... a truly "Indian" theatre ... which can be true to its traditions and at the same time responsive to contemporary concerns (4).

Neeru Tondon interprets this play as contemporary violence. She further says:

In *The Fire and the Rain* too, the dialogues between the Brahma Rakshasa, Indra and Parvasu is a commentary on contemporary evils like patricide, fratricide and adultery. The narrative is taut and the play fraught with unremitting tension, as betrayal, murder and seduction enmesh the characters who live out their destinies in a tumult of element passions (48).

Tondon thus observes the human baseness explored in the play. She says, “the play illuminates the universal theme of love, jealousy and loneliness” (49).

Similarly, Helen Gilbert overview in Karnad’s dramatic work and says:

India’s colonial past had masked its indigenous performance traditions to the extent that Karnad, who had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in the early 1960s, had overlooked his cultural roots. [. . .] Yet, as his reference to these forms indicates, India has its own rich and highly theorized theatrical tradition, which dates back some two thousand years. (180)

Karnad turned to the rich tradition of India to get the subject matter for his plays, and he turned them into memorable art works. The way he penetrated into the depth of the human suffering, injustice, love, victimization of women—this all contributed to the appeal of his plays.

In addition, some critics like Christopher B. Blames elaborates that central point to the Karnad’s play, in *The Fire and the Rain*, is the semiotics transformation of the body. He further comments: “This semiotic transformation of the body is the central to Karnad’s play. The author has pointed out that it was not in fact a story or tale that inspired him to write the play, or even a political conviction or thematic

complex”(195). What Blames notes here is that Karnad had no political intention, for that matter no feminist or postcolonial agenda. Yet, because politics is so pervasive that even without one’s knowledge one becomes a participant in the power structures. Karnad also happens to question the rationality of the male activities that issue out of revenge, pride and hate, and thus obliquely criticizes the male tradition.

This present work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents the short introductory outline of the present study. It gives a bird’s eye view of the entire work. It also tries to discuss about Karnad’s historical background, his literary career, his literary texts in brief and his family background. For this purpose, some of his texts are taken as supporting materials and critical viewpoints to justify how *The Fire and the Rain* represents as violence, seduction, betrayal, evil, and treatment of myth for the mythical characters.

The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality that is discussed and applied in this research. The theory discussed in this section is feminism. On the basis of theoretical modality outlined in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at considerate length with critical summary. It will also sort out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study how classism, casteism and gender differences are constructed and perpetuated by the society to suit the interest of the dominant group. This part serves as the core of this research. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research work. Based on the textual analysis in the third chapter, it concludes the explanations and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters and shows how the play exposes the violence inflicted by male on female.

II: Feminism

Feminism is social theory and a political movement primarily informed and fuelled by the experience of women. Inaugurated by such critical minds as Mary Wollstonecraft and Germaine Nicole de Sainte Beauve, this movement was later strengthened by Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir in the twentieth century. Simply put, feminism can be understood as a doctrine which advocates equal rights and dignity for women. Feminism acquired a more or less concrete set of beliefs in the nineteenth century articulating the thesis that women are inherently equal to men in every conceivable way.

Feminist criticism became a dominant force in Western literary studies in the late 1970s, when feminist theory was applied to linguistic and literary matters. Since the early 1980s, feminist literary criticism has developed and diversified in a number of ways and is now characterized by a global perspective. French feminist criticism garnered much of its inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir's seminal book, *Lé Deuxième Sexe* (1949; *The Second Sex*). Beauvoir argued that associating men with humanity more generally (as many cultures do) relegates women to an inferior position in society. Subsequent French feminist critics writing during the 1970s acknowledged Beauvoir's critique but focused on language as a tool of male domination, analyzing the ways in which it represents the world from the male point of view and arguing for the development of a feminine language and writing.

Although interested in the subject of feminine language and writing, North American feminist critics of the 1970s and early 1980s began by analyzing literary texts—not by abstractly discussing language—via close textual reading and historical scholarship. One group practiced feminist critique, examining how women characters are portrayed, exposing the patriarchal ideology implicit in the so-called classics, and

demonstrating that attitudes and traditions reinforcing systematic masculine dominance are inscribed in the literary canon. Another group practiced what came to be called gynocriticism, studying writings by women and examining the female literary tradition to find out how women writers across the ages have perceived themselves and imagined reality.

The publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 is regarded as the groundbreaking event in the history of feminism. The book presents the portrayal of women in the world of literature authored by men of different times. The central contention of the book is that human mind is impressionable and that women have been forced into believing in their own inferiority and the superiority of men by the representations in literatures and the constant preaching of parents in life. Specially, the sentimental novels which were in vogue at that times become the butt of Wollstonecraft's attack for spreading pernicious influence on the mentality of the young women. Such sentimental novels, she writes, inspired women to be domiciled, and emotionally blackmailed women to pay more attention to their physical beauty rather than to their spiritual and intellectual growth:

Everything they see or hear serves to fix impressions, calls forth emotions, and associates, ideas that give a sexual character to their mind. False notions of beauty and delicacy stop the growth of their limbs and produce a sickly soreness, rather than delicacy of organs... . This cruel association of ideas, which everything conspires to twist into all their habits of thinking... (395-6).

Wollstonecraft was also critical of the religion that put women under the power of men. As her writings point out, women in those times were not free at all regarding

the choice of their intellectual exercise, choice of husbands and career in life. They were expected to act and live according to the fancy of the men. As a result, it was not surprising that women had no sense of public responsibility, moral height or intellectual depth. As Wollstonecraft further clarifies, women are not allowed to participate in any meaningful social activity. Their only utility to society is to perform the domestic duty of pleasing and holding the family of their men together. As Wollstonecraft writes, “The mighty business of female life is to please”(398). Though they may seem ordinary today, Wollstonecraft’s ideas were quite novel in her own times. Her writings set up the way women should concentrate for their emancipation from the domestic and traditional roles assigned them by the patriarchy.

While it gradually became customary to refer to an Anglo-American tradition of feminist criticism, British feminist critics of the 1970s and early 1980s objected to the tendency of some North American critics to find universal or essential feminine attributes, arguing that differences of race, class, and culture gave rise to crucial differences among women across space and time. British feminist critics regarded their own critical practice as more political than that of North American feminists, emphasizing an engagement with historical process in order to promote social change.

By the early 1990s, the French, American, and British approaches had so thoroughly critiqued, influenced, and assimilated one another that nationality no longer automatically signaled a practitioner’s approach. Today’s critics seldom focus on woman as a relatively monolithic category; rather, they view women as members of different societies with different concerns. Feminists of color, Third World (preferably called postcolonial) feminists, and lesbian feminists have stressed that women are not defined solely by the fact that they are female; other attributes –such as religion, class, and sexual orientation etc – are also important.

Many commentators have argued that feminist criticism is by definition gender criticism because of its focus on the feminine gender. But the relationship between feminist and gender criticism is, in fact, complex; the two approaches are certainly not polar opposites but, rather, exist along a continuum of attitudes toward sex, sexuality, gender, and language.

