KARNAD'S VIOLENCE:
WRITING IN THE AFTERMATH OF COLONIALISM

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SUMMARY

This paper focuses on the postcolonial significance of the thematic and formal violence that is discernable in the historical and mythological plays of Girish Karnad, using the framework of trauma literature. In so doing, the paper explores aspects of the plays that have been considered irrelevant to postcolonial studies, and demonstrates that both the historical and the mythological plays are national allegories concerned with investigating the continuing communal violence in India. The historical plays use history as an allegory to present Indian secular leadership as a condition of melancholia and a hybrid that contains within itself the seeds of communalism. The mythological plays present the inherent violence and burden of secularism through the unravelling of identity due to an encounter with an Other who claims kinship. As such, the violence that epitomizes Karnad's plays is shown to be strongly connected to Indian secularism. The thesis attempts to answer the following questions: Is there an explanation for the violation of the public/private divide in the historical plays, and likewise in the mythological plays? Does this violation provide useful information about Indian postcoloniality? Does my reading strategy clarify and explain the way violence operates in Karnad's plays, and does it likewise provide a context in which the persistent communal violence in India can be situated and understood? By answering these questions, the paper attempts to situate Karnad's works better in postcolonial studies, as well as demonstrate the usefulness of studying the overlap between postcolonial studies and trauma literature.

INTRODUCTION

The journey that has culminated in this thesis began with violence. Encountering Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadhana*, I was struck by what seemed to me the strange yet vital position that violence occupied in that play. Going on to read many of Karnad's other plays, I noted a similar preoccupation with violence; similar too in the way violence operates and unfolds in them. The plays written by Karnad so far can be grouped into three categories, historical, folktale-mythological and contemporary (Dharwadker, 'Introduction Vol 1' ix). The historical plays consist of *Tughlaq* written in 1964, *Tale Danda* (1990) and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997). The mythological plays include *Yayati* (1961), *Hayavadhana* (1971), *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Agni Mattu Male* (1994), *Bali* (2002, a reworking of an original play *Hittina Hunja* first written in 1980) and *Flowers: A Monologue* (2004). The contemporary plays include *Anjumallige* (1977), *Broken Images* (2004) and *Wedding Album* (2008). Of his plays, all were written in Kannada (one of the southern Indian languages, spoken mainly in the state of Karnataka, where Karnad grew up and currently lives) except for *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (which was written for BBC for the 50th anniversary of Indian independence), *Flowers: A Monologue* and *Broken Images*, all three of which were written in English. Karnad has personally translated all of his Kannada plays into English, except for *Yayati*. *Hittina Hunja* was also not translated into English, but the play's reworked version, *Bali*, was translated into English by Karnad. For my thesis, I have looked at Karnad's own English translations of the plays *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadhana, Bali*, *Naga-Mandala, Tale Danda* and *Agni Mattu Male* as well as his English play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. My interest in the violence I encountered in Karnad's plays, and the similarity I discerned in the depiction and narration of violence in each play convinced me to adopt the rather unusual strategy of reading Karnad's historical plays and his mythological plays as an oeuvre, rather than focusing on each play as a separate entity. As I only wanted to use Karnad's own English translations of his work, I have not

included *Yayati* in my study of the mythological plays. I also have not included the contemporary plays in my analysis as they seem not to contain a pattern of violence similar to what I discern in the historical and mythological plays, and as such appear irrelevant to my thesis, although future scholarship may prove otherwise.

In comparing the two earlier historical plays, *Tughlaq* and *Tale Danda*, I noted a definite recurring pattern in the narrative of violence. The plot is set within a society in which there is a pre-existing propensity towards violence, essentially due to communal differences. The protagonist is a leader who is trying to dissolve the communal differences and hence end the chronic communal violence. Eventually however, the very means adopted by the protagonist to resolve communal differences lead to the outbreak of terrible violence and the play ends in a state of crisis. In the play *Tughlaq*, the society is 14th century Delhi and the communal differences occur between Hindus and Muslims. Tughlaq, the enlightened Sultan, tries to be a just ruler by treating his Hindu and Muslim subjects as equals, but his policies bring immense suffering to his people and his reign ends in violence and chaos. In the play *Tale Danda* (literally "Head Punishment", to be understood as a figure of speech in conversation that can be translated as "may my head be punished"), the society is that of the city of Kalyan in Karnataka in the 12th century, where the communal differences occur mainly in the form of caste differences. The protagonist is Basava, the religious leader of the community of sharanas, who advocates the abolishing of the caste system. Basava's vision ironically brings about events that lead to severe inter-caste violence and the city of Kalyan descends into utter devastation. Karnad's most recent historical play, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, fits this general schema to a large extent. Here the conflicts take the form of a lack of cohesion between the various rulers of the Indian subcontinent. Tipu tries to promote unity among these rulers so that together they can drive the British out of India, but his actions bring down the dreadful vengance of the British upon his city of   Srirangapatna (known as Seringapatim to the British).

In the case of the mythological plays, the way violence is presented is more complex. Here violence seems to be connected in some way with identity and desire. The protagonist is a desiring

subject, whose pursuit of desire fulfilment opens up categories of identity - the identity of others, societal identity or identities that in some way depend on a kind of kinship. This ultimately leads to the violent unravelling of the protagonist's self-identity. In *Hayavadhana* ("Horse-Face"), the protagonist Padmini desires both the brains of her husband Devadatta as well as the brawns of his friend Kapila. Her desire leads to violent events that result in the unravelling of both Devadatta's and Kapila's identities, and finally leads to an emptying out of Padmini's own identity. In *Naga-Mandala* ("Snake Play"), the protagonist Rani desires for greater affection from her husband Appanna, and this desire finally turns her into a village Goddess, completely taking away any possibility of selfhood. In *Bali* ("Sacrifice"), the Queen's desire to convert her husband into a Jain finally leads to the unravelling of her own identity which had been predicated on the value of non-violence. In *Agni Mattu Male* ("The Fire and the Rain"), the protagonist Arvasu desires simple domestic bliss with Nittilai, a tribal girl who belongs to a different community from him, a Brahmin. This desire comes into conflict with numerous other desires, including the desire of the nation for rain, in order to end the suffering brought about by drought. Finally, Arvasu finds himself ethically bound to fulfil the desires of another, and in so doing forever gives up any chance of personal happiness, any chance of personhood.

So why is there such a preoccupation with violence in Karnad's plays, and why in these particular forms? How has this violence been perceived within academia and how has it been translated and transformed in performance? To answer these questions, the next leg of my journey was concerned with context, in situating Karnad and his plays within a wider discourse. In her introduction to the first of two volumes of Karnad's plays, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker states:

> 'Girish Karnad (b. 1938) belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the two decades following independence, and collectively reshaped Indian theatre as a major national institution in the later twentieth century' (Dharwadker, 'Introduction Vol 1' vii).

Thus Dharwadker clearly demarcates Karnad as a playwright whose works should be read and critiqued within the frame of Indian theatre history specifically and within Indian postcoloniality and postcolonial studies more broadly. Karnad himself endorses this view of his work, by noting

that he belongs to the generation of playwrights 'to come of age after India became independent' and that 'this is the historical context that gave rise to [his] plays and those of [his] contemporaries' ('Theatre' 331). For Dharwadker to describe Karnad in the manner mentioned above is especially significant, for Dharwadker has contributed to and to a large extent framed the academic study of Indian theatre, mainly through her book *Theatres of Independence: Drama Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947*. In her review of this book, Shayoni Mitra calls it 'a major intervention in the field of postcolonial studies as a whole' (525). Along with Dharwadker's book, Shayoni Mitra describes Vasudha Dalmia's *Poetics, Plays, and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre* as 'indispensable to any South Asian scholar for the theoretical rigor that they bring to the study of Indian theatre as well as the detailed accounts of all the major plays and playwrights of the past century' (527). Dalmia names Karnad one of the 'Big Four' playwrights (5) of 'national stature' along with Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar, the 'four 'greats' of modern Indian theatre' (139). Hence, if I were to revisit my earlier questions – why the preoccupation with violence and why in this particular form – it appears as though the answers to these questions must also be framed within a postcolonial discourse, within a discussion of Indian theatre. Karnad himself asserts in his preface to *Bali* that '[violence] has been the central topic of debate in the history of Indian civilization' (Karnad, *Vol 1*, 316). Therefore the violence in Karnad's plays is in some way connected with Indian postcolonial history and experience. In fact, the violence that is perceivable in Karnad's historical plays is frequently seen as allegorizing the communal violence in India. For instance, in her introduction to the second volume of Karnad's plays, Dharwadker connects the premise of *Tale Danda* to 'mass politics fuelled by communal feeling' ('Introduction Vol 2' x).

Dharwadker is aware of ways in which Indian postcoloniality in general, and the works of playwrights like Karnad in particular differ from assumptions made about postcolonial texts. She points out that Brian Crow and Chris Banfield who include Karnad and another Indian playwright, Badal Sircar, as postcolonial playwrights in their book *Introduction to Postcolonial Theatre* define

postcolonial texts as being symptomatic of 'cultural subjection or subordination', which misrepresents the work of Sircar and Karnad, 'who are middle-class, Western-educated playwrights shaped by the modernist and postmodern traditions of existentialist, absurdist, environmental and historic-mythic theatre [whose] work is [...] clearly concerned with the precolonial past and the postcolonial present rather than the experience of colonialism' (*Theatre* 10). Therefore Dharwadker describes Karnad's role within the broader frame of postcolonial studies as both a preoccupation with the retrieval and recuperation of precolonial history and an engagement with the problems of the state and society after the end of colonial rule. Hence, Dharwadker discusses Karnad's *Tughlaq* as representative of the work of a postcolonial Indian playwright, seeing the play both as an example of historical revisionism, of the postcolonial subject relooking at a chapter in the nation's pre-modern history that the colonial powers had dismissed or given an interpretation that suited themselves, in the process giving that chapter a new reading, as well as allegorization of the nation, using the past to speak of and represent the present condition. Julia Leslie in her article 'Understanding Basava: History, Hagiography and a Modern Kannada Drama', describes what Karnad achieves with *Tale Danda*, written 26 years after *Tughlaq,* in terms noticeably similar to Dharwadker's description of Karnad's aims with *Tughlaq*. Leslie states that Karnad's 'focus on twelfth-century Kalyan [in *Tale Danda*] has two purposes: to throw light on an extraordinary conflict in the past, certainly, but in doing so to reflect that light on to the turbulence of India today' (259). In discussing *Tale Danda*, Dharwadker notes the similarity between the two plays, noting that both use the past to illuminate the present. The most important difference is a difference of context, as *Tughlaq* was written during a period of disenchantment with the nation while *Tale Danda* was written during a period of rising religious nationalism and fundamentalism. Essentially then, both plays, though separated by slightly more than two and a half decades, still function as allegories, demonstrating the current status of the nation at the time the play was written.

Surprisingly, Dharwadker sees Karnad's historical plays as an alternative to Fredric Jameson's claim in his widely-read article 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational

Capitalism', that all works of third world literature 'are to be read as […] national allegories'; that 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society' (Jameson, 69). She raises two objections to Karnad's historical plays being regarded as national allegories. Firstly, she points out that Jameson regards stories of 'private individual destiny' as national allegories, not historical narratives, so that instead of the Public/Private split that Jameson expects, Karnad has created a Public/Public split. Secondly, she considers the relationship of the historical play to the present to be 'resemblance rather than identity', and therefore this relationship cannot be considered allegorical (*Theatre* 225). My own take is that Karnad's historical plays should be seen as a *modification* of Jameson's national allegories rather than an 'alternative'. Jameson presents his theory of the national allegory speculatively as a possible reading strategy that might prove useful in the case of third world literature, and as such it is necessary when adopting this strategy to also note how engagement with actual third world texts modifies Jameson's concept of the national allegory. Karnad's presentation of the 'public', of history, is interestingly precisely in the form of the 'private individual destiny' of his protagonists Tughlaq and Basava. The essence of Karnad's historical plays lies in the emotional, psychological and spiritual development of the historical character who is the protagonist; in the life journey taken by the protagonist from innocence to experience; in tracing the development of the historical character from a position of optimistic idealism to one of cynicism, madness or failure, due to an exposure to harsh reality.

Furthermore, Dharwadker's second objection, due to what she perceives as the reductive tendency of the literary mode of 'allegory' (*Theatre* 225), is ironic, as Dharwadker chooses to be reductive herself in applying the concept of a national allegory. Imre Szeman, in his article 'Who's Afraid of National Allegories', opens up both the term 'national' and the term 'allegory'. He proposes that the term 'nation' should not be seen as a non-problematic unitary concept but rather as a term in flux, capable of multiple meanings as well as constant change. He also puts forward the suggestion that allegory should not be read as the typical one-to-one mapping of the signifier to the

signified, but rather as symbolism in all its possibility (191 – 192). As I will go on to show, using the term 'allegory' in a wider scope proves to be especially useful in fitting Karnad's plays better within the larger study of Indian nationalism and postcoloniality. As such, unlike Dharwadker I will continue to consider Karnad's historical plays as examples of Jameson's national allegories, albeit as examples that modify the original concept in important ways.

Dharwadker and Leslie both see Karnad's historical plays as having two aims – the retrieval of precolonial history and engagement with the postcolonial present. Neither of them seems to realize the paradox in the simultaneous expression of these two aims. If Karnad's *Tughlaq, Tale Danda* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* are historical fiction, if their function is to retrieve a lost chapter in the dominant historical discourse and bring it to light, then it is necessary that these plays are seen as the re-enactments of specific historical periods. However, if they are allegories that use the past to speak of the present, then historical accuracy, at least at the level of interpretation, is jeopardized. Dharwadker and Leslie shift between two different positions regarding this. On the one hand, they seem to be suggesting that Karnad merely happened to notice a certain resemblance between the historical period and the contemporary condition in India, a 'history repeats itself' phenomenon. On the other hand, Dharwadker and Leslie appear to give Karnad greater agency in this, to be suggesting that Karnad was committed to creating a historical parallel. On my part, I consider the latter to be a more reasonable hypothesis, though I do not exclude the possibility that the decision to create a historical parallel might have been subconscious, affecting Karnad's reading of the past. Karnad himself states in his notes to *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadhana* and *Naga-Mandala* that 'in India […] the past [...] coexists with the present as a parallel flow' (*Vol 1* 312), implying that creating a historical parallel was intentional, as it also demonstrated the way history was actually experienced in Indian daily life.

Nevertheless, this does open up the discussion of violence, as it now appears that Karnad, apart from providing a thematic presentation of violence in his plays through plot, characterisation and motifs, has also done violence to the *form* of his plays by converting historical narratives into

national allegories. Furthermore, the original formal violence initiated by Karnad continues to

be propagated by the productions of his historical plays at a performative level. Dharwadker

compares Karnad's historical plays to what Homi Bhaba describes as the 'Janus-faced discourse of

the nation' (*Theatre* 225), connecting this to the fact that as a play, the 'narrative unfolds not only as

text but as performance'.   As Dharwadker notes, Karnad's historical plays might have been written

based on the national preoccupation at the time of writing, but they appear to have an uncanny

ability to demonstrate the current national situation no matter when they are staged, seemingly to

change or adapt to always show the present condition.

So for Karnad's historical plays, there is a double violence – the thematic violence that is no

doubt connected to the violent history of postcolonial India especially in the form of communal

violence, as well as the formal violence in turning historical narratives into national allegories. How

is this similar or different from the place occupied by violence in Karnad's mythological plays?

Dharwadker suggests a reading strategy for Karnad's historical plays and mythological plays in the

following manner:

> 'History as represented in *Tughlaq* is a medium for public and political experience, and a
> parallel for the present life of the nation; its appropriate mode is realism, and it foregrounds
> the actions of men. Myth and folklore, the basis for *Hayavadhana*, *Bali* and *Naga-Mandala*,
> evoke the private and the personal; they are compatible with the resources of both realism
> and an essentially theatrical anti-realism (music, mime, magic), and foreground the lives of
> women. Their fictional characters – articulate individuals as well as types – are involved in a
> quest for fulfilment and wholeness that leads sometimes to qualified happiness and at other
> times to death' ('Introduction Vol 1' xxxv – xxxvi).

Thus, according to Dharwadker, the historical plays are concerned with the public, while the

mythological plays are concerned with the private. The historical plays, therefore, are the ones most

pertinent to a discussion of Indian theatre and postcoloniality, while the mythological plays have

some limited relevance because of their use of folk elements, which could be conceived as a

recuperation of premodern Indian culture (a view that both Dharwadker and Dalmia ultimately do

not endorse). While I believe in the importance and veracity of Dharwadker's reading strategy, what

interests m] is how the boundaries constructed by Dharwadker – public/private, nation/individual –

remain tenuous and porous, like the boundary of disputed territories. Even here there is a kind of

formal violence, whereby categories are violated, refuse to stay intact and lose their integrity. I have already indicated the blurring of the private/public boundary in Karnad's historical plays, which have psychologically complex characters whose private concerns and 'quest for fulfilment and wholeness' play an integral part in the narratives. Tughlaq, Basava and Tipu, the protagonists of Karnad's history plays, are all concerned with making their personal visions come alive, and very importantly, this unleashes tremendous violence upon the people they exercise power over. Conversely in Karnad's mythological plays, I contend that 'public and political experience' have a prominent place. National discourses and imagery continuously punctuate the narratives.

Interestingly, while Dharwadker refuses to see the historical plays as national allegories because she asserts the term is applicable only to narratives about 'private individual destiny', she also fails to consider whether the mythological plays, which according to her own reading strategy are definitely concerned with 'private individual destiny', might then be considered national allegories. While I affirm that the mythological plays should indeed be considered national allegories, that this best frames and explains the violence that is encountered in the mythological plays, I am aware that in asserting this, I am swimming against the tide of popular opinion, as generally Karnad's mythological plays have been performed as narratives of individual destinies, never as national allegories. Nonetheless, there has frequently been a sense that the performances have not done justice to the written texts. The performances have also shown an inevitable and difficult engagement with the images and discourses of the nation that interrupt the narratives of the plays, all of which convince me that I am justified in my claim.

In considering the violation of the boundary suggested by Dharwadker between Karnad's historical and mythological plays, I now visit some of Karnad's own writings about his plays. Here too my strategy is to read Karnad's critical writings as an oeuvre. It is noteworthy that Karnad himself has written a history of Indian theatre in an essay 'Theatre in India'. Significantly, the substantial difference between this essay and the works of Dharwadker and Dalmia, and other scholars of postcolonial theatre like Nandi Bhatia, apart from obvious differences of scope, lies

precisely in the same violation of the boundary between private and public, nation and self. This violation takes the form of an immense self referentiality in Karnad's article. As Karnad himself puts it:

> 'Perhaps the best way for me to give you an idea of the state of Indian theatre is to present a mosaic of impressions, ideas, feelings, and anecdotes from my experience. [...] Autobiography can sometimes become a metaphor for history' ('Theatre' 331).

Dharwadker comments that this essay is typical of an 'ongoing self-reflection on his part'. The fact that Dharwadker herself notes a kind of continuity in Karnad's writing by seeing it as 'ongoing' lends credence to my strategy of viewing Karnad's writing, as I view his plays, as an oeuvre. Dharwadker further mentions, with reference to two interviews Karnad had given, that Karnad has the ability to 'address important cultural and political issues while commenting on his own work' ('Introduction Vol 1' xiii). The striking fact about Karnad's article on theatre history is precisely his very endeavour to describe the history of Indian theatre through the conduit of his own experience. This indicates how for Karnad the divide between personal and public, self and nation, is truly porous. A sense of a struggle for individualism, despite his own disclaimers about the relevance of notions of western individualism in the Indian context, inevitably emerges from his writings and interviews. This becomes especially significant when Karnad discusses the personal situation in which he found himself writing his first play *Yayati*. Karnad had received a scholarship to study overseas and this had created tension within his close-knitted Brahmin family who wanted him to return to India and lead a safe, conventional life, while he wanted to take the road less travelled. As a kind of self-expression, Karnad had started writing this play. Yet his work surprised him in numerous ways – the fact that it was a play rather than his preferred form of poetry; the fact that it was in Kannada instead of the English he had painstakingly learnt; the fact that it was the retelling of an ancient Indian myth. When he had finished the play, Karnad found that that myth he had chosen, and in a way the play he had written, 'had nailed [him] to [his] past' ('Theatre' 334).

What is interesting here is not so much the fact that Karnad's fiction is a way of projecting, presenting and possibly dealing with his personal issues, which, after all, is not particularly

surprising, but the fact that Karnad uses his traditions, the myths of his childhood, his mother tongue (in a sense, since his actual mother tongue was Konkani, but Kannada was the language he spoke at home) to disguise and objectify his personal issues. Karnad's search for self-expression, due to his frustrations in plotting out an individual, personal destiny for himself, had ironically brought him back to his 'past'. Furthermore, these were aspects of his traditions that Karnad in fact felt alienated from, yet he found himself reverting back to them. Ten years after writing 'Theatre in India', Karnad gave an interview to Chaman Ahuja, which was published in *The Tribune*. In this interview, he reiterates once again that neither the West nor India could provide him with a tradition that he could work on as a playwright and this time explicitly declares 'I have been trying to create a tradition of my own' (Ahuja). It is fascinating to note here that while Karnad is openly admitting that he is trying to find his own voice, he is nonetheless, using the term 'tradition' to describe what it is he is trying to create. Karnad's writing therefore percolates around the traditions he grew up with, but also demonstrates his endeavours to render them his own. Karnad's personal experiences illustrate the unavoidable violation of the boundary between the public and the personal, the nation and the self, and in many ways this violation has found its way into his plays.

In describing the process of writing *Tughlaq*, Karnad again speaks of the violation of boundaries in another context. Writing a historical play, Karnad found himself trying to utilise the stagecraft of Parsi theatre, which required a spatial hierarchy of 'deep scenes' and 'shallow scenes' (Vol 1, 307-8). Deep scenes were associated with royalty and nobility. Shallow scenes were associated with the common folk. Karnad states that as the writing of the play progressed, the deep scenes became 'emptier' while the shallow scenes were 'bulging with an energy hard to control' (308), resulting in the final desecration of the spatial hierarchy with the meeting of the commoner Aziz and the sultan Tughlaq, who discover their uncanny similarity. Karnad feels that this was in part a result of the political situation in India at the time of his writing, namely the fact that 'the mass populace was exercising political franchise' (308), but does not take a positive view of this, seeing in this rather the beginning of 'anarchy' (308). What I note here is that Karnad connects the

desires of private individuals to the nation, precisely because private individuals as part of a 'mass populace' can exercise 'political franchise', because the private desires of individuals can become political and so can be inscribed back onto the narrative of the nation. This leads to the violation of the public/private boundary and this violation can very well be, for Karnad, the cause of further violence in the form of anarchy.

What I find significant here, is that both in the case of his mythological play *Yayati* and his historical play *Tughlaq*, Karnad had experienced this violation of the public/private divide. There are striking similarities in the way the violation operates in each case, as ultimately, what occurs is the impossibility, the failure of the separation of self and nation. With *Yayati*, Karnad finds that articulations of individual desires still find expression only within the representational limits of culture, traditions and the nation. With *Tughlaq*, Karnad finds that individual desires are articulated as political actions and are re-inscribed onto the concept of the nation. Later on in his essay on Indian Theatre, Karnad gives an explanation of Indian psychology that further reflects this connection of self and nation:

> [In] India individualism has never been accepted as a value in itself and every Indian defines himself in relational terms, in terms of his relationship to the other members of his family, clan, and caste. Issues too are perceived in the same relational terms' ('Theatre' 340).

Karnad's writings show the impossibility of looking at individual destiny and individual quest for fulfilment or wholeness in purely individualistic terms, for the individual is never truly an individual in Karnad's view, but rather someone whose identity is defined in *relational* terms. Yet again, Karnad demonstrates the violation between self and nation, for the self cannot be defined in its own terms, and needs to be situated in relation to the nation or something that can stand in the place of the nation, like 'family, clan and class'. The relationship, furthermore, is not just with one's community but with one's history as well, for as Karnad points out in his notes to *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadhana* and *Naga-Mandala*, 'in India […] the past is never totally lost; it coexists with the present as a parallel flow' (*Vol 1* 312).

This further confirms my belief that both Karnad's historical and mythological plays should

be regarded as national allegories to better contextualise and understand the role of violence in the plays. As such, it would be beneficial here to consider Karnad's own treatment of myth to consider how the concept of allegory might function in Karnad's plays. Karnad says about his play *Bali*:

> 'I first came across the myth of the Cock of Dough when I was still in my teens, since then, my career as playwright has been littered with discarded drafts of dramatized versions of it. But looking back, I am happy closure eluded me, for the myth continued to reveal unexpected meanings with passing years' (*Vol 1* xxxiii).

Karnad's experience of this particular myth can be viewed through the lens of Lawrence Coupe's treatment of allegory and radical typology in his book *Myth*. Karnad's experience of myth is discernibly compatible with Coupe's definition of radical typology, whereby each myth has the potential for being radically interpreted in a completely new way, such that the newest interpretation seems to be a fulfilment of the potential within the myth that has been only hinted at till now in all previous interpretations, thereby altering the relationship governing the previous interpretations (100). Myths, therefore, never come to the end of their potential for meaning. Allegory on the other hand, according to Coupe, is a rereading and mapping of a myth onto a realistic explanation, so that the meaning making potential of myth is effectively eliminated and the myth is safely rendered into a symbolic way of speaking of a single entity that exists in the real world (97). Hence there is an inferred dialectic of one and many in comparing allegory and radical typology. Allegory reduces the myth to singularity, taking away the very identity of myth as myth in doing so. Radical typology expands the myth towards infinite meanings, reaffirming the creative potential of myth for meaning making.

Mahadevan speaks of the creative potential for reinterpretation that exists within myths in his article which discusses one of Karnad's plays based on a myth, *Hayavadhana*:

> Both Mann and Karnad understand myth as a social statement rooted in an ancient cultural period that must be adapted if it is to be used in modern contexts. Since myths perpetuate certain ways of thinking, evolving social and cultural contexts demand that myths evolve with time. Their works thus both modernize myths and reflect on this process of evolution. In doing so they reveal the power of myth in the hands of a revolutionary artist (39).

Mahadevan's perception of the way myths function and the way artists appropriate myths is in line

with Coupe's theory of radical typology, and Mahadevan certainly considers Karnad's usage of myth in a similar vein. Karnad, in seeing the myth 'reveal unexpected meanings' certainly seems to experience the myth as radical typology. His discernment of the creative potential of this myth is especially significant since he is a writer and wishes to use this myth as material to create his own work.

However, the idea of myth as radical typology also provides a framework in which the eternal relevance of Karnad's historical plays can be situated. Like the myth of the Cock of Dough, the historical plays elude closure and 'reveal unexpected meanings with passing years' (*Vol 1* xxxiii), as the staging of Karnad's historical plays consistently imply a new relevance to the current political situation. The implication then, is that just like myth, history too has been turned into radical typology in the performance of *Tughlaq* and *Tale Danda*.   Nevertheless, each 'new meaning' thrown up by the historical plays in performance still remains anchored to the contemporary situation in Indian politics and history.   As such, the creative potential of the myth, its radical typology, only spews up repetitions of national allegory. History then becomes both radical typology and national allegory. The creativity of history as myth becomes barbaric and turns inward on itself. Meanings proliferate, but each avatar is a simulacrum of the nation. Significantly, the dialectic of one and many inferred by the distinction between allegory and radical typology is re-ignited in the definition of the Indian nation itself, in its desire for unity in the face of the multiplicity and divisiveness that characterizes India. The Cock of Dough, an image of sacrifice, always presents yet another vision of the nation, yet another way in which a sacrifice is called for. It is noteworthy that an image of sacrifice continuously revealing unexpected meanings is truly ominous, suggesting that there is always yet another victim waiting to be sacrificed in the name of the nation – there will always be violence. Hence, in keeping with Szeman's recommendation that allegory be read as symbolism in all its possibility, the concept of allegory can be expanded into radical typology when Karnad's plays are regarded as national allegories. Jameson's national allegory again undergoes modification, functioning more as a kind of radical typology that

however, ends up demonstrating its own limits of representation, as each fulfilment of potential meaning always leads back to the nation.

I hope thus far to have shown the benefits of studying Karnad's plays and to a certain extent his critical writings as an oeuvre. By doing this, I have first brought to light certain recurring patterns in the way violence occurs in Karnad's plays. Having then situated this within a discourse of postcoloniality and Indian theatre, I have shown the connections between this violence and the presence of violence within Indian postcolonial history. I have then gone on to show formal violence through the violation of boundaries and categories, be it the violation of the genres of mythological and historical, or the violation of the historical narrative through allegorization. I have also shown how this violation of boundaries thematically spills over in the form of the violation of the private and the public, as well as the self and the nation. To understand these permutations of violence, I have chosen to view both Karnad's historical and mythological plays as national allegories. It might here appear as though I have chosen to put aside Dharwadker's reading of Karnad and privilege Jameson's theory of national allegory. In fact, I see myself not rejecting Dharwadker's reading, but building upon it and extending it. I agree with Dharwadker that Karnad's plays, and by implication the violence in his plays, should be read within the context of Indian postcoloniality. It was precisely Dharwadker's reading of the character Tughlaq as an allegory of Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi in the play *Tughlaq* that initiated my discussion of Karnad's historical plays as national allegories. My point of departure from Dharwadker lies in my choice of seeing Karnad's plays as a modification of Jameson's national allegory rather than as an alternative to it, as well as in my claim that the mythological plays should likewise be seen as national allegories. Even here I see myself continuing a journey that Dharwadker had initiated, only because my concern is with violence rather than theatre history, I might be traversing a path she might not have seen a need to take. I believe in the dichotomy Dharwadker notes between the historical and the mythological plays, but again it is my interest and concern with violence that allows me to see that the boundaries conceptualised by Dharwadker, though undoubtedly present, prove to be porous

and blurred, amenable to violation. Dharwadker's discussions, in situating Karnad's plays within postcoloniality, do address the violence inherent in them, but have a tendency to marginalize the discussion of violence to the fringes of the study. In Karnad's writings, however, violence frequently takes on centrality. For instance, he describes the historical context that gave rise to his plays as one made up of 'tensions':

> [Tensions] between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved' ('Theatre' 331).

As such, it seems vital to come up with a frame of analysis that can bring the violence in Karnad's plays from the margins to the centre of discussion. Such a frame would not be an *alternative* to Dharwadker, but a *continuation* of her discussions to demarginalize a discourse about violence. This frame should help illuminate just how Karnad's plays function as national allegories, and most importantly, why this is presented as violence. The frame I suggest here is the frame of trauma literature, precisely because trauma theories give centrality to violence. While not much work has been done in studying the possible overlap between trauma literature and Indian postcoloniality, Bhaskar Sarkar's book *Mourning the Nation* and Veena Das's *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* take several important strides in the right direction.

Sarkar clearly proclaims his interest in 'the mutually transformative articulation of trauma studies, area studies and media studies', especially in analyzing how 'frameworks of loss and mourning reframe Indian identity, history and media' (5). Sarkar's work focuses on the specific traumatic event of the partition of British India into the independent postcolonial states of India and Pakistan, and studies the ways in which this event is 'mourned' in Indian cinema. My work, although sharing Sarkar's basic interest in studying Indian postcoloniality using the framework of trauma studies, does not focus on any specific event and looks at theatre rather than cinema. Both differences are significant. Sarkar claims that

> 'the Partition of India is a particularly harrowing moment within a larger trauma of the Indian modern, for what are the experiences of modernity and nationhood in the postcolonies if not largely traumatic?' (5).

In a later part of his introduction, Sarkar fears that he might have 'run the risk of reducing an entire social matrix and its evolution to this one event' (39). He speaks of a conference in which he had given a talk and had been questioned by a participant as to whether the Partition was indeed 'essential to post-1947 Indian identity' (39). Interestingly, Sarkar found out that the participant who had questioned him 'was born and brought up in the southern state of Kerala', and as such had not '[lived] directly with the violence and multifarious fallouts of 1947' (40). Though forced to consider the possibility that what he assumed to be a national situation might only be relevant for North Indians and disturbed by this consideration, Sarkar does not follow through this interruption to his case, choosing to see it just as illustrative of the 'range of differentiated experiences and evaluations that make up the legacy of Partition' (40). What about a playwright in the southern state of Karnataka who writes in Kannada then? If he were to write of a national trauma, would that too take the form of mourning the Partition, albeit a lower register of a 'range'?

My own take is that Sarkar is right in his instinct that there is a national condition of trauma, one that has been and continues to be experienced by every citizen who has undergone the process of nation-building. However, his locating of the site of trauma in a single incident, the Partition, (even if he claims he is not being reductive, but merely arguing that this event is an important constituent of and thus by inference representative of the 'larger trauma of the Indian modern') is symptomatic of trying to map the western models of trauma studies onto the Indian context, despite his expressed desire to 'extend models of trauma, loss and morning beyond the contexts familiar to (Western) academia' (5) by creating an 'Indian paradigm of mourning' (8).

In her article 'Trauma Studies and Faulkner's Sanctuary', Dorothy Stringer grapples with the problem of extending the definition of trauma so that it can be utilized as a reading strategy in discussing American Literature. Discussing Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, she says that

> '[Caruth's] discussions assume that the traumas of history are like the occupation of France, or the atomic bombing of Japan: singular, extreme, confined to a short period of time, and readily identifiable as radically destructive of moral norms and assumptions. For this reason, Caruth's confrontation with the traumas of war sits uneasily with American literature's representations of slavery and its historical legacy' (4-5).

In the same way, 'a singular, extreme, short, radically destructive site of trauma' sits uneasily with the colonial and postcolonial history and literary representations of India. Despite this, Sarkar has capitulated to the seeming necessity of such a site of trauma in order to discuss Indian postcoloniality using the framework of trauma studies. Partition appears to be that ideal singular, extreme, short, radically destructive site of trauma, but it falls short in expounding the real site of trauma Sarkar wishes to speak about, one that even the questioner from Kerala (and likewise a playwright from Karnataka) should have been able to relate to, what Sarkar calls the 'larger trauma of the Indian modern' (5). As Sarkar goes on to explain,

> 'in the postcolonies, in the absence of [a] gradual and rooted emergence of the assemblage of processes, attitudes and institutions that we typically call modernity, modern nationhood wrought a form of violence – epistemic, material, and psychic' (6).

Partition, though a traumatic event, is nonetheless only a substitute for the *national* trauma that Sarkar truly wishes to discuss, a discussion that is central to my reading of Karnad's plays – a discussion of Indian modernity.

In fact, what Sarkar is truly looking for is an explanation for the neverending outbreaks of communal violence in India. There has in fact always been a tendency in scholarship to regard the violent outbreaks in India as continuous. Sarkar says about communal violence:

> 'This ordeal encompasses other seemingly iterable violent re-enactments, moments of palpable haunting referred to as communal riots. Every time violence breaks out, previous massacres are cited and connections between them established – in the media and in everyday conversation alike – as a way of framing and understanding the latest atrocity' (30).