As a concerted social and political movement that became wide-reaching, feminism got momentum in the twentieth century. The aim of this movement can be designed as spiritual as it seeks to establish a human society based on the mutual understanding and respect between the two sexes. Encyclopedia Britannica defines feminism in two important senses:

Feminism is (a) arrange of contemporary theoretical perspectives (political, sociological, legal, psychoanalytic, literary, philosophical) in which women's experiences are examined in relation to actual or perceived differences between the power and status of men and women; (b) a social justice movement in which issues of particular importance for women are analyzed, understood, and addressed from feminist perspectives. (201)

Today, the multiplicity of definitions of this movement makes it difficult to provide an all-inclusive definition. But a shared endeavor all feminist theories and theorists make is to question why women have been consigned to a subservient status in relation to men. They explain the social system controlled and constructed by men, is the cause behind women's subordination. Feminism also studies how women's lives have changed throughout history. All human cultures seem to encourage the development of gender roles, through literature, costume and song. Some examples of

this might include the epics of Homer, the King Arthur tales in English, which valorize the qualities of bravery, adventure and chivalry as exclusively male ones.

It was not until recently that the mainstream literary representation of women often meant it was darkish side of their existence. It was only in the seventeenth century that the consciousness that women are equal to men emerged. Before that, the position of women as equal to men in all the consequential and vital aspects of life was outright denied. Since almost all literatures were written by men, women were depicted as being inferior to men in terms of physical strength, mental capability, and spiritual quest. Women were limited to the role of taking care of kitchen, children and church (religion). Of course, women were adored for their outward or physical beauty. That shallow adoration did not earn women any true respect from the males. Relegated to a secondary status, the aspiration and dreams of half of the world populace found no recognition in the annals of human history which was exclusively andocentric. Little literature created by women has been found. In the performance art such as dramas of those times male actors played the part of the women. This was the universal plight of the women kind throughout the world. As consequence, women everywhere were rendered mute and tolerant, subservient and secondary. For all that, women were not going to tolerate the injustice for ever. In fact, there were occasional voices against male domination of women. As Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantly in their book *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory, 1830 to 1930* (1998) contend “until the late 1700s feminist writing survived as a thin but persistent trickle of protest” (488).

As was inevitable for their liberation from the century long suppression, females finally began to raise strong and organized voice suspecting and arguing against all sorts of social constructs and myths that consigned them to a lower-than-

human status. The historical movement in the seventeenth Europe called Renaissance paved the way for the Age of Reason or The Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The philosophy of utilitarianism and individualism, championed by minds such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill respectively, underlined the importance of each individual and their aspirations. This inspired the women to claim recognition of themselves, of their individuality. This awareness further prompted them to explore their position in the society. No sooner had they begun to explore this issue and found themselves oppressed by men, “feminist writing has become a growing tide of critical work” (Lengermann and Brantley 488). There were several women and even some men who were instrumental to introducing feminism which gained strength as a socio-political movement in time. Some of them are briefly introduced in what follows below.

The next important feminist was Harriet Martineau from America. She emerged as one of the earlier liberal feminists with her demand that women be given the opportunity of education, the right to vote for or get elected. Her earlier publications such as *Society in America* (1836) and *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838) were works of sociological interest. As Lengermann and Brantley write of her in the book. *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory, 1830 to 1930* :

Martineau sought to create a science of society that would be systematic, grounded on empirical observation, and accessible to general readership, enabling people to make personal and political decisions guided by a scientific understanding of the principles governing social life (31).

Martineau advocated for the due minimum political right of the women—the right to vote. She noted in *Society in America* that the four social conditions—slavery, political non-existence of women, among others—were in direct contradiction to one of the founding principles of the American nation, that all are equal in the eyes of God and government. In the America of 1830s, all were not equal excepting the adult, white, land-owning males. Thus, her demand for voting right for women earned her the designation of a liberal feminist.

John Stuart Mill, though a male, advocated that women should be empowered for the development of a society. In his book *The Subjugation of Women* (1827), he emphasized the “importance of education for the advancement of a society” (12). Mill’s alignment with the feminist cause was important, for it was evident that women’s participation only was not sufficient for bringing about an attitudinal change in the society about women. After being elected as a member of parliament in the 1860s, Mill supported women’s suffrage movement, the welfare of the peasants and workers, and the land reform in Ireland. He unequivocally announced that there should be equality of married persons in the eyes of law, for a just society can be founded only among people of equal rights and dignity. For these ideas, he is recognized as one of the forerunning liberal feminists from the male side.

Stereotypical Representation of Women

A society that is guided by strong religious beliefs cannot afford to neglect what a literary text says about male and female and their comparative status then and now. A dominant society can be called patriarchal to the extent it valorizes male values at the cost of female ones and helps perpetuate the domination of women at the hands of men. Patriarchy, understood in its literal sense, means the rule of the father. This sociological and anthropological meaning retains its relevance in the political

and philosophical movement of feminism too. But feminist would like to contend that patriarchy would refer not simply to a society where men hold power, but rather to a society ruled by a certain kind of men wielding a certain kind of power. And such a society reflects the deep-rooted values of traditional male ideal. In this sense, patriarchy denotes a culture whose central and driving ethos is an embodiment of male or rather masculist ideals and practices conforming to those ideals. Patriarchy has determined to a considerable and virtually indelible extent the nature and quality of human societies across the world irrespective of time and space, the values and priorities, and the place and image of women within the societies, and the relation between the sexes. Feminism, therefore, as socio-political movement which aspires to enhancing healthy and just relations between the two sexes, has to expose how masculist ideals have been dehumanizing, subordinating women on the basis of grossly unfounded myths and norms.

Masculism is in part the mistaking of male perspectives, beliefs, attitudes, standards and values and perceptions for all human perceptions. Masculism has been the root cause behind women's social and intellectual disenfranchisement. And the major problem with this is that Masculism is unconsciously embedded even in the female psyche. As Sheila Ruth writes in *Issues in Feminism: A First Course in Women's Studies*, the goals of feminism acquire the status of a supremely noble ideology, a sort of spiritual dignity. As she records the goals of feminism are: to change women's sense of themselves; to change women's aspirations, based on an increased sense of worth and rights, their presence in the world; to alter the relations between women and men, to create true friendship and respect between the sexes in place of the war between the sexes; to give all people, women and men, a renewed sense of human worth, to restore to the center of human endeavours a love for beauty,

kindness, justice, and quality in living; to reaffirm in society the quest for harmony, peace, and humane compassion.

Gender, viewed from feministic perspective, is used for dominating women. Gender is nothing more than the division of sexuality and men's domination over women. Sexuality constitutes gender, not vice versa.

The power is exclusive to men. If women exercise any power emanating from their sexuality, that power is precarious at the best, always at the mercy of men. This power is a disadvantaged privilege which ultimately cripples the human personality in women. To elucidate by example, a woman is more adept at looking after a baby or a sick person. This very skill renders her a mere caretaker—either as mother or wet mother, or as a nurse. She is deprived of the right to act like a father or a doctor. As Catherine Mackinnon says:

Sexuality, then, is a form of power. Gender, as socially constructed embodies it, not the reverse. Women and men are divided by gender made into the sexes, as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalize male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. If this is true, sexuality is linchpin of gender inequality (qtd. In Freedman 60).