Sarkar gives an explanation for the continuance of communal violence, by framing it as the repetition of an original trauma, which is the trauma of Partition. Like Sarkar's discussion on cinema and mourning, many other discussions on Indian modernity, secularism and culture seem to revolve around the search for a grand narrative that can explain the outbreaks of communal violence. Many of the discussions of Indian modernity and secularism I refer to in this thesis are essentially directed towards constructing a frame through which communal violence can be explained, discussed and hopefully resolved once and for all.

Veena Das, a sociologist, is strongly committed to finding an Indian model of trauma to discuss violence in the Indian context. Das's book is concerned with two violent episodes in Indian postcolonial history – the Partition and the violence following the assassination of Indira Gandhi – and the way memories of the former violent event haunt and reconfigure the latter. Unlike Dharwadker who somewhat marginalizes violence, Das gives importance to violence by seeing it as an integral component of any discussion of Indian postcolonial history:

> 'Since [...] the partition of India in 1947 and the assassination of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 [...] span a period in which the nation-state was established firmly in India as the frame of reference within which forms of community found expression, the story of lives enmeshed in violence is part of the story of the nation' (2).

Das, too, has strong misgivings about using western notions of trauma in investigating violence in the Indian context:

> I would submit that the model of trauma and witnessing that has been bequeathed to us from Holocaust studies cannot be simply transported to other contexts in which violence is embedded into different patterns of sociality' (103).

Das asserts that in the Indian context, it is more helpful to see the management of trauma after violence has occurred as a 'descent into the ordinary', in the way one returns to the everyday life and normalcy while still holding on to the knowledge and pain of the trauma:

> '[A] different picture of witnessing – as in engaging everyday life while holding the poisonous knowledge of violation, betrayal and the wounded self from seeping into the sociality of everyday life' (102).

This differs from Freud's model of mourning and melancholia, of substituting the original:

> '[Instead] of the simplified images of healing, which assume reliving a trauma or decathacting desire from the lost object and reinvesting it elsewhere, we need to think of healing as a kind of relationship with death' (Das 48).

Sarkar's study of the way a cultural medium like cinema could engage with, respond to and be affected by national trauma is significant in providing a model that I can use for studying the violence in Karnad's plays as a response to national trauma. Likewise, Veena Das's attempts at constructing an indigenous trauma theory is one I will try to replicate, by adopting Dorothy Stringer's strategy of using 'key figures' to translate trauma theories from one context into another. In her article, Stringer asserts that 'trauma theory itself cannot simply be transferred to another

milieu; it must be translated' (4). She goes on to consider Caruth's concept of 'key figures', 'an irreducible kernel of traumatic representation' (4), proposing the lesbian phallus as a possible key figure for reading American literature as trauma literature (7). I too intend to employ Stringer's strategy of using a relevant 'key figure' to try to translate trauma theory into the Indian context. It is noteworthy that Sarkar too had employed this strategy in his book, using the figure of Sita from Ramayana as a key figure to discuss the national mourning for the trauma of partition in the Hindi movie *Awara*. Naturally, the key figures I employ must be associated with Jameson's national allegories, participating in the way Jameson's concepts have become translated into the Indian context by Karnad's plays.

Here I turn to Sarkar's discussion of allegory in the context of trauma studies by looking at the definitions of allegory by Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man. From de Man's comments on the temporal lag between the allegorical sign and the preceding sign it is necessarily a repetition of (which makes the allegory a representation of its own absence when compared with a symbol, which hides its own inherent emptiness) Sarkar comes to the conclusion that 'allegory inaugurates a reflexivity on the part of the subject, a reflexivity that proves crucial to the precarious hermeneutic of a traumatized self' (93). From Benjamin's discussions of history as temporal continuity and nature as the calamity that disrupts such a conception of history, Sarkar deduces that allegory '[reformulates] history as a narrative of suffering' and in doing so, the form of allegory becomes the most apt for melancholy, for it 'turns the image into a 'fragment'' (94). The allegory therefore marks itself as a site of absence, and in being a signifier of the event that precedes it, fragments history, presenting it in its traumatized form. Sarkar's presentation of allegory provides a useful bridge between trauma studies and postcolonial studies, as it allows for comparison with Frederic Jameson's concept of the 'national allegory' as a reading strategy for third-world literature. If all third-world literature is national allegory, then all third-world literature or postcolonial literature is formally trauma literature, and can be strategically read as such. If allegory is the form of melancholia, then national allegory is the form that represents national melancholia.

Trauma literature is generally concerned with the limits of representation, both the inability to adequately represent the traumatic event as well as the ethical necessity of representing an absence. Sarkar claims that in the Indian tradition this problem does not exist, as there is no 'prohibition on imagining the unimaginable' in an 'iconophilic religion' like Hinduism (Sarkar, p. 26). Karnad, on the other hand, illustrates that the problem is relevant to an Indian context by translating the limits of representation into national terms. The limits of representation are demonstrated via a failed representation, namely the inability to represent the individual, as the moment the individual is represented, he or she becomes an allegory and his or her individuality is emptied out. Partha Chatterjee claims in *Nation and its Fragments* that the cultural project of the nation inevitably leads to the exclusion of many and is essentially a story of betrayal. Chatterjee also points to the subsuming of the private by the cultural project of the nation, stating that the 'new individual' of a postcolonial nation 'could represent the history of his life only by inscribing it in the narrative of the nation' (*Nation* 138). As discussed earlier, the allegorical form allows for this emptiness, this absence of the self, to be represented in a way the symbolic form cannot. Trauma theory, therefore, can provide a frame in which the violation of the private/public boundary and the self/nation boundary can be situated and understood.

In the following chapter, I explore the discussions of Indian nationality, focusing on the topic of violence, to discover a relevant key figure through which I can revisit Dharwadker's reading of Tughlaq. Through this, I aim to show that Dharwadker's reading already employs Jameson's strategy of the national allegory. I also aim to demonstrate that Dharwadker's reading strategy can be translated into a trauma-based one through Stringer's concept of a 'key figure'. This generates a richer discussion of Karnad's violence from Dharwadker's reading.

CHAPTER 1: NON-VIOLENCE BEGETS VIOLENCE –
       HISTORICAL FICTION AS TRAUMATIC NATIONAL ALLEGORY

My aim in this chapter is to revisit Dharwadker's reading strategy with the play *Tughlaq* and demonstrate that it is both compatible and easily translatable to my own strategy of using Jameson's national allegory and trauma theory in reading Karnad's historical plays. As I have mentioned earlier, my aim is not to set aside Dharwadker's reading, but to open it up so that my concerns with the violence in Karnad's plays can come to the fore of the discussion. Dharwadker reads Karnad's plays within the context of Indian theatre and postcoloniality, and while such a reading does allow her to address the topic of violence, for instance in noting how a steady increase in communal violence within India has changed the interpretations and performances of Karnad's historical plays, there are definite gaps in her reading when it comes to a specific discussion of Karnad's violence – the thematic violence that is present in plot and characterisation as well as in interpretation and performance, and the formal violence perpetrated by Karnad through the blurring of distinctions between categories – gaps that occur simply because violence is not the main concern in Dharwadker's study of Karnad. Before turning to Dharwadker's reading strategy, however, I look at the existing scholarship on Indian modernity, secularism and culture. I will then use this existing scholarship alongside Karnad's historical plays and Dharwadker's reading of *Tughlaq* to fashion a suitable 'key figure' that can bring a discussion of violence into prominence.

I will start by studying the colonial experience itself as traumatic or trauma inducing. While some authors have spoken about the traumatic effects of the colonial experience, study of the colonial experience as trauma and postcolonial literature as trauma literature is certainly lacking. As Embree declares in *Imagining India*, 'colonial rule exacted a price in psychological distortion, the depth and meaning of which has never been fully analysed' (163). What exactly is the nature of the trauma inflicted by the colonial experience? Partha Chatterjee tells us in 'Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: the Contest in India' that the British justified their control of India by

criticizing the 'social customs of the Indian people' as 'degenerate and barbaric', thus presenting their imperial undertakings as a 'civilizing mission' ('Contest' 622). Chatterjee hypothesizes in 'Five Hundred Years of Fear and Love' that the British in India were different from earlier invaders because they had a need to be 'loved'. To both justify and maintain their control over India, they needed to inculcate in their Indian subjects a love of the West and everything it stood for ('Five Hundred' 1333). A corollary of this was the necessary debasement of Indian culture, so that the subjects of the British Raj would turn away from their own culture and learn to love the culture of their colonial masters.

If the colonial project is perceived as the eradication of the native culture and its supplanting by the colonizer's culture, then Embree and Chatterjee intimate that the nationalist project must necessarily be conceived as a reclamation or an invention of a national culture, to bring about pride in one's native culture, so that along with colonial rule, India can overthrow colonial cultural and moral hegemony. Embree discusses Swami Vivekanada's contribution to the Indian nationalist movement, stating that Vivekananda's 'greatest contribution […] was his insistence that the ideals of strength and freedom necessary for nationalism could be found within the Hindu tradition' (160) which led to the 'clarification in a new and exciting way of the role of the Indian tradition as a source for a vigorous patriotism' (161), while maintaining the stance that 'science was neutral; it could enrich, not weaken Indian life' (157). Thus a new kind of modernity had arisen out of these considerations – the possibility of a return to the past and to tradition in conjunction with the acceptance of western technology and modernity without accepting the accompanying westernization.

Aijaz Ahmad, however, has an important criticism to make about this. In 'Right-Wing Politics and the Cultures of Cruelty', Ahmad describes fascism as

> 'the will to fashion an anti-materialist concept of revolution, anti-liberal conception of nationalism, anti-rationalist critique of Modernity, anti-humanist assaults on the politics of liberation, in a rhetoric of 'blood and belonging', and in the name of a glorious past that never was' ('Cruelty' 4).

Ahmad is here drawing a distinction between Marxist and fascist ideologies by seeing the former as

rooted in materialism, and the latter as rooted in anti-materialism. In fact, this anti-materialism

is culture, which uses concepts like race, religion and kinship ('blood and belonging') and idealistic

history ('a glorious past that never was') in its own brand of nationalist and modernizing projects.

There is therefore good nationalism – left wing, Marxist – and bad nationalism – right wing, fascist

– and the bad ones use 'culture' as their mediating principle. Ahmad goes on to demarcate two

distinct options that national identity can be predicated on: *citizenship*, which is 'available to all

who are willing to accept the authority of the nation-state and obligations that apply to all equally

and universally' ('Cruelty' 8 – 9), which is hence necessarily secular and 'seen as a transitional

toward an eventually universal society' ('Cruelty' 9), and *cultural essence*, 'based on ethnicity, race,

religion, language or some other form of a primordial intimacy specific to an entity that by

definition excludes others', creating 'a sharp distinction between the national Self and the rest of the

World' ('Cruelty' 9).

Ahmad states that all anti-colonial nationalisms are 'ideological hybrids' as 'the

traditionalizing and the modernizing impulses in projects of social change exist *simultaneously* in

any nationalism of the defeated' ('Cruelty' 10). Ahmad then proceeds to demonstrate this in the anti-

colonial nationalist history of India:

> The entire history of what we call our secular nationalism is replete with nostalgic
> revivalisms and those claims of cultural particularly which trace themselves back to a
> Golden Age when India was pristinely Hindu, undisturbed by Christian and Muslim
> intrusions; […That] same formation also had, as a dominant element within itself, a vision
> of a modern, post-colonial India that was culturally diverse, religiously pluralistic,
> constitutionally federalist and republican, with extensive guarantees of individual and
> collective rights. […] In short, then, the terrain of nationalism in India has always been a
> contested terrain, over which the secular and the communal have struggled as opposing
> forces but also as adjacent plants growing on the same soil. ('Cruelty' 11)'

Ahmad sees this essentially as a problem. He sees a nationalism that focuses on cultural essence to

be retrogressive, restraining and obstructing the progressive potential of the kind of nationalism that

is based on secular citizenship. Since Indian nationalism has both impulses, the obtaining of actual

progress for all citizens, regardless of their cultural differences, becomes increasingly difficult. He

declares that Indian nationalism finds itself unable to free itself from the concept of culture, because

'even the most secular […] nationalists continued to think of India as a primordial nation civilizationally defined, rather than a modern nation that was the *product* of the anti-colonial movement itself and an entity that arose out of the crucible of 15 August 1947' ('Cruelty' 16).

In 'The Politics of Culture', Ahmad continues to make his case against culture as an organizing principle for the nation, criticizing what he calls the 'extraordinary orientation toward a [falsified] past' ('Politics' 65), implying that the real attraction of this alternative modernity is not the fact that Indians are now able to embrace both their traditions as well as modernity, but the fact that this strategy allows Indians to efface the traumatic experience of colonialism from their history. What is actually being created here is a false history, starting from a falsified, ideal past, from which a trajectory is drawn towards a modernized future, as though the ideal, false past could have naturally led to a future in which India is united, modern and technologically advanced, without the need for the colonial experience in between.

Ahmad furthermore considers this revivalist nationalism to be especially dangerous, in the same way that all fascist nationalism is dangerous, in that it essentially creates a 'wide social sanction' for violence ('Cruelty' 14). He therefore traces the origin of the never-ending communal violence and the violence of state agencies precisely to this culture-oriented nationalism. Ahmad calls the cultures that epitomize this 'cultures of cruelty' ('Cruelty' 14 – 15), and perceives them as being of service to 'a pathological form of nationalism' ('Cruelty' 6). Ahmad's study of Indian nationalism is strongly reminiscent of Adorno's earlier study of German nationalism. In fact, the term Ahmad uses to refer to a culture-based Indian nationality, 'pathological nationalism' ('Cruelty' 6) was first coined by Adorno (Adorno 98). In his article, 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', Adorno's arguments about National Socialism are only too pertinent to postcolonial studies, as he himself observes the possible similarity based on the fact that both involve a discussion of nationalism and national vanity:

> 'Today the fascist wish-image unquestionably blends with the nationalism of the so-called underdeveloped countries, which now, however, are instead called 'developing countries'[….]. Nationalism is up to date in so far as the traditional and psychologically supremely invested idea of nation, which still expresses the community of interests within the international economy, alone has sufficient force to mobilize hundreds and millions of

people for goals they cannot immediately identify as their own' (97 – 98).

This describes only too well the postcolonial nation that has inherited the trauma of colonial rule, and which must now seize independence from colonial rule as an opportunity for the repair of collective narcissism. Adorno argues that Nationalism's 'grotesque features' were 'reined in as long as liberalism guaranteed the right of the individual' (98), but as events in Nazi Germany have shown, and as according to Ahmad events in postcolonial India show, the 'cultural essence' bent of nationalism can and has frequently overcome the liberal and secular aspects of nationalism, as they are always simultaneously present in postcolonial nationalism. Hence it can be seen that Adorno's earlier work also notes the dichotomy between liberalism and cultural nationalism that forms the basis of Ahmad's later discussions of Indian postcoloniality.

Akeel Bilgrami has a refreshing take on secularism that takes blame away from culture as posited by Ahmad. In his article 'Two Concepts of Secularism: Reason, Modernity and Archimedean Ideal', Bilgrami rejects arguments made Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee that the failure of secularism is due to the faults of modernity, reason (as shaped by European enlightenment) or the separation of religion from politics (in mimicry of western political systems). Bilgrami also rejects Nandy and Chatterjee's argument that because secularism was modern and artificial in the Indian context, religious nationalism, fundamentalism and communalism had to flourish as the necessary Other. The problem with the type of secularism India encountered, according to Bilgrami, was the fact that it was always placed beyond the possibilities of negotiation between different groups, even during the British colonial period. He states:

> 'For three decades before independence the Congress under Nehru refused to let a secular policy emerge through negotiation between different communal interests, by denying at every step in the various conferrings with the British, Jinnah's demand that the Muslim League represents the Muslims, a Sikh leader represents the Sikhs, and a harijan leader represents the untouchable community. And the ground for the denial was simply that as a secular party they could not accept that they not represent *all* these communities. Secularism thus never got the chance to emerge out of a creative dialogue between these different communities. It was *sui generis*.' (1754)

Essentially, then, this was a top-down secularism, imposed by the leader on his people, which is why it could not win actual commitment or participation from the masses, for as Bilgrami puts it,

'secularism can only emerge as a value by negotiation between the substantive commitments of particular religious communities' and 'must emerge from the bottom up with the moderate political leadership of different religious communities negotiating' (1755). An important question to ask here is, why is a negotiated secularism never envisioned? Bilgrami himself gives the answer to this in his comments about the Congress Party, when he states that Congress could not countenance accepting other communal leaders because 'they could not accept that they not represent *all* these communities' (1754).

Bilgrami's argument has striking similarities with the Freudian paradigm of mourning and melancholia. Freud states in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', using the Fort-Da game as the basis for his analysis, that traumatic experiences lead to repetitions of that trauma by the traumatized individual, and the individual will continue with these repetitions until cured, presumably through a process of healing (*Reader* 59 – 602). In 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud suggests that this healing needs to take the form of mourning, whereby the individual learns to externalize that which had been lost, so that the ego, the self, can be repaired and function once again. The alternative path is that of melancholia, where the individual continues to internalize their trauma, unable to accept the loss they had encountered, and as such continues with a ruptured selfhood (*Mourning* 204-206). If Bilgrami's notion of an imposed secularism is viewed through the lens of melancholia, then in this context the concept of melancholia undergoes interesting modifications. While there have been many discussions about national mourning in the Indian context, the idea of melancholia as a national pathology is rather unique. The focus may shift from the individual entity that suffers from melancholia, in this case the secular leadership, be it in the form of the national leader, or the constitution or leadership ideology that privileges secularism, to those who are victimized by the melancholic, in this context the citizens who face the melancholic leadership. This further throws open the question of whether the victims should be seen as healthy individuals, in which case the discussion of melancholia takes on an unusual political aspect (i.e. the unhealthy leadership needs to be replaced by a healthy one) or whether the way the notion of the nation operates ensures that the

victims participate in this melancholia, so that at some level the victims themselves should be considered melancholic or at least behave as though they are. In discussing national melancholia, it remains to be seen if melancholia truly takes on a national aspect, and if it does, if it is truly capable of overflowing the boundaries of individuals in an oddly self-reflexive way, then which sections of the citizenry are more prone to the condition.

Using the modified view of melancholia in the context set up by Bilgrami, I posit that since Indian secular leadership could not accept that the other communities, such as Muslim, Sikh or untouchable communities, were not part of their selfhood, Bilgrami, in recommending that Indian secular leadership recognize these other community leaders, is in fact promoting mourning, suggesting that Indian secular leadership accept the otherness of these other communal groups and to find a new relationship with these Others, a relationship born out of negotiation. Secularism has remained a melancholic experience in Indian history, never allowing for otherness to be acknowledged, never condoning the actual recognition of difference, which must occur before negotiation can take place. Bilgrami is offering a radically alternative explanation for the ubiquitous outbreak of communal violence in India. He implies that the rise of communalism is paradoxically an essential step in the progress toward true secularism. If non-negotiated secularism is radically inclusive, then communalism is radically exclusive, completely closed to even the notion of negotiation. The opposing groups to these communal factions would therefore by contrast be more moderate and open to negotiation. Negotiation can take place within these groups, out of which a true secularism can develop. Viewed in the framework of mourning and melancholia, however, this implies that the nation must then accept its own failure in representing all of its people, accept the representation of various groups as 'Others', and then, through negotiation within these communities, bring about a real secularism that will not forever be in a stalemate battle with communalism.

Ahmad and Bilgrami's discussions problematize the dichotomy of secularism and communalism. Ahmad shows that Indian postcoloniality is an ideological hybrid, containing both

secular and communal aspirations simultaneously. Bilgrami shows that Indian secularism can ironically be regarded as a fundamentalist position, precisely because it can be so intolerant of anything different from itself. At the same time, juxtaposing Ahmad with Bilgrami brings to light gaps in their arguments. Ahmad does not see that secular nationalism might also be the cause of communal violence. Ahmad also does not give any space for the possibility that communal ideologies might have positive attributes. Bilgrami on the other hand does not seem to recognize that Indian secularism is in fact a hybrid that carries within itself communal sentiments, ideas and the possibility even of a communal positioning. As a solution to the problem of communal violence in India, Ahmad proposes the weeding out of communal ideals that are based on the notion of cultural essence, while Bilgrami proposes that Indian secularism be replaced by a secularism that is born out of dynamic engagements with communal positions. I will now look at Dharwadker's reading of Karnad's historical plays alongside these discussions of Ahmad and Bilgrami.

Dharwadker prefers to see *Tughlaq* as an example of the genre of the historical parallel. To some extent, she sees this as characteristic of Western conceptions of historical drama (*Theatre*, 250). Quoting Lindenberger, Dharwadker sees the historical parallel hinging on an assumption of *continuity* on the part of the audience, since the audience is aware of what has happened since the historical period portrayed on stage. Thus Dharwadker is implying that historical theatre in general and the historical parallel in particular have a nationalistic function, since the 'imagined community' of the nation (to use Anderson's well-known term) comes to be seen by the audience as a real entity that has existed across time. At the same time, Dharwadker points out a significant way in which historical fiction differs in the Indian context – the historical knowledge of the Indian audience is 'both discontinuous and heavily mediated' (*Theatre*, 250). However, Dharwadker considers Karnad to have resolved this important difference by incorporating the problems of history writing rather than ignoring them.

The historical parallel as a genre, including the Indian variant of it, demonstrates the tenuous border between history and fiction, a fact that brings it into conflict frequently with the discipline of

history. Keith Windschuttle in his book *The Killing of History* is committed to maintaining the integrity of the discipline of history, mainly by keeping it from being tainted by literary analytical methods. Windschuttle informs us that historical fiction poses no problem to the discipline of history, because once the fictional work is completed, it then becomes the task of the historian to show up the historical errors made in that fictional work. Windschuttle misses the point that this precisely is the confounding of literature and history. Historical fiction, as Dharwadker notes in Karnad's historical plays, participates in historicity, with historians being able to look at it and discuss whether or not it is historically accurate, which carries the implication that historians can in a way then revise that work of fiction, so that it becomes historically more accurate. The work is not allowed to remain fiction, a body of work that is the result of someone's imagination and hence already a complete body of work in itself. This is why historical fiction has always been in a position that refuses to be resolved – either as history or as fiction. If historical fiction is considered history, then the non-objectivity or subjectivity of the writing, as well as the combination of imagination with facts renders it impossible for historians like Windschuttle to endorse this view. If it is considered literature, then the intense historical interest it garners, which leads to the notion of revision to create greater accuracy, makes this view problematic. The possibility of being read as a kind of history is precisely the definition of historical fiction. In his book *Metahistory*, Hayden White suggests that history and historical discourses are themselves literature, or to be more precise, types of discourse and hence fundamentally narratives. He suggests several tropes by which historical narratives are constructed, namely metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Each trope leads to a historical narrative that corresponds to the narrative types Romance, Comedy, Tragedy and Satire. Considering the ambiguous identity of historical fiction which includes the possibility of seeing it as history rather than fiction (a notion Windschuttle would never accept), the genre of the historical parallel might actually be considered a fifth trope.

When Karnad did a reading of his play *The Dreams Of Tipu Sultan* at Landmark, Spencer Plaza in Bangalore in 2004, there were members of the 'audience' who did not agree with his

characterization of Tipu Sultan, as reported by Shonali Muthalaly in *The Hindu*. She states:

> Karnad's admiration for the king blazes through the text – a fact that some readers find problematic, considering Tipu Sultan's 'reputation'. 'He plundered temples,' says one elderly member of the audience rising indignantly. 'From what I remember of Tipu Sultan, from my history text books, he wasn't really a model of tolerance, was he?' chimes another. 'Well, even the Hindus plundered temples. And about the forced conversions, he never really converted his own subjects – only the Nairs of Kerala and the Coorgs. That was one way he punished his enemies… and it was rather humane, considering how enemies were treated at that time… The Marathas burned and raped their enemies,' answers Karnad, adding 'It's problematic to see it as fanaticism in 20th century terms. Yes, he was a devout traditionalist. I suppose you could see him as a man of his times.' 'But history?' sputters a young man. 'History was written by the British' Karnad replies' (Muthalaly).

We see here how Karnad the playwright is forced to become a historian, who has to defend his interpretation by holding it up for scrutiny and possible correction. Karnad had obviously done his research, as his ability to counter the arguments raised by the audience shows. Dharwadker points out that in writing *Tughlaq,* Karnad had used the 'full range of historiographic materials available at Oxford' ('Introduction Vol 1' xviii), '[constructed] his dialogue verbatim out of various historical documents, especially Barani's contemporaneous account of Tughlaq's reign, the Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi', '[followed] the chronology of Tughlaq's reign closely' and used 'historical characters (such as Barani, Najib, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, and the stepmother)' ('Introduction Vol 1' xx). Leslie too is convinced of the intended historical authenticity of *Tale Danda*, pointing out that the 'basic plot – the inter-caste marriage and its fearful aftermath – is based on real events fully documented by the Lingayat tradition' (245), that many 'details have been derived from inscriptional evidence and the work of historians as well as from the stories circulating within the tradition' (245), that most of the 'characters in the play are based on real people whose names and actions have been preserved by history or tradition' (246). At one point, Leslie even declares that 'Karnad's main contribution to our understanding of Virashaivism is that he brings out the economic realities of the saranas' place in Kalyan society' (256), implying that reading Karnad's play clarifies our understanding of the historical period portrayed in his play.

At the same time, various theatre reviews of Karnad's plays reveal the ease with which contemporary events are inscribed back into the historical events portrayed by the play. When *Tale*

Danda was translated into Hindi by Ramgopal Bajaj and staged by Arvind Gaur as *Rakt Kalyan* (Blood-filled Kalyan), Kavita Nagpal of *Hindustan Times* commented that Karnad was trying to show how relevant 'the questions posed in the 12ᵗʰ century are today', especially with relevance to the 'mandir and masjid movements [of 1989]' (Nagpal). Sushma Chadha of *Hindu Times* also made this connection, calling 'caste system, religious biases, political manoeuvrings for selfish ends' the 'bêtes noires of Indian politics and society' (Chadha). Romesh Chander of *The Hindu* thought the play 'well illustrates how man has not learnt from history' and that Gaur's direction '[underlines] the relevance of the play set in 12ᵗʰ century in south India to the present day socio-political atmosphere in the country' (Chander). Chander further inferred that the choice of not using 'period costumes' was to '[place] emphasis on the socio-political relevance of the play' (Chander). Kasturika Mishra of *Sunday Herald* also called the play 'relevant'. Rashtriya Sahara called the play a 'powerful and timely response of the prevailing caste-tensions and religion-political turmoil in the country' (Mishra). Interestingly, critics have even accused productions of not fulfilling the potential for relevance, for not successfully inscribing current politics and issues into the presentation of the historical events portrayed in the plays. G. N. Prashanth of *The Hindu* commented with reference to a 2003 production of *Tughlaq* by Arjun Sajnani that the play has 'import […] for the many political possibilities of the present' (Prashanth) and expressed his opinion that the production should have used the play to point the rise of the Hindu right-wing in contemporary India as well as used the plurality of the character of Tughlaq to raise an alternative view of Islam in a world that is saturated with images of Muslim fundamentalism.

Unlike Dharwadker and Leslie, I regard the reinterpretation of history as a parallel to the present, both by Karnad in his writing and by directors in their subsequent interpretations of Karnad's historical plays, as an act of violence, as I have argued in the introduction. What are the implications and results of this formal violence? In discussing historical theatre, Dharwadker asserts that 'among symbolic forms, the nation is most easily recognizable on the stage, and the recognition is especially powerful when the stage seeks to enact history of the nation itself' (*Theatre* 221),

quoting Loren Kruger's notion of 'theatrical nationhood', the idea of 'summoning a representative audience that will in turn recognize itself as nation on stage' (*Theatre*, p. 221). Therefore, for Dharwadker, Karnad's historical theatre performs historiography, in direct contradiction to Windshuttle's ideas of what fiction can and cannot do. Karnad himself shows an awareness of the historiographical role his historical plays perform. He demonstrates this for instance in the play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. Two of the characters in the play are historians, Mackanzie and Kirmani. There is a power differential between the two. Mackanzie the white historian represents the victorious colonizer while Kirmani the Indian historian is the defeated colonized subject. Mackanzie requires the help of Kirmani to write the history of Tipu Sultan, and the power differential seems to ensure that it is Mackanzie's version of history that would prevail. Yet, Kirmani finds a way to resist this domination, by taking refuge in Tipu's journal of his dreams. Forced into a position of the subaltern, the Other, Kirmani accepts the fact that he can only keep the scraps thrown by the colonizer. Even the dream journal can only belong to him after Mackanzie tells him 'Keep the dreams'. Yet Kirmani manages to escape subordination through embracing his Otherness, by discovering a gap, a fissure, in the rational, objective worldview of the white historian that he could slip through – the world of dreams. Hence, Karnad brings to question history as we know it, by revealing it to be part of a westernized Mackanziean version of history, one that is part of a power differential. Mackanzie's apparent objectivity in studying the Indian *arthashastra*, in looking at the misdemeanours of the British soldiers and his expressed desire to know the story of the 'other side' is still necessarily subjective, the worldview of the victor imposed on the defeated. As Karnad quipped in Spencer Plaza in 2004, 'History was written by the British'.

As such, Karnad's plays can perhaps be seen as the world of dreams that Kirmani keeps to himself, the burrow where it might be possible to construct an alternative subaltern history. This alternative subaltern history, however, already demonstrates a violation of private and public, by bringing that which was meant to be private into the public arena. In the play, Kirmani himself expresses sorrow that Tipu's journal of dreams had not been destroyed and had been retrieved by

Munshi Habibullah, pointing out that Tipu 'had kept it concealed from his closest confidants (*Vol 2* 191). The necessity of creating that alternative history had violated an individual's privacy. My stand, however, is that Karnad's historical plays are not so much alternatives to the historical accounts of the victors, but performances of historiography. As such, they necessarily become performances of emptiness. Reading *Tughlaq*, *Tale Danda*, and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* as national allegories, but using Sarkar's definition of allegory as that which is present as an absence, Karnad's reopening of chapters in the history of Indian past, the postcolonial project of reclamation of history, is ultimately an empty endeavour, because the history that is uncovered is always inscribed back onto the nation and into a national project. Postcolonial historiography is revealed to be a melancholic process that can never free itself from nationalism. The endeavour to search for history always uncovers simulacra for the nation.

Dharwadker reiterates that *Tughlaq*, as a historical parallel, does not '[shrink] into an allegory of any one political figure or event' (*Theatre*, 250). As I have argued elsewhere, I do not agree with this distinction between the historical parallel and the concept of the national allegory, choosing to see the former as a modification of the latter, just as Dharwadker herself sees the incorporation of the problems of writing history a modification of the historical parallel, rather than an alternative. Ironically, Dharwadker's own reading of Karnad's characterisation of Tughlaq demonstrates a shrinking into an allegory of three (rather than *one*) political figures. Dharwadker has argued convincingly that the character Tughlaq should be read as a composite allegory of Gandhi (leadership as spirituality), Nehru (leadership as romance) and Indira Gandhi (leadership as power). It is certainly possible to read Basava as an allegory of Gandhi, the spiritual leader who wanted to extend his vision of ethics and morality to the nation and its people, and in doing so could not prevent the outbreak of violence. Leslie too notes the similarity between Basava and Gandhi (248) and further suggests that Sovideva, the tyrant who becomes the ruler of Kalyan at the end of the play, can be seen as an allegory of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency (252). Likewise Tipu could be an allegory of national leaders of the nineties and the millennium with their focus on

modernization and the economy, figures like Chandrababu Naidu who ushered in the IT era in Andhra Pradesh. Nevertheless, Dharwadker's suggestion of the threefold division of Tughlaq's psyche still seems insufficient to explain the radical self-divisiveness of Tughlaq, for Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi, whatever their differences, were still unitarians, were firm believers in one India, in a pan-Indian culture that can truly absorb all differences into oneness. Thus, while accepting Dharwadker's allegorizing strategy, I will now attempt to bring Karnad's plays into the frame of trauma literature, by seeing the allegory Dharwadker adopts as a 'key figure', and I will do this by reading Karnad's plays alongside the stances of Ahmad and Bilgrami that I have earlier presented. Instead of reducing the allegory to what amounts to a practically one-to-one mapping to specific Indian leaders, I suggest that the protagonists of Karnad's historical plays be read as allegories of Indian leadership. As such, this leadership would present an ideological hybrid as Ahmad suggests, one that is definitely dedicated to secularism but nonetheless carries the seeds of communalism within itself, precisely because of the simultaneous existence of liberal and cultural-essence based ideologies. At the same time, this leadership would also be presented as Bilgrami's concept of an Indian secularism, and as such a melancholic condition, one that within the Indian context, leads to the victimization of the citizens who face this governance.

Such a translation of Dharwadker's allegorizing strategy, immediately opens up the violence within Tughlaq's personality to a discussion about Indian postcoloniality. Dharwadker's strategy of regarding Tughlaq's self-contradictory characterisation as an allegory of the shift from spiritual leadership as exemplified by Gandhi and Nehru to a power-based leadership exemplified by Indira Gandhi tames the discussion, and does not sufficiently clarify the amazing self divisiveness and violence encountered by Tughlaq. The conversation between Tughlaq and Imam-ud-din, a religious leader who opposes Tughlaq's policies of equality to Hindus and Muslims, in Scene Three clarifies this:

> 'Imam-ud-din: [...] 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.
> Muhammad: They tried to indulge in politics – I couldn't allow that' (*Vol 1* 26).

It becomes clear here that Tughlaq is a secular monarch, one who believes in the separation of religion and politics. Later in the scene, Imam-ud-din tells Tughlaq:

> Imam-ud-din: Religion! Politics! Take heed, Sultan, one day these verbal distinctions will rip you into two.
> Muhammad: [...Reading the Greeks] tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sang to them. And my kingdom too is what I am – torn into pieces by visions whose validity I can't deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha. (Smiles.) I'm sorry. But it can't be done. (*Vol 1* 27)

The tragic flaw in Tughlaq, then, is his secularism. As Chatterjee argues in *A Possible India*, one of the characteristics of the secular state is equality (*Possible* 241), and the cornerstone of Tughlaq's policies is indeed equality towards Muslims and non-Muslims. Tughlaq's secularism is presented by Karnad as the non-negotiated top-down secularism that Bilgrami presents in his article, one that is artificial, imposed on Tughlaq's people, not the result of negotiation between different factions. The refusal of Tughlaq's subjects to accept his policies is then an allegory of the communal factions in India refusing to accept the top-down secularism that has been imposed on them, a secularism in which they had no actual part to play. Imam-ud-din in this scene first invites Tughlaq to be a communal leader, by being an Islamic ruler whose reign clearly recognizes his non-Muslim (especially Hindu) subjects as the Other. However, Tughlaq refuses, unable to accept his non-Muslim subjects as different from himself. The fact that Imam-ud-din is an alternative leader, a possible leader for the Muslims in Tughlaq's kingdom who sees no reason to separate religion and politics, and the fact that Tughlaq perceives this as a threat once again illustrates the conflict between secularism and communalism. Karnad presents this secularism as a melancholic condition.