In heterosexuality, men occupy the first or upper position. Lesbianism, on the other hand, provides a space for female love for female. In the postmodern era, it is argued that lesbianism does not mean women are prone to having sexual relation with women, but rather women are declined to having sex with men. As Freedman argues, “the very essence, definition and nature of heterosexuality is men first” (61). Heterosexuality reinforced men's supremacy over women. Women who had sex with men were supposed to be surrendering themselves to the dominance of men.

Gender is a socially constructed concept based on the biological difference, that is, sex, between male and female. While sex is determined and indisputably established by nature at the time of one's birth, gender is merely an effect of conferring certain stereotypical roles and values to the sex. By this boys are supposed to be strong, daring and daring whereas girls are supposed to be weak, docile and submissive. Actually, there is no such relation between sex and the nature of an individual, but certain roles are imposed upon them by society. So they are social constructs.

The relation between sex and gender is loaded with confusion and even a degree of complexity. One line of argument goes that sexual characteristics are fixed as per the law of nature and therefore account for gender role arrangements. That is, since men and women are differently endowed by nature, their duties, and capacities also differ. But others, especially the ones armed with the latest theories of nature /nurture controversy deny such simplistic differentiation between the two. Gender is not the same as sex, which means the biological fact, they argue; it is composed of a set of socially defined character traits. For example, a man is supposed to be self-assertive, calm, rational and protective of the weaker sex. Contrarily, a woman is supposed to be soft, docile, seeking to please her male relatives, trying to maintain harmony at the cost of her rights and identity. But the question is: are such expectations and concepts not created by men and therefore artificial? The critical approach known as feminism says it is so. The patriarchal society, dominated by male values as universal values, constructs such gender roles. Women are made weak by many things as a foremost feminist critic Sheila Ruth's observation makes it clear how women are rendered weak in character and self-assertion:

Many factors in the environment conspire to impede women's competence and accomplishments in many areas—hostile or deprecating attitudes of incumbent men, lack of support and assistance from all quarters, dual and/or incompatible professional and nonprofessional functions, pervasiveness of the male (alien, inhospitable) ambience, and socialization that erodes confidence and self-assertion. Rather than being inferior, women are hampered in developing competence in the most profound ways (160).

Given these odds against their success in life, it is hardly surprising that so few women come to be counted as successful personages in life. This accounts for the relatively backward position women occupy in every public domain in comparison to men. How can one expect women to be somebody with their distinct mark in a field when what the society and family confines the definition of good women to those who are beautiful and attractive, fragile, domestic and self-effacing—that is, ready to renounce themselves for the integrity of their family and the honor of their husbands? The masculist images of women and the roles that these images support are constructed so as to create a situation many ways very convenient for men. Women are expected to help and serve men physically, taking care of their homes, property, clothing, or persons; economically, doing numerous household chores for which women are paid so little or not paid at all; sexually, as wives, mistresses, or prostitutes who satiate men's sexual needs; and reproductively, assuring men of their family line, the continuity of dynasty. The image of woman as man's complement offers an extremely effective support mechanism for the masculist self-image: the softer, weaker, and more dependent the woman is, the stronger and more powerful the man appears; the more servant the woman, the more master the man.

Thus, female members of the society, because of their sex, are deprived of the many privileges enjoyed by the male ones. Women are divested of power, be it economic, political, or any other. This state of affair is reflected in literature too. In portraying female characters, writers whether knowingly or unknowingly happen to show the women as weak, powerless, in need of the support and guidance of men.

Questioning Patriarchal Representation

Since feminism is related more with awakening the female lot about their rights and dignities, and less about opposing male in themselves, a scholarly model of the liberation movement includes calling in questions the age-long beliefs and discourses about gender roles and relations. Critics have drawn attention to this movement from across the globe.

With this concept in mind, this thesis proceeds to expose the various oppression and deprivations the women have to survive through in the hope that one day the oppressed class will revolt against the customary mores. As the twentieth century drama historian critique critic Erika Fischer-Lichte, wrote in her treatise *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, theatrical arts are reformative in nature and they can criticize traditional gender-roles.

...the twentieth century can be regarded as an age of transition – not only because of the second and third industrial revolutions and their consequences, or the transition from an industrial and colonial to a post-industrial and post-colonial era, but in many other respects, too. Among the many changes brought about in different cultural fields it is particularly the various redefinitions which two relationships underwent in this course of time which interest me here: the relationship between mind and body and

that between individual and community. These redefinitions went hand in hand with a search for new cultural identities, with the transition of Western culture from a predominantly 'textual' to a prevalingly 'performative' culture. Such redefinitions were also closely connected to political upheavals, revolutions, catastrophes and repeated outbreaks of violence throughout the twentieth century (19).

The violence on women is not exclusive to a particular culture or age; it is pervasive in all societies that are guided by the male-centric, patriarchal mode of thinking.

Playwrights like Kanards have started taking keen streets in what is happening in our society, how people perceive their relationship with one another, and many fetters bound in the legs of women.

The job of advocating for the rights of women began well before the enlightenment, yet it has not gained the popularity and momentum that it should have. It is incumbent upon writers, and readers and critics alike to promote gender awareness if we are to bring this pre-enlightenment project to completion. But this entails taking the risk of being labeled as a political activist. Girish Karnad undertakes the job by revisiting the mythical story from *The Mahabharat* and sets it against a modern backdrop by using well-known film stars to act in the filmed version of the play. In doing so, he has held the patriarchal domination over women from a critical vantage point, though he denied having any feminist or political agenda. But willingly or unwillingly, he produced a political drama for political theatre in writing the play because the issues it treats as its subject matter are political by nature. It deals with such perennial and urgent issues as treachery, betrayal, non-conformity, and loyalty etc. So, as the critic Fischer-Lichte has concluded, Karnad's play is a political play.

III: A Case Study on Crisis of Indian Women

This research problematizes the concept of representation of violence in term of Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* in which most of the characters: Vishakha, Nittilai, Arvasu and so on are disgusted, suppressed, crushed, exploited, and oppressed. *The Fire and the Rain* reworks the myth of Yavakri which occurs in chapters 135-38 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto) of the Mahabharat and which prefers nishk-amakarma to Bhakti and jnana. The Mahabharat myth focuses on Yavakri, son of Bharadwaja since he nursed a grievance against the world that praised Raibhya, his uncle and father of Parvasu and Arvasu; he did penance for ten years to appear Lord Indra and managed to poses supreme knowledge. As he came back from the forest, he molested Vishakha, his ex-lover who was Parvasu's wife then. He was killed by Brama Rakshasa with the help of a "false".

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Parvasu, the son of Raibhya, a great sage and the chief priest, is conducting a fire sacrifice for seven years in the king's Palace in order to propitiate Lord Indra, the God of rains. Vishakha, his wife was once loved by his cousin Yavakri, but when he left for the forest to seek enlightenment, the girl's father "didn't want to" marry Parvasu, she acquiesces herself to the reality of her helpless situation and tells her father: "but that didn't matter" (16). On the wedding night, her husband realized that his newly wedded wife didn't wish to marry him, he says that he will make her "happy for a year. And he did. Exactly for one year" (16). He plunged her into a kind of bliss and made her feel heavenly. Then on the first day of the second year of their marriage, he puts an end to this and just leaves her accepting the invitation from the king to be Chief Priest. The site of the fire sacrifice is only a couple of hours away from his home. But in all those seven year he never came back.

Vishakha feels very lonely and becomes dry like tender “ready to burst into flames at a breath” (16).

The happy married life of this helpless woman lasts just for a year. She is a lonely figure, suffering the pangs of loveless marriage like most women in contemporary society. Ultimately she becomes a prey to Yavakri who seduces her just to take revenge against her father-in-law and her husband. Her father-in-law, the great sage Raibhya, also seduces her in order to gratify his lust. Finally, she is left without anybody even to share her agonies with. Maya has rightly said, “Vishakha is left like the drought-hit-land, dried up without a drop of love” (71). Her loneliness, loveliness, boredom, rootlessness and humiliation reveal the pangs of such pathetic women in the modern world. In order to take revenge upon the Brahmanic society, she urges Yavakri to have sex with her.

Through Vishakha, who is disgusted, suppressed, crushed, exploited and humiliated, the playwright shows the plight of most Indian women in a male dominated society. Whereas in the case of men those who are devoid of power and value are exploited and oppressed in the society, in the case of women, everyone irrespective of socio-economic states is exploited and oppressed both at home and in society. Men are content with their power in the house, while women are content with their power on children and daughter-in-law. Taught to repress her own desires and trained to practice self-effacement women has come to articulate a male constructed definition which she has internalized. Therefore, when she speaks, it is patriarchy that speaks through her. She is not expected to go out and perform, but efficiently lurk around the threshold supporting the male endeavor. Literature is replete with examples of women who meet with destruction because they try to cross the threshold. Those who happened to cross so, and acquire voice were scared of the

wide, dark, animalistic and devouring word outside and beat an undignified retreat to get inside the threshold. But a large number of them remain committed, passive, servile and silent, bearing and rearing children and gratifying the sexual needs of their husbands. Element of discontent unfulfilled desires and aspirations, unequal demands made by the other are still born and reborn. Men and women imbibe and exploitative and oppressive culture and perpetuate it. So, they blame one another, quarrel among themselves and make their life miserable. They do not try to eradicate the morbid culture that led to the pathetic state. Vishakha is thus seen or presented as no more than an object for whom the males vie and compete. She is not even once asked whether she prefers one of the two or not. Her so-called long lost lover does not count her a human personality to be respected and asked of regarding her marriage and life ahead. For him, she is merely an opportunity of avenging his arch-rival. This plight of Vishakha is not an exceptional or unique one; numerous case are heard even today in India and this sub-continent where males try to win women as a prize, a prey for themselves.

Nittilai: A Victim of Casteism

Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain*, due to circumstantial causes, marries the man her elders choose for her. But when she learns the problems of her past lover Arvasu, she comes running away from her husband, family and everything only to lend a helping hand to him. Chandrasekar's compliment of Nittilai as "The young hunter girl is invested with such a surfeit of good qualities that it gives use to the unworthy suspicion that she may be Karnad's equivalent of the noble savage" (12). Nittilai herself says the following in a serious voice:

Arvasu, when I say we should go together-I don't mean we have to live together-like lovers or husband and wife. I have been vicious enough

to my husband. I don't want to disgrace him further. Let's be together-like brother and sister. You marry any girl you like (42).

In India, it is totally unacceptable for a married woman to be with another man.

Nittilai proves to be an Indian woman as she feels that in no circumstances she should spoil the reputation of her husband. But her husband and brother do not understand the truth and out of suspicion kill her: “[...] the brother knocks Arvasu down and pins him to the ground. The husband pulls out a knife, grabs Nittilai by her hair and slashes her throat in one swift motion. He then let's her drop (Epilogue 58).

This is very much in tune with the ethos of a society, which cannot accept a woman being in love with two men at one and the same time. Or the parents, brother, the male figures of the family cannot tolerate the fact that their daughters or sisters take a husband for herself, out of her choice. There is no place for individual freedom and choice in a typical patriarchal family in a caste-based Hindu society. This is still true today as it was in the past, in the mythic and Vedic times. Thus by showing the poor plight of women in such sensitive matters as marriage and love in which they have to comply with the dictates of the males, Karnad actually questions the inhumanity of this all.

Women as Male Possession and Site of Battle of Honor

The young maid Vishakha in *The Fire and the Rain* is trapped by her own family member and their relatives. Raibhya, the father-in-law, who is the patriarch of the family, is lustful and gets his lust fulfilled through Vishakha his daughter-in-law forgetting his shameful act, asks his daughter-in-law, why are you so filthy? You look like a buffalo that's been rolling in mud”(19). He grabs her by hair, beats her and kicks her. He calls her as a whore forgetting that he himself has committed the shameful, illegitimate act.

Woman in a traditional society is not even permitted to express her feelings of love to another man; she has to steal her heart within herself like a body within a grave. She is accursed and punished whereas men doing the same crime escape from the accusation and punishment. Karnad, in his play *The Fire and the Rain* has portrayed the harsh and realistic situation faced by women in India.

Nittilai of *The Fire and the Rain*, a hunter girl, also suffers a lot, as her lover Arvasu does not come in time to meet the elders who are waiting for him under the banyan tree, to bring their affair to an end. As Arvasu is stung by conscience, he is unable to be self-centered and therefore he has to cremate the body of Yavakri. But Nittilai's brother does not pay heed to his words, and he grabs him by the collar of his neck. Arvasu comes to know that Nittilai is to be married in the next couple of days. So, he stumbles back home. Though Arvasu is not at fault, his actions lead Nittilai to marry someone else. Thus, Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain* is the passive and stereotypical sufferer who according to Ramachandran is "caught up in a whirlpool of Hindu patriarchy and is sucked down helplessly" (29).

As Raymond Williams has said, "Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life", all the characters of Karnad are greatly influenced by the society (584). Karnad's characters are portrayed as prisoners who are unable to escape from their miserable existences. Tennessee Williams comments, "We are all sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins", is quite true regarding the characters of Karnad (7).

In *The Fire and the Rain*, the unprivileged classes of people are prohibited to take part in the fire sacrifice performed to propitiate Lord Indra so that he sends rain. Indra never appears, as he is not pleased with the vicious performer Parvasu. It doesn't rain and the other priests become tired and they feel "sick and tired of these

endless philosophical discussion, metaphysical speculations, debates” (Prologue 2). It is obvious that the priests are tired of their performance and they do not relish the dreary sacrifice. The spectators for this performance are people of higher caste and no one is allowed to enter the sacred space. Waiting endlessly for Indra who does not appear makes their performance a failure. The unprivileged class has no right to watch the performance or even listen to the mantras.