It is Tughlaq's refusal to accept the existence of 'others', his tendency to keep that which is different as a salient part of his selfhood that truly unleashes violence upon his kingdom. Tughlaq himself compares his divided self to the divided nature of his kingdom in the scene mentioned above. Any attempt to remove the 'others' who have become a part of his kingdom or his selfhood results in violence. This is a melancholic violence that is forever directed towards itself, for when

the Self is already multiple and divided, there is no real Other, only a myriad of strange Self-Other complexes, all suspended within a state of eternal warfare. This multiplicity and divisiveness is stranger and more virulent than that suggested by Dharwadker, for it is more than the threefold division of Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi's notions of leadership and statehood. It is the uncontainable and irreconcilable multiplicity and division of the modern Self, to be more specific, the modern postcolonial individual. The problem faced by the multi-ethnic state is in fact the problem faced by the modern individual, and the violence unleashed by this reciprocal multiplicity and division cannot be defined and explained merely by a discussion about statehood and leadership but must necessarily extend to the individual and his or her trauma.

I now extend the reading strategy I have used for *Tughlaq* to the play *Tale Danda*. At first glance, it does not seem possible that *Tale Danda* could likewise be an allegory of Indian secularism. If secularism is the separation of religion and politics, then in this play it is Basava's religious vision that shapes the politics of the sharanas, and in turn affects the politics of Bijjala's Kalyan. Two components of the faith of the sharanas are given special importance by Karnad in *Tale Danda* – the concept of equality, which amounts to the renunciation of caste, and non-violence. Seen together, there is not much difference between the faith of the sharanas and Indian secularism, which is also predicated on a sense of equality and is forever poised against violence, generally communal violence. The violence portrayed in *Tale Danda* is unquestionably communal violence, both interreligious conflicts such as between Hindus and Jains as well as intra-religious conflicts between high caste Brahmins and the caste-rejecting sharanas. Even though Basava's power over the sharanas is predicated on a common faith, it frequently overflows its bounds and presents itself as universal ethics, rejecting difference. In Scene Four, Basava and Jagadeva have an argument about the conflict between Jains and the sharanas:

> 'Jagadeva: [...] Must you go to Muddur today?
> Basavanna: Yes, some of our people have occupied a Jain temple there by force. They are threatening to smash the naked idols in it and turn it into a Shiva temple. Things could go out of hand –
> Jagadeva: And what will you do once you get there? I know. Rebuke our own people. Hold them responsible. You don't know how the Jains bait us, provoke us –

>Basavanna: Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and mortar is a monument to stupidity' (*Vol 2* 36).

While Jagadeva posits that Basava should support his 'own people', Basava uses the concept of non-violence, itself a component of his faith, to take a neutral stance, a stance that does not align him with the sharanas and mark the Jain as the Other. Basavanna's comments about retaliatory violence and 'in the name of a structure of brick and mortar' is noted by both Dharwadker and Leslie to be an allegorical allusion to the Mandir movement begun in the 80s by Hindu fundamentalists, who wanted to demolish a mosque in Ayodhya built by the Mughal emperor Babur in the sixteenth century and build in its place a Hindu temple for the God Rama, claiming that Ayodhya marks the birthplace of Rama and a Hindu temple standing there had been previously demolished by Babur and replaced with a mosque in order to suppress Hinduism and spread Islam. Karnad's allegory in *Tale Danda* became especially significant when on 6th December 1992, two years after Karnad had written the play, Hindu fanatics destroyed the Babri mosque. The expression of a sentiment against the Mandir movement would in the Indian context be recognized as a secularist sentiment that is expressed in opposition to a Hindu communalist sentiment. Thus, Basava's stance here comes across as a secular one. Similarly in Scene Five, Basava has a conversation about tribal refugees from Andhra:

>'Kalayya: Basavanna, these tribals have brought their god with them. You should see that idol. Rolling eyes. A tongue lolling out. It's very funny.
>Gundanna (*laughs*): I think – the sooner you initiate them into our fold the better!
>Basavanna: A roof over their head first, and a piece of land to spread their mats on. We can minister to their spiritual needs later' (*Vol 2* 41).

Later on in the scene, there is an exposition about the tribals:

>'Haralayya: Is that about the refugees from Andhra, Gangakka? They say a band of tribal shepherds is camping on the riverside.
>Basavanna: There's famine raging in Andhra. These poor souls have trecked for weeks in search of food and shelter. But *our people* won't let them stray this side of the river because of their low caste. I tell you, for sheer inhumanity *our people* have no equal' (emphasis mine, *Vol 2* 42).

This time, it is the concept of equality, which implies a rejection of caste, that Basava presents to evoke once again a universal neutral stance. When Basava does evoke an 'us versus them' rhetoric

using the words 'our people', it is only to rebuke his own people for their inhuman acts, and to lead them towards more humanitarian acts, which would effectively remove that very 'us versus them' paradigm. When Gundanna suggests a way by which these others could be included and assimilated – through religious conversion – Basava rejects that, suggesting the neutral ethical alternative of helping them simply because they are in need. Basava thus always takes the conflict out of a communal context and engages with it from a universal and ethical context, which essentially makes it a secular context. This in many ways resonates with the implicit contradictions of Gandhian politics. As Bilgrami points out:

> 'though there is no gainsaying the humanism inherent in Gandhi's politics, it is also foolish and sentimental to deny the brahmanical elements in it. There is the plain and well known fact that Gandhi [...] encouranged the communal Hindu elements in the national movement by using Hindu symbolism to mobilise mass nationalist feeling' (75).

Hindu concepts were used by Gandhi to proclaim a humanist and secularist stance, similar to the manner in which equality and non-violence are used by Basava in the play. Hence Basava's faith, like Gandhian Hinduism, carries within itself the possibility of yet another communal position. The character Jagadeva illustrates precisely that. Like Imam-ud-din in *Tughlaq*, Jagadeva is an alternative leader, another possible 'hero of the sharanas' (*Vol 2* 37). He represents a leadership that is based on the essential difference between the sharanas and the others, one that would not hesitate to use violence to propagate the interests of the group. Thus the faith of the sharanas can be both a secular position as exemplified by Basava, as well as a communal one as exemplified by Jagadeva. As Leslie puts it, 'Jagadeva [embraces] the path of violence [and] contrasts himself deliberately with Basava's non-violent stance' (252).

In Scene Fourteen, Jagadeva decides to kill King Bijjala to avenge the torture and killing of the father of the Brahmin girl and the father of the Untouchable boy whom the sharanas had united in marriage. This murder is essentially symbolic, spurred by Jagadeva's fear that posterity might look down on the sharanas for not retaliating, for the torture and murder of the fathers had in fact been ordered by prince Sovideva, not Bijjala. Furthermore, Bijjala had now lost all power to his son Sovideva and had almost gone mad after the death of his wife the queen. As Jagadeva approaches

Bijjala to kill him, two significant events occur. Firstly, the atheistic and practical Bijjala clings to the *linga*, the icon of Shiva in the sanctum as he is faced by Jagadeva. Secondly, Bijjala suddenly mistakes Jagadeva for his son, addresses him as Sovideva and tries to embrace him:

> Bijjala: What's it, lad? Why are you so upset with me?
> (*Jagadeva stabs him. As Bijjala collapses, he grabs Jagadeva.*)
>   Why, Sovi? Why – why this anger?
> Jagadeva: I am not Sovi. I am not your son.
> Bijjala (*trying to embrace him*): Sovi, son –
> Jagadeva: Let go of me! I told you – I'm not your son!
> (*Jagadeva pushes Bijjala, who rolls to the floor.* [...]) (*Vol 2* 97)

Shortly after murdering Bijjala, Jagadeva commits suicide, plunging the dagger into himself. In this final scene, Jagadeva's necessary paradigm of 'us and them' suddenly collapses. When Bijjala hugs the icon of Shiva, he becomes a worshipper of Shiva, no different from the sharanas. When Bijjala mistakes Jagadeva as his son Sovideva, once again difference is obliterated. Jagadeva, whose leadership had been based on radical difference, at this moment experiences the melancholia of the secularist. The enemy, the other, suddenly becomes one of his people, his kind. The murder he had committed hence became empty of all possible meaning, and with it Jagadeva's self identity also unravels. To signify that self-dissolution, Jagadeva kills himself.

At the same time, Ahmadian hybridity can also be discerned in the doubling Karnad creates in the two historical plays – Imam-ud-din/Tughlaq in *Tughlaq* and Jagadeva/Basava in *Tale Danda*. Imam-ud-Din is said to be similar to Tughlaq in appearance, mannerism, even in their liking for making speeches. Like Imam-ud-din, Tughlaq too is an Islamic scholar, and frequently shows his aptitude and interest in Islam. In a similar vein, Jagadeva is a sharana like Basava, and what is more, his actions are based on his interpretations of Basava's vision, the fact that Basava's philosophy inherently carries the kernels for such a positioning. As such, Karnad problematizes the characterization of his protagonists. Even though they are allegories of Indian secularism, they exhibit the hybridity of Indian postcoloniality by holding within themselves the seeds of communalism. In many ways, this creates an unstable and layered portrayal of violence. Karnad's attitude toward culture appears problematic at best in the historical plays. In the play *Tughlaq*,

Tughlaq seems to be attracted to various cultures and cultural knowledge, but finds his exposure

to these many and multiple cultures potentially traumatic, which destabilises his personality. The

play *Tale Danda*, though dealing with the cultural divisiveness of Brahmanical Hinduism as well as

the clashes cultural and religious differences give rise to, is saturated with the Virasaiva poetry of

Basava, for which Karnad obviously has much admiration. Dharwadker points out that in his

preface to the play, Karnad comments that 'the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life

today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions [the Virasaiva thinkers] offered'

('Introduction Vol 2' xiii). Thus, even when noting the problems caused by culture, Karnad is

willing to consider solutions offered by culture. In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Tipu is presented as

a secular realist, a materialist interested in all that is new rather than tied down by traditions. Yet

even Tipu says, 'the many faiths in my Kingdom will depend upon me for protection and succour'

(*Vol 2* 94), which makes Tipu precisely the kind of secularist Ahmad mentions, who is concerned

with India not just as a state but as a civilization.

Bilgrami and Ahmad's discussions also bring to the fore some interesting problems I

encounter in reading Karnad's violence in his historical plays. As I have discussed elsewhere,

extending the concept of melancholia to Bilgrami's Indian secularism idea creates a new dialectic of

leader-subject within the discourse of melancholia. As such, even though Karnad conscientiously

speaks of the suffering of the people, the subjects in his three historical plays, the suffering of the

subjects take a back seat to the suffering encountered by the melancholic leader. As such, the

presentation of violence is usually far more concerned with the psychological violence encountered

by Tughlaq, Basava or Jagadeva and Tipu rather than the communal violence encountered by the

people who are the victims of this melancholic leadership. Strangely enough, although Karnad

demonstrates the failure of secularism through the spectacular failure of the secular leaders, he

continues to regard secularism as right, and never considers the alternative position of either

regarding secularism as a mistake or giving actual consideration to the communal ideologies.

Karnad's historical plays carry an unmistakeable aura of tragedy and melancholia precisely because

the secular endeavours of the protagonists are both admired and admitted to be failures by Karnad. Karnad's historical protagonists are presented as figures of what we can justifiably call modernity, even though two of the three plays are set in pre-modern times. They are all progressive, and their progressiveness, interestingly, takes the form of secularism – the separation of religion and politics, and this secularism takes place in a multicultural setting. In the case of Tughlaq, he wishes to treat his Hindu and Muslim subjects as equals. For Basava, differences in caste should be overcome and should not play a part in politics. Tipu wishes to transcend the cultural differences among different nations on the subcontinent to fight against the westerner and gain access to his modernity. John Clark suggests in his book *Modern Asian Art* that in the Asian context the avant garde artist is recognized as one who is progressive for his time, and as such one whose work is not understand by his contemporaries and is appreciated only in retrospect, probably posthumously (Clark, 231). Tughlaq, Basava and Tipu can certainly be understood as avant garde artists (for politicians can be considered artists too), whose policies were not appreciated in their own time and which the modern audience watching the play now appreciates, which is in line with Karnad's own admiration for these characters. However, the fact that these plays are national allegories which parallel the present complicates the issue, for it seems to defer the proper understanding of these historical figures further yet into the future.

Furthermore, Karnad's presentation of alternative leadership is not developed as well as his presentation of secular leadership. Other possible positions apart from a communal one or a secular one are not given much space or development. Characters like Najib and Aziz in *Tughlaq* and Damodara Bhatta in *Tale Danda* represent practical and opportunistic politics, and this is so patently presented by Karnad as unethical that it cannot be viewed as a tangible alternative to the dialectic of communalism/secularism. Also, characters who represent communal leadership lack the layering and the character complexity of the secular protagonists. Imam-ud-din is presented as an arrogant man who is simply a fanatical believer in the Koran. Jagadeva is ultimately motivated by personal glory, so even his painful personal and familial sacrifices appear like the acts of a fanatic.

Karnad fails for instance to illustrate through plot and characterisation the fear of assimilation that is faced by those who adopt a communal position, especially minorities, despite mentioning this very briefly in the first scene in *Tughlaq*. More importantly, Karnad fails to see the flip-side of his own theory of the 'relational self', that Indian identity is predicated on relationships, that such an identity is then necessarily equally predicated on difference, on non-identity. Ashis Nandy in his book *Time Warp* comments that:

> Multiculturalism may sometimes imply a culturally embedded identity in which the others are telescoped into the self as inalienable parts of the self. In that case, they survive not merely as fragments of a negative identity, but also as temptations, possibilities and rejected selves. Such internalization is not unknown to psychoanalytic psychology though there is in it, in this instance, a larger cultural dimension. The internalization need not be of significant individualised others; it can be of culturally significant collective others' (209).

Nandy here is offering the notion that identity is predicated both on relation as well as non-relation, that the recognition of collective groups as 'rejected selves' is an important component of self identity. Karnad does not demonstrate such an understanding of communalism, that it is predicated on a relation of non-relation, a recognition of whom one is not. Instead, communalism is presented automatically as divisive and fundamental. The possibility that communalism could help shape identity, and this could be the basis of national identity, is not considered by Karnad, who ultimately refuses to countenance any justification for communalism.

Karnad's obvious admiration for secularism sits oddly with his open demonstration of the violent outcomes of a secularist leadership in his historical plays. Although Karnad's historical protagonists were progressive and admirable, Karnad still presents them as spectacular failures. Bilgrami's definition of a non-negotiated transcendent concept of secularism is highly clarifying and pertinent to a discussion of the progressive policies of Tughlaq, Basava and to a certain extent, Tipu. In spite of his enlightened ideals, Tughlaq did not construct the means for the different communities in his kingdom, the Hindus and the Muslims, to negotiate a law that could be equal and just for them. Similarly, Basava's vision for a casteless society remains a transcendental vision that warrants fulfilment within the society of Kalyan. It never actually leads to negotiations between

the different caste groups in Kalyan to construct a fairer, more equal society. Even the marriage between the Untouchable boy and the Brahmin girl, the direct cause of the violence in Kalyan, was borne out of convictions based on Basava's visions and teachings, rather than out of negotiations between the two communities. In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, the interactions do not occur between leader and the masses but between the enlightened leader and other non-enlightened leaders, which to a certain extent displaces the question of negotiation. Also, the colonial endeavour is presented essentially as a power play that uses negotiation as a front.

Tughlaq, Basava and Tipu are all desiring characters, and each character's desire blurs the distinction between the personal and the public. Each character desires to achieve something personally, and this desire percolates outwards into the society each character inhabits and in some form rules. Hence, the violence faced by the people each character rules is in fact caused by that character's inability to separate their selfhood from their respective societies. Despite each character's good intentions, intentions that Karnad very clearly sympathizes with, each character chooses to fulfil his desires using his society as the site for that fulfilment, and each character is ultimately disappointed because his society eventually expresses its separateness and difference from him. In the case of Tughlaq, he ends up mad, unable to accept this difference. Tipu dies, unable to reconcile the differences within and without. Basava manages to escape the condition of melancholia by choosing to follow his own individual path to spiritual enlightenment. Basava therefore prevents himself from becoming a melancholic by converting his desire from a desire for societal change to a desire for personal fulfilment. However, in choosing this path, he takes himself out of the world of the play and thus the audience is unable to share in this delivery from melancholia. Instead the audience watches the traumatic self unravelling of Jagadeva, whom, as I have argued, faces the melancholia that Basava has escaped. Karnad's plot ensures the audience is left with Jagadeva's melancholia rather than Basava's liberation. As such, Tughlaq, Basava and Tipu are not just allegories of the nation, or allegories (composite or otherwise) of national leaders, but also figures who allegorize the melancholia of Indian secular leadership.

Having looked at leaders whose quest for personal fulfilment overflowed its boundaries and wrecked violence on the subjects ruled by these leaders, I now turn to the mythological plays, in which I argue that the narratives of personal fulfilment are in fact allegories of the nation once again, and this best explains the interruption of the personal narratives by national images and discourses. Here too I will use a 'key figure' to create a frame that allows for a better discussion of the violence that is perceptible in Karnad's mythological plays.

CHAPTER 2: NOT QUITE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE –
          MYTH AS TRAUMATIC NATIONAL ALLEGORY

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the violence I perceive in Karnad's mythological plays. Once again, I will be studying Karnad's mythological plays as an oeuvre, in order to see the repeating patterns of violence at the level of plot and characterisation that occur in these plays. Here I will be taking a stand very different from current scholarship, which persists in reading Karnad's mythological plays as works concerned with gender and individual narratives. I on the other hand, will consider them as national allegories, and use a key figure to translate the allegories into the frame of trauma literature. Through this, I hope to be able to come up with an explanation for the blurring of the private/public divide that occurs through the interruptions of the ostensibly private narratives by national images and discourses, and use this to discuss the specific presentation of violence I observe in these plays. I will first look at the current discussions that try to frame Karnad's mythological plays, focusing on the 'theatre of roots' concept and the gendered psychological readings of Dharwadker and others, and show the gaps and inconsistencies in these reading strategies. I will then go on to explore Veena Das's writings alongside the mythological plays to try to come up with a 'key figure' that can better frame the violence in the plays and open them up for discourse.

Ahmad's hypothesis of the nationalist cultural project certainly fits Suresh Awasthi's concept of the 'theatre of roots', one of the labels that has been used to describe Karnad's mythological plays. While Karnad is not one of the three playwrights mentioned by Awasthi as the quintessential 'theatre of roots' practitioner, Karnad and his works have frequently been bracketed into this category. In 'Retrospective of Modern Indian Theatre', Induja Awasthi (not to be confused with Suresh Awasthi) comments that B.V. Karanth's production of Karnad's *Hayavadhana* '[marks] a significant point in the 'theatre of roots' movement' (Awasthi, I. 186), showing the extent to which *Hayavadhana* has been considered central in any discussion of the 'theatre of roots'. Martin Russell in his review of *Drama Contemporary: India*, an anthology of plays including Karnad's *The Fire*

and the Rain (Kannada title *Agni Mattu Male*), refers to this play as '[a work] of the 'theatre of roots' genre' (383), indicating that the 'theatre of roots' label persisted as a description for Karnad's mythological plays even till 2002, the year Russell's review was published.

Awasthi, in his article ''Theatre of Roots': Encounter with Tradition' gives the name to 'the unconventional theatre which has been evolving […] in India as a result of modern theatre's encounter with tradition' (Awasthi, S. 48). Awasthi sees this as a result of decolonization, 'the return to and discovery of tradition […] inspired by a search for roots and a quest for identity [due to the] decolonization of lifestyle, social institutions, creative forms, and cultural modes' (Awasthi, S. 48). Awasthi explains the tendency in Indian postcolonial theatre as follows:

> Directors […] have had meaningful encounters with tradition and, with their work, have reversed the colonial course of contemporary theatre, putting it back on the track of the great Natyasastra tradition. It sounds paradoxical, but their theatre is both avant-garde in the context of conventional realistic theatre, and part of the 2000 year old Natyasastra tradition (Awasthi, S. 48).

Awasthi hence sees the 'theatre of roots' as a meeting point, an 'encounter' between tradition and modernity. He sees in this no conflict, or actual problem, but merely the source of inspiration for a new theatre. Yet the seeming 'paradox' Awasthi mentions in passing is one worth exploring further when considering Ahmad's hypothesis of cultural nationalism. The obvious progressive (and hence anti-traditional) implication inferred by the term 'avant-garde' is coupled with the regression suggested by the return to a 'tradition', that of the 2000 year old *Natyasastra*. Awasthi explains away this oxymoron using the phrase 'putting it back on the track'. The implications are clearly nationalistic and patriotic. According to Awasthi, Indian theatrical tradition, to be seen as singular in the form of the 2000 year old *Natyasastra* tradition, is to be considered as a tradition at such an apex of sophistication that the colonial period, in which theatre moved away from this tradition, is in fact the period of regression, and now that theatre practitioners are moving back to this tradition, Indian theatre is back on the path of progress. In the eyes of the western primitive theatre practitioners then, in Awasthi's opinion, the 2000 year old *Natyasastra* would presumably seem avant-garde, because it is so advanced when compared to their own theatre traditions. The 'theatre

of roots' is therefore a postcolonial project, one with definite anti-imperialist, pro-nationalist sentiments, one that hopes, by retrieving the lost theatrical tools of the past, to aid in the progression of the postcolonial nation in letting go of its colonial cultural fetters. In other words, it perfectly exemplifies the orientation toward an idealized past for the recuperation of national narcissism that Ahmad and Adorno speak of.

Dharwadker expresses doubt about the credibility of the 'theatre of roots' as a useful concept in studying Indian theatre, by indicating the lack of 'criticism explaining its aesthetic, semantic, social and political intentions in the present', pointing out that even Awasthi did not discuss the works of the 'theatre of roots' in his study (138). She agrees with Wole Soyinka, Brian Crow and Chris Banfield that the 'theatre of roots' would only be meaningful if it had a part to play in present conditions, also quoting Rustom Barucha's arguments that a recovered tradition is necessarily not a living one and has already been mediated by the colonial experience (140). She points out that Barucha had dismissed the 'theatre of roots', asserting that it was neither sufficiently connected to actual traditional practices nor to contemporary conditions in India (325). Furthermore, Dharwadker, unlike Awasthi, sees no unity in the way folk elements were used by the apparent practitioners of the 'theatre of roots', which further implies the incapacity of the term as an organising principle to explain the plays it is associated with (323). To Dharwadker the 'folk' elements in the works of playwrights like Karnad, who have been considered as epitomising the 'theatre of roots', can never represent a recuperation of traditions, for they are decidedly urban and are being used by Karnad to express urban themes, issues, problems and ideologies. Dalmia considers the 'theatre of roots' an attempt to 'manipulate and integrate into the grand national master narrative', making possible the 'national-chauvinist appropriation and monumentalization of diverse folk cultures' (211). She sees the 'theatre of roots' as inseparable from the Indian government's attempt to '[propagate] the image of an India Immortal (200) to the western countries, in order to promote India as a viable country for investment. An actual search for 'roots', for Dalmia, should include a search for modern, more recent roots (207), and the 'theatre of roots' cannot take away the

necessity for a modern Indian theatre (209).

While agreeing with Dharwadker and Dalmia that the 'theatre of roots' concept is not very helpful in studying Karnad's mythological plays (especially in analyzing the violence in the plays), I do differ from Dalmia's opinion that Awasthi's 'theatre of roots' does not have a space for modernity. The 'theatre of roots' does have a space for modernity, namely the avant garde, although for Awasthi this takes the form of non-realist theatrical practices, which are traditional in the Indian context but progressive in the western context. Nevertheless, the 'theatre of roots' certainly calls for the concept of an Indian avant garde, an Indian modern. Geeta Kapur and John Clark both propose the possibility of an 'Asian avant garde', one that is associated with the notion of progress and represents a reconfiguration of traditions rather than a preoccupation with newness – a possible third world modernity. Dhareshwar in 'Postcolonial in the postmodern: Or, the political after modernity' refers to Kapur's works that are based on the creation of the Asian avant garde and its possible implications for an alternative (third world) modernity (PE107). Dhareshwar however points out that Kapur's alternative modernity is always subsumed by nationalism (PE109). Nationalism becomes the substitute for modernity in her analysis, the paradigm that defines and thus limits her conceptualisation of modernity. Hence Dhareshwar sees Kapur's Asian avant garde turning into yet another simulacrum of the nation – nationalism replaces modernity, and as such removes the actual political potentiality of modernity, substituting for it collaboration with a nationalist project. The Asian avant garde, then, is just another name for nationalism.

Are Karnad's plays also part of this 'Asian avant garde'? Are they too part of the nationalist project? Awasthi speaks of an important seminar of theatre practitioners he had personally organized in 1971, the 'National Roundtable on Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre', in which discussions were held about the future direction that Indian theatre ought to take (Awasthi, S. 50). Awasthi regards his seminar as a resounding success, convinced that after this seminar 'the new theatre moved ahead with greater confidence and vigour' (Awasthi, S. 50). Awasthi sees the 1971 seminar and an earlier one he had conducted in 1961, the 'national seminar', to be 'points of

reference' in 'any discussion of the encounter with tradition and the resultant theatre of roots' (Awasthi, S. 50). We do not know if Karnad attended the 1971 seminar, but he did attend the 1961 national seminar. Karnad notes, unlike Awasthi, that at the seminar 'participants fell into opposing camps' (*Theatre* 339), the traditionalists and the modernists. Hence for Karnad, violence is the outcome of the meeting between tradition and modernity. Another point of departure for Karnad from Awasthi is his categorical rejection of any notion of homogeneity in Indian performative arts:

> '[Official] history is based on the assumption that there is such a thing as a homogenous 'Indian culture', within which Indian theatre, Indian dance, Indian music, and so on find their own homogenous identities without conflict. According to this theory, when applied to the field of performing arts, all traditional forms are merely expressions of a basic philosophy, an attitude toward life and the arts, which is common to all Indians and which has remained unchanged through the centuries, so that no history needs to be taken into account. [The] truth is that 'conflicting philosophies, historical situations, and cultural attitudes may have shaped these different forms [of performing arts] and may motivate them still today' (*Theatre* 338).

Karnad sees this as the consequence of 'the myth of an all-Indian cultural unity [which] had a valid role to play in the colonial as well as the immediate post-Independence period' (*Theatre* 339). In Karnad's categorical refusal to accept Awasthi's idealised notions of Indian theatre, we see that his engagement with culture and mythology differs from that promoted by Awasthi. Reading Karnad's mythological plays as national allegory directly brings his mythological plays into a discussion of Indian postcoloniality and averts the necessity of a peripheral and failed discussion via an analysis of the folk elements that purportedly make his mythological plays part of the 'theatre of roots'.

Dharwadker chooses to take Karnad's mythological plays out of the context of Awasthi's 'theatre of roots', preferring to discuss their use of Indian epics (especially the Mahabharata) and their use of folk elements which makes possible an alternative space for the representation of women. This is tantamount to taking Karnad's mythological plays out of a national context, and in effect rendering them unsuitable for a discussion of national theatre. Dharwadker argues that Karnad's use of folk elements, which is what brought his plays, especially *Hayavadhana*, into the gamut of a discussion of national or 'Indian' theatre, is in fact more representative of authorial originality, as the folk elements are in fact not a recovery or preservation, not even a

reconfiguration, of traditions, but a medium for discussing and exploring urban issues. A discussion of Karnad's mythological plays as representative of the 'theatre of roots' and by implication a national 'Indian' theatre therefore becomes a discussion based on a mistake. I posit however, that even if Karnad's use of myths and folk elements are meant to be in service to his authorial originality, the fact that his self-expression needs to take on cultural and national images and ideas is significant, as it points once again to the violation of the boundary between private and public; self and nation. Karnad's writings also indicate this, as I have shown in the introduction.

Setting aside the discussion of Karnad's plays through the frame of folk theatre, Dharwadker goes on to give a reading of *Hayavadhana* using gender. Dharwadker sees the protagonist Padmini in *Hayavadhana* as possessing a selfhood that the male characters lack, and maintains that Padmini's representation undermines patriarchy even if this is not overtly discernable (*Theatre* 338). Through this strategy, it becomes possible for Dharwadker to insert Karnad's mythological plays into a discourse on national theatre and Indian postcoloniality, via a marginal discourse of the possibility of social revolution, of patriarchy and gender inequality. Ultimately though, this still classifies Karnad's plays as primarily concerned with private destiny that may only have peripheral, inferred references to a national discourse, and Dharwadker surprisingly does not go on to develop this into a social or societal discourse. Dharwadker is not alone in perceiving Karnad's mythological plays as works concerned with the private. Prema Nandakumar, states in a review of *Three Plays: Naga-Mandala; Hayavadhana; Tughlaq* that Padmini and Rani (the protagonist of *Naga Mandala*) are emblems for the New Woman, unshackled from the repressions of a terrible past' (434). L.S. Gill in his analysis of *Hayavadhana*, also sees the play as essentially dealing with 'elemental human passions' (Gill, p. 16). Geeta Kumar, investigating the power-politics in *Hayavadhana*, *Tughlaq* and *Tale Danda*, calls the power politics in *Hayavadhana* 'Freudian', taking the form of 'psychological warfare' (Kumar, p. 118). Suman Bala considers the aim of Karnad's mythological plays 'the [spelling out of] modern man's anguish and dilemmas' (Bala, p. 127). N. Krishnankutty asserts that Karnad's retelling of the myth in *Hayavadhana* 'is to give voice to those who have been left out or

marginalized in the earlier version' (Krishnankutty, p. 137 – 138), in this case the woman (Padmini) and the other man (Kapila). Krishnankutty however does not explore this as the possible reinstating of the subaltern, keeping his discussion still within the confines of the private. Suneetha Rani sees *Hayavadhana* as either a critique or an expression of Karnad's own personal opinions on women and their desires (Rani, p. 144 – 148). Sangeeta Das considers *Hayavadhana* an illumination of 'the essentially ambiguous aspect of human nature' (Das, p. 150). B. Indira compares *Hayavadhana* to Margaret Adwood's *The Edible Woman* 'to show how two women struggle to live a full life' (Indira, p. 153). Interestingly, Indira indicates that *The Edible Woman* is a possible national allegory, allegorising 'Canada's fight against the American Imperialism' (Indira, p. 153), but she has no such consideration for *Hayavadhana*. Gill, Kumar, Bala, Krishnankutty, Rani, Das and Indira all choose to see the principle characters as psychologically three-dimensional. None perceive them as national allegories, as I do.

My biggest objection to the reading strategy of seeing Karnad's mythological plays as repositories of the private is that once again, the violence that I perceive in the plays is not bought to the fore of the discussion when this reading strategy is employed. The use of this strategy usually does not even include an effort to open up the discussions of violence to the level of the social or societal through the suggestion that the violence encountered in the mythological plays is gendered violence, violence that is a result of or is undertaken against patriarchy. Violence as a theme is embalmed within the confines of private discourses and in the process, is marginalized yet again in the discussion. Also, the interruptions to the private domestic narratives by national discourses are ignored by these reading strategies. In *Hayavadhana*, the main story of Padmini-Devadata-Kapila occurs within a framing story of Hayavadhana, a man with the head of a horse. Within this story, albeit in a humorous manner, occur short but striking discourses on the actions of a good citizen, such as upholding cleanliness in the streets and taking an interest in the 'social life of the Nation – Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist pattern of Society' (Karnad, *Vol 1,* 114). Towards the end of the play, Hayavadhana sings the national anthem, an act that has

performative significance, as it is mandatory for an Indian audience to stand up when the national anthem is sung. In *Nagamandala*, the character Rani finally becomes a village goddess, and I argue here that she in fact becomes a simulacrum for Mother India, the divine symbol of the nation. In *Agni Mattu Male*, the overarching story is a national one, about the disaster of drought and the nation's need for rain. At the end of the play, this national need comes into direct conflict with the personal wants of the protagonist Arvasu. In *Bali*, the King and the Queen together are made to evoke a united image of the fecundity of the nation, which again I posit is a simulacrum of Mother India. The play also frames the private narrative within a civilizational discourse about violence. Even the trope of pregnancy, the need for the King and the Queen to provide an heir to the throne, has nationalistic undercurrents.

My own take here is that Dharwadker and the others' impression of women being privileged in *Hayavadhana* and by implication in other plays by Karnad that use folk elements is a misreading. Women appear to be the repository of the personal or private in Karnad's plays and as such it seems as though they are capable of forging their own selfhood, escaping the inscription of the nation in its many guises, but this seeming freedom is a myth, for Karnad is in fact using gender symbolically to demonstrate the powerlessness that is inherent in a narrative that has no choice but continuously to be a national allegory. Partha Chatterjee studies the correlation between gender and nationalism in *The Nation and its Fragments*. He speaks of the anti-colonial movement, which created a home and the world (*ghar* and *bahir*) dialectic, whereby in external matters India would modernize and learn from the West, while in internal, that is, cultural matters, India was already superior to the West and needed to maintain its traditions to retain its identity (*Nation* 120). Women then become naturally implicated in this dialectic, as the prevention of the westernization of women, the maintenance of women as guardians of culture and tradition, becomes inscribed into the nationalistic project (*Nation* 126 – 127). Karnad re-inscribes Padmini, Rani and the Queen into the nationalist project, but in a manner that performs the experience of the nationalist project in terms of identity formation. This is why all three female characters are necessarily circumscribed within domesticity,

and their desires are connected with domestic concerns like love, marriage and most importantly, pregnancy. Rather than a subtle, covert resistance to patriarchy, this is a sublimation of patriarchy, for patriarchy is not the real concern of discussion. The women are merely foils for an actual discussion about Indian secularism. They are national allegories. Dharwadker herself states that 'the majority of [Karnad's] plays employ the narratives of myth, history, and folklore to evoke an ancient or premodern world that resonates in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present' (p. ix). I will go on to show that when the concept of the national allegory is extended to Karnad's mythological plays, these plays take on a far more central locus in the discussion of Indian postcoloniality than Dharwadker's somewhat peripheral discussion of Karnad via the topics of folk theatre and gender allows for.

Describing *Hayavadhana*, Dalmia informs the reader that

'The Sanskrit tale had been given a psychological turn by both [Heinrich] Zimmer and [Thomas] Mann; it was now further transformed by Karnad. It became the fable of the incompleteness of the modern self, yearning for completion in the partner' (196).