Karnad, one of the foremost media persons of the contemporary times, has a unique caliber to create beauty out of evil. Most of his plays end unhappily and violence, bloodshed, murder, impersonation, treachery, bribery and adultery seem to have an upper hand in this plays.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Girish Karnad takes as his subject the concept of murder, revenge and jealousy within the learned families of Raibhya and Bharadwaja—a chain finally broken only by the nobility and generosity of Nittilai, a ‘Shudra’ girl, and her lover Arvasu. The central action of the play revolves round the motif of revenge, futility of superficial knowledge and the frailty of human nature. In this play, Karnad has projected the mystery of evil residing within human beings which does not allow him to progress further. Even after ten years of religious penance, Yavakri fails miserably to control his thirst for vengeance. His real motive is to avenge the humiliation meted out to his father by another learned sage Raibhya. So, his first move after he returns from the forest is to molest the wife of Parvasu so as to revenge against Raibhya and his son Parvasu. After gaining spiritual powers and knowledge through ten years of penance and self-mortification, he comes to know of Vishakha’s marriage to Parvasu. He has been her lover and before going for penance, he has promised that he “would not look at another woman” and he kept up his word (12). After ten years he meets Vishakha in a lovely place in the jungle where

she goes to fetch water. He requests her to talk to him; she being an Indian woman says, "I can't stay here chatting with a stranger" (12). Being a married woman she avoids her erstwhile lover's company. But he somehow, succeeds to have a chat with her. She opens her heart and says, "You are hungry for words. And so am I. So let's talk. Sit down" (15). Then they become attracted towards each other and unable to resist the temptation they go behind a dry champak tree on the banks of the river. She willingly yields to the basic demands of the flesh and Yavakri whom she had loved once enjoys her. In the mean time Arvasu and Nittilai come there and they recognize the footprints and the pot of Vishakha. Arvasu goes behind the champak tree into the bushes but rushes out with wonder and shock followed by Vishakha whose clothes are torn and her back covered with mud. She rushes into the hermitage when her father-in-law steps out. She gets horrified to see this thin but physically active sage. He scowls at her Seeing Arvasu follow her with the pot on his shoulder. He mistakenly thinks that Vishakha and Arvasu have developed some illicit relationship as her husband has been away for seven year. Raibhya becomes enraged, angrily grabs her by her hair and starts heating her. He even kicks her. Unable to bear all this Arvasu rushes to rescue her but Raibhya says, "I want the truth and I'll kill her if necessary" (20). Finally Vishakha reveals that it was Yavakri who came to see her. Then Raibhya leaves her to the decision of her husband, but for Yavakri he has made up his mind and tells as follows:

Vishakha, go and tell your lover I accept his challenge. I shall invoke the 'Kritya' and send a Brahma Rakshasa, a demon soul, after him. Let Yavakri save himself. He needs only go and hide in his father's hermitage. I loved my brother and will not desecrate his altar. Let Yavakri cower in there like a dog. If he steps out, he will be dead. Tell

him this, too-that if he can manage to stay alive for another twenty-four hours, I, Raibhya, shall accept defeat and enter fire. (20)

Vishakha comes forward for Yavakri's defense, saying, "No please! Don't do anything to him. It's my fault. Please, don't harm Yavakri. I'm willing to face the consequences punish me. Not him. Please." (20). But Raibhya does not pay heed to her words and so Vishakha sends Arvasu to warn Yavakri. She too runs in another direction so as to find out Yavakri. Meanwhile Raibhya opens his eyes, pulls out a strong hair from his head and throws it to the ground. The Brahma Rakshasa appears and he runs in the direction of Yavakri. Arvasu unable to find Yavakri in his hermitage asks the blind gatekeeper Andhaka to be vigilant and not to allow Yavakri come out of the hermitage. But Vishakha finds him under the banyan tree and warns him of Raibhya's plan and determination. But Yavakri is so confident that he says, "...your father-in-law will die, Vishakha, let's see what your husband does then" (23). But Vishakha slowly and calmly pours down the water from the kamandala and he now pines for "a drop-only a drop"(24). Ignoring her advice to go and run, he says, "I'm not here to run away-I've triumphed over Indra, the lord of gods. Who are you to order me around?" (24). However, as soon as the Brahma Rakshasa appears, he starts running and when he is about to enter the hermitage, Andhaka not recognizing him jumps up and grabs Yavakri. Yavakri struggles to enter the hermitage but the Brahma Rakshasa comes and spears him. Yavakri collapses in Andhaka's arms. The demon pulls out the trident and goes away. Thus, Yavakri receives his punishment for molesting Vishakha.

According to Naik, "The fire in the title is thus the fire of lust, anger, vengeance, envy, violence, and death"(48). He falls to vanquish, jealousy, hatred and lust. Karnad artistically highlights the futility of Yavakri's knowledge which he has

received directly from Lord Indra. Even after receiving knowledge, he could not free himself from the bondage of selfhood. His knowledge makes him even more miserable. His superficial knowledge does not help him to conquer the evils residing in him. On the contrary, his knowledge boosts his passion and pride for a desire to take revenge. Vishakha aptly points out that, “I can’t believe it! The whole world may be singing your praises. But you haven’t grown up! These ten year have not made any differences to your teenage fantasies. That’s all gone, Yavakri”(14).

As Yavakri’s sole purpose is to destroy the happiness and reputation of Raibhya and his son Parvasu, he is continuously burning in the furnace of jealousy and hatred. He resembles says to Vishakha as follows:

What matters is that I hate your husband’s family. My father deserved to be invited as the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. But that too went to Parvasu, your husband One night in the jungle, Indra came to me and said: ‘You are ready now to receive knowledge. But knowledge involves control of passions, serenity, and objectivity’. And I shouted back: ‘No, that’s not the knowledge I want. That’s not the knowledge. That’s suicide! This obsession. This hatred. This venom. All this is me. I’ll not deny anything of myself. I want knowledge so I can be vicious, destructive!’ (22-23).

So, God grants Yavakri his desires. He becomes vicious like a fierce beast. The evil lying within him does not allow him to enjoy his reputation and life. He becomes restless. His knowledge does not help him to get rid of his evil nature. His prime aim is to bring disaster to Raibhya and Parvasu as he is possessed by evil desires. He has given up his presence to good and has degraded himself. He has become the slave of his selfhood and undesirable passion. Even the presence performed by Yavakri is

‘Tamasika’; he is led further into ignorance and darkness. In the *Mahabharat*, Raibhya appears to be a noble and generous personality. But, Karnad has presented him as a lecherous, cruel and jealous figure. His son Parvasu is highly well versed in Shastras, respected by the king and the Brahmin community and so he is invited to be the Chief Priest to perform the Fire Sacrifice to propitiate Indra. Though his father Raibhya is equally or even more learned, he is not nominated because “... it was a seven year rite. They thought ...a younger man safer”(29). To this, the jealous father says to his son, “ ...so you measured my life-span, did you –you and your king? Tested the strength of my life line? Well, the sacrifice is almost over and I’m still here .Still here .Alive and kicking .Tell the king I shall outlive my sons. I shall live long enough to feed their dead souls” (29).

Though he is a learned Brahmin, he is no better than Yavakri; the above words soaked in venom are pointers in that direction; he has become a slave of his self hood .the enraged, revengeful Raibhya invokes Kritya and sends Brahmas Rakshasa to kill Yavakri. Despite knowing that is committing an evil act, he cannot refrain from submitting himself to evil desires. He commits the sin of incest also, a great sage that he is, Raibhya finally uses his daughter-in-law to gratify his lust which consumes him. Parvasu, Raibhya’s elder son and the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice, ignoring all the norms of the religious ritual, returns home though for one night Raibhya doubts that Parvasu must have been thrown out of the fire sacrifice because of the disrepute of his wife Vishakha. He actually comes to talk to his wife and she reveals to her husband the conditions that have forced her to move closer to Yavakri. She reveals that she is generally alone with her father-in-law in the hermitage. She further says:

Something died in your father the day the King invited you to be the Chief Priest. He’s been drying up like a dead tree since then. No sap

runs in him (pause). On the one hand, there's his sense of being humiliated by you. On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's curdled lust. And there's no one else here to take his rage out on but me. (32)

Hearing all this, he shoots an arrow at his father Raibhya, who instantly collapse without even a whimper. Thus, his own son Parvasu murders Raibhya. He then asks his brother Arvasu to observe all the funeral rites of his father and goes back to the fire sacrifices advises, "Don't rush through the rites Perform them with care . Every detail has to be right" (35). After getting Parvasu's blessings Arvasu performs the rites and returns to the fire sacrifice place. But Parvasu asks who Arvasu is and from where he has come. When Arvasu replies that his father had been killed by his and that it was Arvasu who completed Raibhya's obsequies, Parvasu cries, "Patricide! Patricide! What is he doing in these sanctified precincts? Throw him out-out! Out! Demon!"(38). This reveals the heartlessness of Parvasu who like mythical Cain kills his brother Abel in the story of Bible. Arvasu who has always worshipped his brother Parvasu as a father figure for his intellect and scholarship is shattered by his brother's rude condemnation in public and not knowing what to do asks, " But why, Brother why?...Why?" (38). But two soldiers drag him out. To safeguard himself from accusation, Parvasu tells the assembly of priests and watchers: "As the sacrifice approaches its completion, the demons come out Rakshasa. Their sole aim is to disrupt the sacrifice. We must be on our guard"(38). Arvasu tries to meet his brother at night in order to know why he was thrown out. But once again the soldiers pounced on him, kicked him out, tore his scared thread and threw him out in the burial grounds. Arvasu gets heavily shocked and so he says to his ladylove Nittilai, "I worshipped my brother. And he betrayed me" (41) and "If he can't justify his act-I'll-

I'll push his face in it. I'll make him pay-I'll revenge myself on him" (43). But Nittilai stops him from talking about and plunging into vindictive action.

Thus, the play is definitely one that is based on the fires of jealousy, love, sex and politics. According to Budholia, the face of jealousy can be visualized as follows:

Between, man against man, father against son, brother against brother, wife against husband, high caste against low caste people, man against God, ritual against sacrifices, freedom against bondage, attraction against repulsion, hate against love the fire against the rain, illusion against the reality, passion against the truth and above all Vidya (knowledge) against Avidya (ignorance). (151)

In the play, jealousy and revenge lead to destruction and condemnation. Jealousy acts as a natural catalyst to destroy everything. It is a natural human weakness which stings man's mind and it intoxicates him in a fit of madness and ultimately leads him to disaster and death. Over ambition has hit Bharadwaja and Raibhya, the learned sages and friends, and turns them into foes. Raibhya as a father becomes envious of Parvasu, a son, in order to be the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice. And Parvasu who has killed his father charges his brother Arvasu of patricide. It is an act of jealousy and conspiracy of brother against brother. Arvasu experiences that jealousy is an unavoidable evil and as Nittilai, the hunter girl, remarks, the whole family learned men lies in shambles. She aptly says, "Look at your family, Yavakri avenges his father's shame by attacking your sister-in-law. Your father avenges her by killing Yavakri. Your brother kills your father"(43).

The story of Parvasu and Arvasu is the story of every home in modern society. The prevailing evil is a natural vice which still continues with sharper sting without sparing anyone and intoxicating madness in the hearts of people out of jealousy, Raibhya misuses his spiritual powers, creates a Brahma Rakshasa to kill Yavakri; Bharadwaja, a learned saint and a friend of Raibhya, feels offended by the jealous acts of his friend and in revenge, he curses his friend to be killed by his elder son; Parvasu falsely implicates his brother in a crime that he does not commit and presents him as a father-killer as well as a Brahmin killer. Finally, everybody is condemned and destroyed. Maya has aptly commented that Parvasu recognizes both Yavakri and his father as characters who “Were led on by the same blind fury flamed by the forces of jealousy” (72). Thus as Ralph Yadav has aptly pointed out, “*The Fire and the Rain* in particular is full of violence and death, impelled by jealousy in family, rivalry, betrayals, caste and hierarchical taboos and so on”(49).

When there is domination, there is a resistance, whether in a subtle or a manifest degree, on the part of the dominated side. This is also the case with Vishakha. She suffers from injustice; her husband leaves her for seven long years, without once communicating to her in those long years. And that happened immediately at the passage of the first year of their marriage. This leaves Vishakha unfulfilled, without love of her husband, without any child, without protection. As a result, feelings of revenge and dissatisfaction grow in her mind. Her husband and the society might have thought that she will remain demure, will not complain of the husband's undertakings in leaving his wife uncared for. But, when the opportunity presents itself to her in the form of a meeting with her former lover, in the solitude of the forest, Vishakha dares to make love with him. She speaks of her physical and emotional unrest at being deserted by her husband in such bold terms:

But in all these seven years he has not come back. I know he can't. But I look forward to having him home once the seven years are over.

Alone, I have become dry like tinder. Ready to burst into flames at a breath. To burn things around me down at the slightest chance — (16)

What she says is no mere threatening; it is a reality she turns into immediately, when her lover leads her into the forest for sexual relationship. In doing so, she has violated the social mores of loyalty to one's husband.

Mythic Material, Contemporary Relevance: Fantasy and Realism in the Play

Theatre, as explained by the actor-manager and the actors in *The Fire and the Rain*, is an attempt to get away from the dreariness of reality and the boredom of modern life as a means of entertainment. The Yajna is a sacred performance with a social purpose for an audience and this is the key to an understanding of Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain*. There is a major officiating priest, the chief performer, called the Chief Priest. He is known as Adhvarya; he chants mantras and supervises the entire Yajna; he is the master of ceremonies. All the people involved in the Yajna are to follow strictly the codes of austerity and concentration. Then only the Yajna can be fruitful.

In the play, the fire sacrifice is to be performed to propitiate lord Indra, and Parvasu is honored to be the rules and codes of conduct to perform the Yajna. He is a young man of twenty-eight, abstains from sex, and even forgets that his wife exists. It is a fantasy that such a personality lacks basic goodness, purity of mind and integrity of character. He kills his father and puts the blame on his brother, Arvasu. He even turns against his brother, calls him a demon and drives him out of the precincts of the sacrifice. The sacrificial Yajna turns out to be a mockery because Indra never appears;

it is a fantasy that Indra is not pleased with the vicious performer, Parvasu. It does not rain and the purpose for which the Yajna was conducted is thwarted. Yavakri, a ravaging beast with lust, accosts the daughter-in-law of sage Raibhya and violates her. As Raibhya learns through his daughter-in-law the shameful outrage, he is seized with implacable anger. Yavakri's misdemeanor incenses Raibhya. It is a fantasy that Raibhya meditates, and then opens his eyes, pulls out a strand of hair from his head and throws it to the ground. The Brahma Rakshasa appears. Arvasu, trying to save Yavakri, goes to his hermitage and finding him not there, asks the blind gatekeeper Andhaka to be vigilant and not to allow Yavakri to come out of the hermitage once he returns to it. Vishakha for her part, finding Yavakri under the banyan tree, warns him of Raibhya's plan and determination. But Yavakri is so confident that he impatiently waits for the Brahma Rakshasa. In his kamandala he has sanctified water, which is enough to make him invulnerable to danger. What follows is a comedy of errors; Vishakha herself pours out the water and, Andhaka not recognizing him, jumps up and grabs Yavakri preventing him from entering the hermitage, his magical haven of safety. The Brahma Rakshasa comes and spears him. Yavakri collapses in Andhaka's arms. The demon pulls out the trident and goes away.