While Karnad had kept enough of the 'psychological turn' of Mann and Zimmer, it must be noted that Karnad had also reversed the shift towards a more psychological interpretation of the story by turning the three main characters back into types. Karnad himself, in speaking of the use of masks in his play *Hayavadhana*, states that:

'in traditional Indian theatre [...] a character represents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype. [...] This is why characters in *Hayavadhana* have no real names. The heroine is called Padmini after one of the six types into which Vatsyayana classified all women. Her husband is Devadatta, a formal mode of addressing a stranger. His friend is Kapila, simply 'the dark one'' (313).

Karnad's avowed aim to present his characters as types indicates that he intended *Hayavadhana* to be an allegory. I propose to show that the seeming character complexity that so many have noted in Karnad's plays, as a result of which his characters have been read and performed as three-dimensional psychological beings, in actual fact allegorizes a discourse of selfhood when that Self encounters an Other. This encounter between Self and Other is based on Karnad's concept of a 'relational self', of a Self whose identity is always predicated on relationships. Thus, the ultimate

objective of this presentation of selfhood is still to present a national allegory.

Veena Das's book *Life and Words* connects trauma with domesticity, suggesting that in the Indian context, trauma is best understood in the way it seeps into everyday life. I hope to create a link between Das's reconfiguring of trauma theory within the Indian context by situating it within domesticity and the seeming domesticity of Karnad's mythological plays. Karnad mentions in his paper on Indian theatre that 'every Indian defines himself in relational terms, in terms of his relationship to the other members of his family, clan, and caste. ('Theatre' 340). I perceive a link between Karnad's 'relational self' concept and Das's recognition of relationships as the site and cause of violence. Das notes the important connection between relationships and violence:

> '[What] happens to the subject and the world when the memory of such events is folded into ongoing relationships' (8).

> '[Community] is constituted through agreements and hence can also be torn apart by the refusal to acknowledge some part of the community (eg. Women or minorities) as an integral part of it' (9).

> '[The] injury was to the very idea of different groups being able to inhabit the world together' (60).

Das gives an interesting account of how relationship was invoked as a possible basis for violence after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and how this was rejected by his wife, who thus prevented the usual blood-letting and communal violence:

> 'Rajiv Gandhi (the son of Indira Gandhi), was assassinated by a female suicide bomber, widely believed to be a member of the Tamil Tigers. That evening, outside the residence of his widow, Sonia Gandhi, one heard the slogans shouted by a crowd that had gathered. One of the slogans was as follows:

> *Bhaiya ke katil zinda hain*
> *Bhabhi hum sharminda hain*

> Our brother's killers are alive
> Oh *bhabhi* (brother's wife), we are, indeed, ashamed

> It was reported in the press the next morning that Mrs. Sonia Gandhi had sent a polite message to the slogan shouters that she did not wish to be disturbed in her grief.

> What kind of statement was the crowd making? [...] First, it creates kinship ties not out of love or fidelity but through the rhetoric of vengeance – brotherhood here is created solely through the obligation to kill. [...] In immediately refusing to tolerate these slogans, Sonia Gandhi refused a politics of vengeance. At the time of Indira Gandhi's death, the picture of

kinship forged in a similar manner (e.g., the slogan stating that you have killed *our* mother) was not overcome, and the consequences were tragic [...]' (105-6).

According to this example, Sonia Gandhi was offered kinship by a group of people, who asked her to consider them her kin, so that they could act in the name of that relationship. Knowing that this could result in violence, Sonia Gandhi rejected that relationship. I will go on to show the recurrence of a similar situation in Karnad's mythological plays.

Das uses a key figure herself in her study, that of the duck/rabbit, a picture that seen one way shows the picture of a rabbit and seen another way, shows a picture of a duck. The point that Das makes is that while both are obviously simultaneously present, it becomes necessary that the existence of one becomes empty in order for the other to exist. This strange liminality fits in with Sarkar's definition of an allegory based on the works of de Man and Benjamin, as a presence that evokes itself as an absence. Das uses this key figure to explain how in situations of communal violence, aggressors were able to regard themselves as victims acting in self defence, even though such a view was contradictory to all evidence. I invoke Das's Duck/Rabbit key figure as also indicative of the nature of kinship. Kinship is not necessarily an alternative to considering someone an Other, but it certainly problematizes the idea of an Other, for kinship occupies a space in between the categories Self and Other. A kin shares with one bonds of blood or marriage, which in effect means they share in one's selfhood. Yet a kin is also necessarily an Other, someone who could be one's replacement or alternative, someone who could stand in one's place or role. Stories of sibling rivalry, generational conflicts and Freud's theory of the dissolution of the oedipal complex are all predicated on this duality of kinship. The rhetoric of kinship is highly relevant to the history of Indian secularism, in two main ways. The notion of 'Mother India' has been used as an ideology to unite the multitudinous subjects within the state in a single maternal embrace. The notion of 'bhai' or brother has been invoked to unite communal factions, such as Hindus and Muslims or high caste Hindus and low caste Hindus. In Karnad's mythological plays, this notion of kinship has a central place. In the previous chapter, I discussed how in *Tale Danda*, Bijjala mistakes Jagadeva for his son Sovideva and this sudden invoking of kinship by an Other unravels the selfhood and identity of

Jagadeva, leading to his eventual suicide. A similar scenario occurs in Karnad's mythological

plays. An Other addresses the protagonist as their kin, and in doing so shatters the Self-Other

boundaries, leading to an unravelling of the Self. This strange invocation of kinship and its

unbearableness, once again functions as national allegory, revealing the traumatic burden of Indian

secularism. The rhetoric of 'blood and belonging' that Ahmad associates with culture-based

nationalism paradoxically becomes the rhetoric of Indian secularism. I posit that when relation itself

becomes an allegory for secularism, for the necessary seeing of an Other as part of one's selfhood,

Karnad translates this as an unbearable burden that results in one's selfhood being torn apart.

In *Hayavadhana*, Padmini's desire for her husband Devadatta's brains and his friend Kapila's

brawns leads to the two young men killing themselves by cutting their heads off in a Kali temple.

When the Goddess Kali comes to Padmini's rescue and informs Padmini that the two men would

come back to life once their heads are connected back with their bodies, Padmini (apparently)

unknowingly switches the heads of Devadatta and Kapila. Immediately after the two men come

back to life, Padmini assumes that the man with Devadatta's head is indeed the real Devadatta, her

husband. However, Kapila questions this assumption by calling Padmini *his* wife:

> 'Kapila (*angry now*): [...] Whose wife is she? (*Raising his right hand*) This is the hand that
> accepted her at the wedding. This is the body she's lived with all these
> months. And the child she is carrying is the seed of this body.
> Padmini (*frightened by the logic*): No, no, no. It's not possible. It's not. (*Running to
> Devadatta.*) It's not, Devadatta' (*Vol 1* 147).

Kapila is the Other who claims kinship. He occupies the in-between state between Self and Other

typical of kinship, by possessing the body of Padmini's husband, but possessing a different head.

Faced with this unexpected appellation, Padmini is horrified and refuses to acknowledge the

relationship, in a manner similar to Jagadeva's refusal of Bijjala's address in *Tale Danda*. If

Padmini's desire and the play's emphasis on completion are allegories of Indian secularism, then

Padmini's desire for both Devadatta and Kapila is now revealed to be hegemonic in a very different

way from the discussion so far. Indian secularism, while rhetorically and theoretically an extension

of equality to all, is nonetheless capable of recognizing only specific representations of the

constituent groups. The problem between secularism and communalism, as Bilgrami points out,

is really one of representation. This is discernable in the play. When the rishi pronounces that

Padmini's rightful husband is the man with Devadatta's head and Padmini is about to leave with her

husband, she rushes to Kapila (the man with Kapila's head) and says to him:

> 'Padmini: [...] It's my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I'm going with your body.
> Let that cheer you up. (*Goes back to Devadatta.*) Good-bye, Kapila' (*Vol 1*
> 152).

In essence, Padmini is telling Kapila that since his body is going to be with her, he should take that

to infer that he does possess her. 'Accept that your *body* is an adequate representation of you, and

you too will be the winner'. This shows that Padmini does not really believe in the supremacy of the

head. As Kapila points out:

> 'Kapila: I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong
> body...
> Padmini: Shut up, you brute' (*Vol 1* 148).

Padmini's unjust desire for the perfect combination of 'Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong

body' reflects the injustice of secularism in calling for specific representations and rejecting

alternative representations. Kapila's rejection of this injustice and his attempt toward self

identification is an allegory of those who are indeed marginalized, even rejected by Indian

secularism, groups who are rendered invisible by Indian secularist leadership's claim of representing

everyone.

Furthermore, the performance of the switched heads aligns the audience with the body rather

than the head, and as such allows the audience to sympathise with Kapila. If the 'law' in the play

places the head as supreme over the body, the performance of the play demonstrates the converse.

While how the play is performed depends entirely on the director, Karnad's suggestions clearly

indicate using masks, and the switching of heads between Kapila and Devadatta is probably most

easily performed using masks that are interchanged by actors. This means that while in the play

Devadatta is Devadatta because he has Devadatta's head and vice versa for Kapila, the actor who

plays Devadatta must now spot the mask of Kapila and *become* Kapila, while the actor playing

Kapila must likewise wear the mask of Devadatta and *become* Devadatta. In other words, the audience is made to side with the body rather than the head. The audience is more likely to regard the character with Devadatta's body as Devadatta because it is the same actor who has been playing Devadatta all this while, and for the same reason regard the character with Kapila's body as Kapila. The fact that many recent performances have used costumes rather than masks to represent the transposed heads, which would result in the actor who played Devadatta continue to play Devadatta after the transposition of the heads and vice versa for the actor who plays Kapila, indicates perhaps that the relevance of the performative evoking of a head/body dialectic, one that Karnad probably intended, has been missed.

How does Padmini's desire for both Devadatta and Kapila allegorize Indian secularism? Her desire, unlike the desire of the protagonists in the historical plays, seems only personal and does not appear to have any link to India, Indian history and Indian culture. I posit however, that while Karnad ingeniously uses the frame of a desiring female in this play, he is nonetheless still discussing the issue of *identity*, and what is more, *national identity*, the identity of the modern Indian, which is demonstrated as a desire for completeness, the central theme dominating the play. Before the entry of Padmini into the world of the play, Devadatta and Kapila have already been presented to the audience by the Bhagavadha as the Other to each, by emphasizing their difference from each other, yet using their friendship to present them almost as though they were a single entity, of 'one mind, one heart' (*Vol 1* 116). In the interaction of the two friends, the desire for completeness is continuously displaced onto the Other. Devadatta the intellectual tries to educate Kapila by teaching him 'poetry and literature' (*Vol 1* 118) while Kapila the strong tries to get Devadatta to come to the gymnasium. Each tries to make the other complete by giving the other what he lacks, yet neither seems to directly desire completeness for himself. Through this state of friendship, Karnad demonstrates an alternative secularism to Indian secularism, a bottom-up secularism based on negotiation between groups, in this case symbolized by the personal, natural friendship between two individuals, each an Other to the other, but able to co-exist without enmity

or violence because no sense of unity or equality has been imposed on them. The desire of each to incorporate elements of the Other in oneself, while admitting that this will only be possible to a small extent, illustrates precisely the necessary negotiation that Bilgrami argues Indian secularism lacks. Through an action sequence in Act One, Karnad illustrates how negotiation between individuals or groups can lead to a cordial inequality that seems preferable to an imposed equality:

> '(*Devadatta gets down on the floor to sit beside Kapila. Kapila at once leaps up and gestures to Devadatta to sit on the chair. Devadatta shakes his head but Kapila insists, pulls him up by his arm. Devadatta gets up.*)
> Devadatta: You are a pest.
> (*Sits on the chair. Kapila sits down on the ground happily.* [...])' (*Vol 1* 119).

It is Padmini's desire for completeness that disrupts this cordial state between the two friends and gives rise to violence. I compare Padmini's desire to that of the creative writer in Freud's article 'The Creative Writer and Daydreaming'. In his article, Freud makes several deductions about the creative endeavour. He states that

> '[…] the creative writer acts no differently from the child at play: he creates a fantasy world, which he takes very seriously; that is to say he invests large amounts of emotion in it, while marking it off sharply from reality' ('Creative' 26).

Two important ideas emerge here - The creative endeavour is associated with fantasizing and is sharply differentiated from reality. Freud also says that 'unsatisfied desires are the motive forces behind fantasies, every fantasy being a wish-fulfilment, correcting an unsatisfactory reality' ('Creative' 28). By inference, the creative artist is also 'correcting an unsatisfactory reality' and fulfilling 'unsatisfied desires' by creating the artwork. In *Hayavadhana*, Padmini becomes the artist figure, and the perfect art-form she tries to create is the Devadatta-Kapila complex, the perfect man endowed with brain and brawn. Thus the Devadatta-Kapila complex is in fact a manifestation of Padmini's own ego. Padmini's desire therefore is the desire 'to be' transferred into the desire 'to have'. The completeness that she cannot attain in herself, she attempts to attain in the form of a perfect husband. In this sense, as a symbol of the national desire of the leader or the monarch, Padmini's desire echoes the same desire for unity in multiplicity that we find in Tughlaq and Basava, the same extension of a personal desire onto the public sphere, onto the nation, onto the

masses.

However, Padmini's perfect combination soon breaks apart. Devadatta's head determines how his new body should behave, and so Devadatta's new body reverts to its old condition. With this, once again Padmini's desire for completeness is thwarted. Freud says something else about the artist in his article, that the artist's creation is sharply divided from reality. For Freud, when the division between fantasy and fact is blurred, the person is heading towards a neurosis. We see this happen in Padmini's case as well. Married to Devadatta and desiring Kapila, she becomes melancholic. When it appears with the switching of heads that she had obtained the perfect man, she becomes overjoyed. When the Devadatta-Kapila complex reverts to Devadatta, she becomes melancholic yet again. The Devadatta-Kapila complex was always a fantasy, and Padmini pays the price for allowing this fantasy to become the reality for her. Padmini however opens herself to continued melancholia and pursues her fantasy. She now accepts the kinship Kapila had invoked before and goes to see him – as the mother of his child:

> 'Kapila: Is that your son?
> Padmini: Yes. And yours.
> Kapila: Mine?
> Padmini: Your body gave him to me.
> Kapila: Mine? (*Erupting*) Not mine. I'm Kapila, Padmini. I didn't accept it that day. But I
>   accept it now, I'm Kapila.
> Padmini: (*softly*) And how's Kapila?' (*Vol 1* 167).

Padmini in this scene not only accepts the kinship proffered by Kapila earlier, but furthermore enforces that relationship by naming him the father of her child. However, this only leads to renewed conflict between Kapila and Devadatta, who, like the communal factions in India, fight it out and annihilate each other, leaving Padmini as an empty, selfless, hollow allegory of secularism.

In the final scene of *Hayavadhana*, Padmini's son who never laughs, meets Hayavadhana who is now a complete horse but still has a human voice, which he wants to lose so that he can become a complete being finally. Seeing the horse, Padmini's boy laughs and when Hayavadhana laughs along, Hayavadhana loses his human voice and becomes a complete horse. The boy then rides the horse. In his article, Mahadevan makes an important point about the significance of the

boy's laughter:

> For Karnad the happy laughter that follows the reintegration of Padmini's boy within society is a crucial alternative to the idea of national pride. His characters finally seek happiness at whatever level of 'completeness' they are able to achieve rather than continue to seek one unified source of identity for themselves or the entire nation. When horses want to be men and women want brains and brawn in their husbands, then disappointment and disorder are in store. Resigning oneself to live as best one can in one's current circumstances is in Karnad's view the only road to happiness and contentment (38)

Mahadevan therefore recognizes the various motivating desires in *Hayavadhana* as aspects of the desire for completeness and connects this desire with the desire for 'one unified source of identity' (38), in other words the same desire that motivates Indian secularism. The desire for completeness is then essentially the desire for oneness. The cause of all the violence that occurs in the play is precisely this desire for oneness, this desire to embrace all multiplicity into a singular unity. This desire for oneness is not only a national one but an individual one as well, as Mahadevan himself points out, calling the central motivation of the play the desire for 'one unified source of identity for themselves or the entire nation' (38). Bound within this desire is both the individual's desire as well as the nation's desire. Padmini, thus, is a national allegory who represents the national and nationalistic desire for oneness that characterizes the history of Indian secularism. In this particular play, it becomes frightening, for the play presents this desire as an adulterous one, as well as one that evokes the Freudian fear of female sexuality.