Thus Karnad through the elements of fantasy portrays as to how Yavakri receives his punishment for molesting Vishakha, Raibhya's daughter-in-law. With the dead Nittilai on his shoulders, Arvasu enters the sacrificial space. Suddenly the emotive atmosphere gets an ethereal color. It is a fantasy that the voice of Indra from the skies is heard as follows, "Know that all gods are pleased with you.....we are pleased with you We loved the way you challenged Indra and then pursued him...in the play" (Epilogue59).

Indra, who never responds to the fire sacrifice, responds to Arvasu. Arvasu has

to make a choice between bringing back Nittilai to life, freeing the Brahma Rakshasa from limbo and bringing rain for the villagers. Indra tells Arvasu, "[...] the wheel of time must roll back if Nittilai is to return to life. It must roll forward for the Brahma Rakshasa to be released. You can't have it both ways choose" (Epilogue60).

Painfully the natural order is upheld in keeping with Nittilai's spirit. Ultimately, "wind blows. Lightening. Thunder. People shout 'Rain! It's raining!' people dance with joy" (Epilogue 62). It is a fantasy that Arvasu sits clutching Nittilai's body while it is raining. Thus the element of fantasy predominates in the play.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad treats the problem of anomalism in contemporary life. It is a criticism of the Brahmin society on the one hand, while on the other hand, his approach is realistic and existential. He has artistically and beautifully handled the power of myth. In the prologue, Arvasu declares, "... this is a fiction, borrowed from myths" (prologue4). It is a reenactment of a puranic myth from the *Mahabharata* of Indra's destruction of his brother out of jealous fury. Arvasu's cry, "But why, brother, why?"(38), rings throughout the play frequently voicing the puzzled fury and heart-rending agony of betrayal by a worshipped brother. The play has a complex framework with a central myth assuming the form of a framework of the story of Arvasu's betrayal by his brother Parvasu, the Chief Priest performing a Yajna to bring rain to the drought-stricken land. The Indian mythology, according to Girish Karnad, expresses a deep concern over, "The fear of brother destroying brother where the bonding of brothers within the Pandava and the kuru clans is as close as the enmity between the cousins is ruthless and unrelenting" (246).

Since it is a play based on the myth of Yavakri, Indra and Vritra, one might feel it does not deserve to be reviewed with modern critical insights. But the reality is

that the eternal conflict of good and evil, as well as of class, and gender differences continue from the period of the Mahabharata to the modern contemporary society. The myth of Yavakri is a story of ambition to achieve the universal knowledge directly from the Gods but not from the human gurus, which is unjustified and immature. Knowledge without experience is dangerous to humanity is the message passed on by Gods to Yavakri as well as to human beings on earth. The mythical play within play is enacted in the last section of the play and depicts Indra's attempt to destroy Viswa, his stepbrother, in order to be unrivalled in all the domains. Indra considers himself to be the legitimate son of Brahma; he cannot tolerate the existence of Viswa, the son of Brahma from an earthly woman or Vritra. It is a fight for supremacy. Viswa is played by the theatre manager's brother; Vritra by Arvasu. Arvasu is a character in the original play and his task is to protect humanity. He is severely wronged by his elder brother Parvasu and falsely accused by him as their father's murderer. Parvasu, the Chief Priest of the seven years' fire sacrifice conducted in the king's palace in order to propitiate God Indra, represents Indra in the play. The drama of real life runs parallel to the myth. The play underlines the need for supreme human quality, that is mercy and compassion represented by Nittilai, the beloved of Arvasu, who belongs to the Shudra class-the tribe of hunters. Nittilai as a 'lamp into hurricane' symbolizes the rains of human love. The play illustrates the use of myth in a powerful way. The game of trickery and treachery adopted by Indra in order to kill Vritra in self defense is the story of modern politicians in the realm of reality. They are much superior to Gods even in their art of treachery, deceit and cunningness. The myth of the Mahabharata is the story of modern hero of every family and the play through the myth of Yavakri. And elitist Brahmin tells the sad aspect of jealousy, power politics, and neglect of woman. Myth mirrors the

contemporary reality of existentialist society.

The context of the mythical play in *The Fire and the Rain* is relevant, morality-oriented and thought provoking. It possesses the merits of morality with shades of reality and ideology. Fire is used as a myth in *The Fire and the Rain*. Fire, that is, 'Agni', is worshipped as a deity in Indra mythology. All the rituals and rites are to be performed in the presence of this deity. In this play, it is presented for various performed in the presence of this deity. In this play, it is presented for various purposes, such as for penance in the case of Yavakri, for warning Nittilai and for cremation of Raibhya. And rain is also equally important in this play. From the beginning to the end it is Indra that is rain, who plays the most vital role in the story of the play. Whether it is Yavakri or Paravasu or anyone else like the king or the action-manager, all are seen trying their best to please Indra who grants the last will of Arvasu and gives rain to the world. In the plot dealing with the myth of Yavakri, Karnad has very intelligently incorporated the Indian myth of the slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra. Significantly enough at the end of the play rain occurs only when Arvasu's mask of Vritra is removed from his face. This is in conformity with the Indra myth found in the Rig Veda as well as in the Mahabharata. Summarizing this myth, Karnad in his "Notes" to the play says, in the Rig Veda, Vritra:

[...] The shoulder less one (a serpent) swallows rivers and hides the waters inside him. Indra, by killing him, releases the waters and 'like lowing cows', the rivers flow out. The importance of this deed to Vedic culture is borne out by the epithet, 'Vritrahan' or the slayer of Vritra, by which Indra is repeatedly hailed (68).

Thus, Indra is the source of all actions in *The Fire and the Rain*. Yavakri undertakes penance for ten years and Paravasu for seven year in order to please Indra, the God of

rains. The Epilogue very significantly presents the myth of the slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra. Through the dramatization of the mythological episode of Arvasu's love for a tribal girl, Karnad very significantly condemns and ridicules the caste system, which has been a social stigma for ages. The mythical Paravasu represents modern man, who, because of his self-centered materialistic approach to life, seeks progress even at the cost of his own father and brother. Thus Karnad in *The Fire and the Rain* has made use of myth for social, religious and philosophical purposes. To sum up, at the philosophical level, Karnad has dramatized the myth of Yayati in his play *Yayati* with the specific purpose of glorifying the existential philosophy of the performance of duty and acceptance of responsibilities. But at the political and practical implications, it has severely exposed the inhumanity of all sorts of barriers, animosities and injustices among human beings. In this light, the play deserves a study and appreciation.

IV. Conclusion

Life is full of struggle, struggle to get what one wants to get, to get the love of life time, to get avenged on one's traitors, to fulfill one's lustful desires etc. Literary works, being assort of representation of life, and not devoid of such struggles either. A play, and any art form for that matter, may not necessarily be a verbatim replica of life and the world as we experience it. But there is always a considerable degree of realism, and with that, of the miseries, complexities, injustices as well as joys and sorrows in a dramatic art as it is a representation of life. When a writer with a modern consciousness dramatizes a subject long included in some religious scripture, but not so well known to the common readers, he has an opportunity to embellish the subject with originality and uniqueness in the stage and also, can express a detached, even critical and judgemental evaluation towards the characters, and the society and the social mores of the times. This is what Girish Karnad does in *The Fire and the Rain*. In this play, Karnad focuses on the evil of caste war, sexism, classism, and the perennial evil lust for power and revenge rooted in human psyche.

This play mirrors the growing war between saints, rishis, brahmins and so called low-caste people in a hierarchical society, actors, hunters and man-made classification of caste war as a tool of achieving the height of superiority and power. He also concentrates on 'purusharthas' like 'dharma', 'artha', 'kama' and 'moksha' as the four ethical goals of human existence. 'Dharma' governs the spiritual sphere, 'artha' relates to political and economic power, 'kama' to the sexual and aesthetic gratification and 'moksha' to the final liberation from human bondage from the cycle of births and deaths. The characters Bharadwaja and Raibhya, the two saint friends, propound the quest for supremacy of knowledge. But their 'dharma' becomes 'artha'- political and economic power. Parvasu and Yavakri are also a part of such political

ambitions. Yavakri is involved in fulfillment of his 'kama' with the wife of Paravasu and finally, they all deviate from the moral standards of purusharthas, which creates a hellish world for them and to repent as cursed beings. Unable to find any liberation from human bondage, they become victims of their attitudes. These characters represent the men of contemporary society who are trying to achieve their goal of political heights without caring for dharma. Yavakri is a symbol of an ambitious person who wants to get knowledge without maturity and experience, not knowledge from human gurus. But knowledge from the Gods, direct and the whole world is at its feet. Such short-cut of knowledge for supremacy is a dangerous act and it may lead humanity to disaster. Even Indra has appeared before him and has said that Yavakri could not master knowledge through austerities. It must come with experience. The Gods again came and suggested that he could not cross a full stream on a bridge of sand.

Yavakri represents the contemporary scholar of knowledge who tries to remove all ladders of experience and to reach the peak of knowledge and seat of learning with less experience and less knowledge. The story of Yavakri is a lesson to people that knowledge should be acquired in the right manner. It is a story of modern pundits of the intellectual society that Karnad has beautifully narrated through Yavakri in *The Fire and the Rain*. It is, on the one hand, a criticism of the Brahmanic society while on the other hand, Karnad's approach is to realism and existentialism. The prevailing evil in man is a natural vice, which doesn't spare anyone. It is not caste that upholds the society, but virtue that maintains the quality of life on earth. This moral consideration is greatly important as it has ensnared mankind from the onslaughts of evils. It is immorality or vice which is attacked and criticized, and after the rehabilitation of values, the face of contemporary society emerges in its

triumphant design of richer human and moral values. In this play, Karnad emphasizes that 'Brahmanism is no Godism'. He deals with the merits of Brahmanic qualities such as goodness, gentlemanliness, truth and sacrifice, but condemns the evils like priesthood and inhuman acts of fire sacrifice at the cost of human life. Parvasu, Yavakri, Raibhya, Bharadwaja and Arvasu belong to a high Brahmanic class and their quest for spiritual power and universal knowledge does not bring them to the state of supremacy as they are involved in the sub-human, sub-standard and un-brahmanic acts of jealousy, power hankering, and ruthless curses for total ruin of each other.

In the duel of honour, women like Nittilai and Vishakha are made victims of. But they are not passive receivers of the actions and the consequences of the males in their society. They act out their own revolt, or resistance in the form of sexual transgression, and expression of true love beyond caste barriers. What they do in that play does not amount to much, it seems, but whatever little they do changes the status quo in their family and society. It can be understood as their subtle resistance to the injustice of the males in their surroundings.

Brahmins are considered to be the torch-bearers of society but they themselves are lost and misguided in the way of ignoble deeds. The greatest tragedy in the contemporary society is that the educated, talented and meritorious people of the upper strata of society exploit the underprivileged men and women. Arvasu, the son of Raibhya, a superior Brahmin in the play, the brother of Parvasu and the Chief Priest, propounds the values of love, kindness and humanity as the rarer virtues of mankind. Nittilai, Andhaka, love, kindness, broad mindedness and sense of human touch and human belonging in the play. These minor characters are represented as the makers of a humanistic society while major characters represent a class of higher status who lack impassioned hearts. Arvasu forgets and forgives everybody and on his

prayer to sun God, everybody including his father Raibhya, brother Parvasu, cousin Yavakri are revived. Finally, after the sacrifice of Arvasu and Nittilai all condemned souls are released and 'moksha', the ultimate desire of man on earth takes place because of 'purusharthas' of Arvasu and sacrifice of Nittilai. It is a great sacrifice of Arvasu and Nittilai for the sake of humanity. Rain falls like gentle mercy and kindness, and all fires of sex, hunger, power and jealousy are defeated, shattered and condemned as evil acts.

The final note of the play is the quest for humanity since, the blood which runs in humans is devoid of humanity No elbow-room for love and emotions of a mother, lover, sister or son all are same, rulers are same in the game of gunning pandemic violence. The man like Yavakri in *The Fire and the Rain* seeks sexual satisfaction only and he denies the importance of love as he is unaware that love is the purest form of human emotion. Love is the immediate need of man for lack of it leads to many maladies. Men do not trust the women in the family and so Karnad has mocked the fragile hold they have on the woman's mind, heart and body. The play confirms to the truism that lack of belief poses great cracks in the human landscape and this crack in human landscape is induced by lack of genuine love for fellow human beings, lack of values and meaning in life.

Girish Karnad successfully presents the full concentration of truth through his imagination. He has successfully tested evil on the stage. Nothing is spared; he accommodates murder, bloodshed, adultery, treachery, and impersonation- all within his play. He presents an excess of violence on the stage not for theatrical effects but adhering to the Aristotelian dictum that an excess of the tragic elements lead to catharsis. And the violence is purported to be born some of and for women, the so-called ill-fated lot, and the second-class human beings. By making this very comment on how women are perceived as the source, simultaneously of good and evil, Karnad

criticizes the traditional patriarchal representation of women in the play. Apart from that, men are shown as the actors, the architects of the destiny of the human race, the decision makers. Women are the mere onlookers, followers, sufferers, the objects of the actions of the men. This objectification of women takes place in the knowledge and assent of the gods. Thus there is gender discrimination not only in the earthly hovels and palaces and royal courts but also in the heavenly abodes and paradisaal councils. The play insidiously, but too inescapably, exposes this bias. And it is for this quality that this paper has appreciated the play as informed by a feminist consciousness, though the play was not intended as any political theorization.

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