While Mahadevan is probably right in suggesting that to Karnad, the only possibility of 'happiness and contentment' is 'resigning oneself to live as best one can in one's current circumstance' (38), I believe Karnad himself demonstrates for us the impossibility of this happy resignation, the inevitable persistence of desire for oneness and its equally inevitable consequence of everlasting violence. Arundhati Ray reviewed a production of *Hayavadhana* in Kolkata for *The Hindu* and refers to a specific failure of the production, in refusing to show the final part of the play, in which Padmini's son rides the completely transfigured horse. She claims that the moment should have triggered a 'dynamic process of communication between audience and the play', whereby the audience achieves 'meaning' because 'all tensions are finally resolved' when 'Hayavadhana and

Padmini's son, fused together, move round and round the stage in a tremendous display of energy and power'. It is noteworthy that Experimental Theatre Company's Singaporean production of *Hayavadhana* (under the title 'Horseface') in 2006 also did not present this final scene. While the decision to axe the scene might be purely technical, such as the difficulty of having a child actor or effectively showing the transformation of Hayavadhana into a horse, I read the failure to stage this scene in fact as a result of the inherent failure of this scene to 'resolve all tensions' as Ray puts it. The 'readjustment of the spectator's held frame of reference' that Ray thinks the play is contriving to bring about cannot happen, at least not with any comfort for the audience. Mahadevan suggests that Padmini's desire does in the end succeed; only it succeeds in the form of her son. As befitting the trajectory of the play whereby one's desire for completeness is always displaced onto the Other, Padmini's desire to be complete, when transformed into the desire to have completeness in the form of the perfect man, finally finds its completion in the form of her son, whom she has arranged to be brought up both as the son of Kapila and the son of Devadatta, both by the tribal hunters and the Brahmin Vidyasagara. I posit, however, that the final scene actually indicates the eventual failure of Padmini's son in achieving that same completeness. When the actor who found Padmini's son encountered him in the village of tribals, he was told by the tribal woman 'This is not our child. It's from the city, Take it back.' (*Vol 1* 180). Thus Padmini's desire to have her son belonging both to the tribals and the city dwellers in fact could not materialize. He grew up among the tribals, but the tribals always knew he was not one of them. When Padmini's son is brought to Vidyasagara, there is no reason to believe that again, he could and would be perfectly integrated into the Brahmin society of his grandfather. What appears more likely is that once again, he would be ostracized. Just like Hayavadhana, Padmini's son would be unable to find his society. Instead of creating completeness for her son, Padmini has doomed him to a radical incompleteness, whereby he would always be the outsider no matter where he is. Thus, the final image of the speaking boy over the complete horse, if it had been staged by the Kolkata production and the Singaporean one, would not have evoked a sense of completeness attained at the level that is possible, but rather a sense of the

perpetual perpetration of incompleteness. The perplexed audience has to accept a final inability to comprehend the mystery of completeness, to accept, as the Bhagavadha suggests at the beginning of the play, that 'the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend'. There will always be those who ride and those who are ridden, and never the twain shall meet. Equality is impossible.

I would further add, that this failure is in fact the exact same failure Javed Malik of *Times of India* recognized in *Rakt Kalyan* (*Tale Danda*) – 'an actual historical experiment in social rendering and its tragic failure on the individual as well as collective level' (Malik). Basava's failure to find self-completeness by extending his own Self onto his society, to construct his society into an ethical, perfect extension of his idealised Self, fails. In the same manner, Padmini's desire for completeness through the construction of the Devadatta-Kapila complex, first as husband, then as son, fails as well. Both plays *perform* the recurring theme of the charismatic leader who tries to shape society in his or her idealized form, which results in the individual being subsumed into the national identity, for which the leader becomes the perfect simulacrum, becoming testimony to a singular experience in Indian nationalist history and politics. The necessity of always representing the Self within the frame of the nation is reconfigured by Karnad as the demonstration of the limits of representation that typifies trauma literature.

In *Bali (The Sacrifice)*, there are two moments in which the imperative of the Other occurs. The first moment happens when the mahout asks the Queen what her name is, just as she is about to leave after sleeping with him. The reason for the Queen's infidelity is made very clear. In another scene, she tells the king

> 'Queen: Sometimes I wished you had [taken another wife].
> King: You did?
> Queen: Yes, purely for bearing children. Then I could make love to you – for its own sake – to make love. You don't know how I've pined for that' (*Vol 1* 211).

The Queen had not given the kingdom an heir, and so lovemaking became for her forever connected to the burden of conceiving a child, and the continuing failure in achieving this. Her decision to anonymously have a tryst with the mahout, therefore, is her way of getting out of this relational

situation that dictated her purpose and reconfigured all her actions in terms of the needs of the kingdom. In other words, it was a momentary bid for selfhood and privacy. Initially, neither the mahout nor the Queen had identified each to the other. The mahout, however, asks the Queen what her name is, and with that, any pretence the Queen might have had of privacy, of being able to be herself even for a moment, is shattered. Identity is once again revealed to be Karnad's relational Self. As the Queen wistfully tells the King, 'For one night, I was nameless' (*Vol 1* 204). The Queen's namelessness, however, quickly dissipates, and with it her hope for selfhood and privacy.

The second moment occurs when the King, the Queen's husband asks her to perform the symbolic sacrifice of the cock of dough with him. The King, although truly the Queen's husband, is nonetheless presented as her Other in the play, as the King comes from a Animistic Hindu culture in which animal sacrifice is the norm, and the Queen comes from a Jain culture in which even the thought of violence is regarded as actual violence. This is further complicated by the fact that the King, out of love for the Queen, had converted to Jainism. However, the act that the King asks of the Queen is one of violence in the form of sacrifice, yet he asks this precisely as the Queen's husband and in order for them to finally have a child. As such he is placed in the same position as the Other who claims kinship.

The trope of pregnancy is significant here, as the pregnant woman appears as a motif in three of Karnad's plays, *Hayavadhana*, *Bali* and *Naga-Mandala*, and in each play becomes a symbol of the possible unity of diverse polarities. In this case, if the King who comes from a culture of blood sacrifices and the Queen who comes from a culture of non-violence were to have a child, that child becomes an allegory of the possible unity of these two polarities, and thus an allegory of the possible unity of various factions that make up the modern Indian nation. This cognitive link between the Queen's pregnancy and the nation's desire for unity is expressed in the King's words in the beginning of the play:

> 'King: […The] King and the Queen
>   sitting on the throne
>   should merge into one […]
>   they must turn

> into a four-armed deity
> thrashing and moaning
> for the good of the land' (*Vol 1* 190).

The unity the King evokes (which, incidentally, infers in its imagery a surrender of selfhood to become a symbol of and for the nation) is different from that of the Queen, for the Queen's idea of the unity between these two different polarities is that of *conversion*. She strongly believes in the value of non-violence and cannot in any way condone the practice of animal sacrifice. Hence the Queen represents not a desire for the unity of these two polarities, but the erasure of one and its replacement by the other. As such, her position appears far more suitable as an allegory for communal and factionist nationalism. However, I assert the contrary, that the Queen represents secularism, more specifically the Indian secularism described by Bilgrami. Once again, as in *Hayavadhana*, Karnad shows the intolerant aspect of secularism, for as I have already argued, Indian secularism, despite its stance of representing all, does not desire for all to be represented. In truth, secularism aims to replace all other alternative modes of representation and become the only mode of representation. Chatterjee points out in *A Possible India* that in the name of secularism, the Indian government had dabbled in reforms of Hinduism, which contradicts the supposed separation of religion and politics (*Possible* 244). Nandy further shows that this tendency for reforming Hinduism runs hand in hand with secularism because it is in fact 'a direct product of nineteenth century Indian modernity and its models of the ideal Hindu as a Vedantic European' (133), as a result of which there has been a 'concerted, systematic effort to either eliminate these gods and goddesses from Indian life or tame them and make them behave' by '[retooling] or [gentrifying] them' (131 – 132). The call for secularism is then actually a call for conversion, a call to transfer from a communal mode of representation to a national one. This is shown in the allegorization of Indian secularism through the Queen's Jain faith.

Devastatingly, the King's imperative and the Queen's refusal eventually lay bare the pre-existence of the Other within the psyche of the Queen. The Queen Mother points out that the Queen's non-violence carries within itself violence, as it causes tremendous hurt to her husband the

King. The Queen's imposition of her Jain faith on the King, using guilt as a weapon, is itself a violent act. The Queen Mother, seeing the torture the King endures because of his guilt, tells the Queen:

> 'Mother: Twist the knife in his wound. Let him flagellate himself, revel in self-hatred. He is the offering, don't you see? Make him bleed. It'll please the gods' (Vol 1 232).

The Queen's own propensity for violence is revealed in the final scene, in which she almost plunges the sword into the King in anger, and then horrified by the violence she has just discovered within herself, plunges it into her own womb. Through this, the violence of the absolutist stance taken by the Queen is revealed. As an allegory of Indian secularism, this becomes an exposure likewise of the violence inherent in secularism, precisely because of its absolutism and its intolerance. In a discourse that usually associates violence with communalism and non-violence with secularism, Karnad reverses the polarities. At the same time, once again the burden of secularity, the need to answer the Other's imperative, to incorporate the Other within oneself, leads to an unravelling of selfhood. The Queen's identity had always been predicated on her value of non-violence, and the moment she discovers the violence within her, her identity shatters. It is significant that the propensity for violence in the Queen mirrors the propensity for non-violence, for patient suffering, in the King. Instead of the ideal unity of the polar opposites in the form of a child, each finds within himself or herself kernels of the other, and instead of bringing about unity, this shatters and unravels identity for both the King and the Queen.

In *Naga-Mandala*, already the confusion between Self and Other, the misrecognition of the other as one's own, can be perceived in Rani's misrecognition of the cobra Naga as her husband Appanna, when out of love for Rani, the cobra assumes the form of her husband and visits her every night. When Rani, who is puzzled by the strange difference in behaviour between her husband in the daytime and at night, becomes pregnant, her husband Appanna accuses her of adultery and the village elders order her to undergo the snake test by holding the cobra in her hand to prove her chastity. Naturally, because the cobra is in fact Naga who had been the one responsible for her pregnancy, Rani is not bitten by the cobra and passes this test of chastity. The seeming miracle

convinces the village elders that Rani is a goddess. From that moment, Rani effectively loses all selfhood, becoming an Other to herself. Her husband Appanna also loses all selfhood, forced by this seeming miracle to become his wife's own servant, to suspend his suspicions about her adultery and live with her. However, the narrator-character Story points out that at some point, Rani must have realised that the man she had been sleeping with was not her husband, and this would have a devastating effect on her:

> 'Story: No two men make love alike. And that night of the Village Court, when her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realize it was someone new? Even if she hadn't known earlier? When did the split take place? Every night this conundrum must have spread its hood out at her. Don't you think she must have cried out in anguish to know the answer?' (*Vol 1* 294)

At the end of the story, Naga comes to visit her and now Rani recognizes him as the being she had slept with. Naga, though aware that he can never truly become her husband, wishes to have a place in her life, and does this by entering her hair and remaining there. Rani, unable to bear the sudden heaviness of her hair, combs out the cobra from her hair, but upon realising it is Naga, she asks the snake to enter her hair again, so that the snake would be safe from her husband. Naga again becomes one with Rani's hair and Rani bears this burden forever:

> 'Rani: [...] You don't know how heavy you are. Let me get used to you, will you? [...] This hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, forever' (Vol 1, 299 – 300)

Thus, Rani's awakening, her self-realization, is marked by a *loss* of selfhood. In becoming a goddess, Rani in fact becomes a symbol of Mother India, and her unbearable and yet necessary incorporation of the Other, Naga, within herself, her responding to the presence of the snake by acknowledging him as a husband, one who is part of her 'wedded bliss' is again an allegory of Indian secularism, only now it is presented by Karnad as a burden.

Agni Mattu Male marks a departure from the other three mythological plays, in that the protagonist is male. Yet the male protagonist is also concerned with domestic concerns, those of love and marriage. In this play, while the nation is engrossed in solving the national problem of drought, the character Arvasu is portrayed by Karnad as an individualist who is concerned with

personal happiness, engaged in what Dharwadker calls 'a quest for fulfilment and wholeness' ('Introduction Vol 1' xxxv – xxxvi). Arvasu is in love with Nittilai and is completely immersed in the processes necessary before they can be married. It is noteworthy that Arvasu's personal enterprise can be seen as an individual alternative to a national top-down imposed secularism. If the purpose of secularism is to bring about equality between different people, then the marriage between the Brahmin Arvasu and the tribal girl achieves precisely that, but from a personal rather than a public perspective. However, Arvasu's endeavour for personal happiness is deflected three times, and each time the deflection occurs via the imperative of a kin. The first imperative occurs when Arvasu's cousin Yavakri dies at the hand of the demon. As Arvasu explains:

> 'Arvasu: [...] How could I leave the dead body [...] there and come away? [...] The blood was fresh. It was gushing out. And wild animals had already started appearing in the bushes. Hyenas. Wolves. Ready to tear into Yavakri [...]. I had to cremate the body on the spot...' (*Vol 2* 135).

Unable to avoid the responsibility entailed by his cousin's death, Arvasu ends up too late for the meeting with the tribal elders to discuss his marriage to Nittilai, and as a result loses Nittilai, who is married off to another man.

The second imperative occurs when Paravasu, after killing their father Raibhya, asks Arvasu to cremate their father's body and do the penitential rites, giving the excuse that Paravasu needs to return to the fire sacrifice and cannot do it himself:

> 'Paravasu: I know I must perform the rites of penitence. But I have to return. Immediately. So there's only one person who can do that. You. As his son, it's your prerogative and your duty. [...]' (*Vol 2* 144).

Arvasu's sister-in-law asks him to refuse Paravasu's request:

> 'Vishaka: Say 'No', Arvasu. [...] Live your own life.
> Paravasu (*as though she hasn't spoken*): Don't rush through the rites. Perform them with care. Every detail has to be right.
> Arvasu (*lost*): Bless me, Brother' (*Vol 2* 145).

Once again, unable to refuse, Arvasu sees to the cremation and rites for his father and comes to the fire sacrifice. There Paravasu accuses Arvasu of having killed Raibhya and Arvasu becomes an outcast, causing a second obstacle to his endeavour for personal happiness. As Arvasu puts it:

'Arvasu: [...] I wanted to strike out on my own. So, first a corpse curls itself round my ankles. Yavakri. Then it's Father. Bodies drenched in blood' (*Vol 2* 154).

It is the third imperative that I would like to focus on, for it comes not from an actual kin but from an Other who proclaims kinship. When the god Indra gives Arvasu a boon, he wants to use the boon to bring the dead Nittilai back to life. The people of the kingdom, however, beg him to ask for rain and end the national suffering encountered by the people because of the drought. At that moment, the Brahma Rakshasa, the demon whom Arvasu's father had created to kill Yavakri, pleads with Arvasu to ask for the demon's liberation as the boon:

'Brahma Rakshasa: I want release – release from this bondage. Your father gave me this life. We are brothers. So you must complete what your father couldn't – I want to melt away – I want peace – eternal peace – I beg of you – intercede on my behalf with the gods – (*Vol 2* 174 – 175)

Arvasu finally uses the boon to liberate the demon's soul. If Arvasu had asked for rain, as the people asked him to, he would have given national concerns a greater place than his own. If he had asked for Nittilai's life back, as he personally desired, he would have given his individual needs greater importance. Yet what happens here is a complex and difficult in-between state, where Arvasu has to act as an individual and yet face the unbearable relational burden of being tied to others who are not others after all, who can claim brotherhood. With this final repetition of giving greater importance to his kin rather than himself, Arvasu finally gives up all possibilities of personal happiness. Once again, the Self unravels when faced with the imperative of the Other who claims kinship.

Thus far, Karnad's mythological plays have not been perceived as or interpreted as national allegories. The violence of the plays have hence been subjugated into the margins of a discourse of folk theatre or gender, neither of which appear capable of situating the violence within a useful context or as authorial originality, which is the negation of a context for the violence. By studying Karnad's mythological plays as an oeuvre alongside Veena Das's seminal book *Life and Words*, I hope to have demonstrated that the mythological plays are in fact national allegories, and the key figure of Duck/Rabbit, used in the context of kinship, allows for the violence to be situated within the context of Indian postcoloniality. Nevertheless, this also opens up questions. Who exactly is

Karnad representing with his mythological protagonists? Is he representing the secular leaders, who take on the secular idealism of representing everyone and then experience the inherent burden of this? While this certainly seems feasible, it also appears as though Karnad truly believes this burden to be the burden of the Indian postcolonial citizen. Yet to what extent does the Indian citizen truly experience the Other as a kernel of his or her selfhood? Or is the citizen's identity, as suggested by Nandy, far more likely to be predicated on difference? Karnad suggests through his mythological plays that an identity based on difference will eventually shatter when it perceives the presence of the Other within itself, but it is possible to see this as a kind of romance, the very romance that activates Indian secularism.

CONCLUSION:

The journey that has culminated in this thesis started with violence. Studying the violence that appeared to have a predominant place in the works of Girish Karnad within the context of Indian theatre history and postcoloniality, I felt the need to extend the frame so that the centrality of violence in Karnad's plays could be more clearly perceived. To do so, I first studied both the historical and the mythological plays as national allegories. In the case of the historical plays, this meant regarding the 'historical parallel' strategy of Dharwadker as a modification of the national allegory and translating her reading strategy into one amenable to trauma theory by using the concept of a 'key figure'. By juxtaposing the works of Ahmad and Bilgrami, I converted Dharwadker's allegorization of Tughlaq into the 'key figure' of Indian leadership, seeing it as both representative of Bilgrami's Indian secularism as a condition of melancholia, as well as of Ahmad's hybrid postcoloniality that carried within itself both secularist and cultural essence-based ideologies. This allowed me to better contextualize the radical self divisiveness experienced by Karnad's historical protagonists, as well as critique Karnad's own position of admiration towards secularism and his closedness towards the possibilities of an alternative communal leadership. In the case of the mythological plays, I employed a similar strategy, but took a stronger stand, asserting that despite academic and performative trends to the contrary, the mythological plays should also be regarded as national allegories. Here I reviewed alternative ways of framing the mythological plays, namely the 'theatre of roots' concept and as private narratives with relevance to issues of gender, but demonstrated that these did not provide a strategy for situating and understanding the violence in the mythological plays. Using Veena Das's book alongside the mythological plays, I used the 'key figure' of the duck/rabbit and associated it with the Self-Other duality of kinship. I then showed how this 'key figure' provided an explanation of the particular type of violence discernable in Karnad's mythological plays.

However, there are ways in which Karnad's violence is unconventional, and as such raises

questions. As I have argued elsewhere, in the historical plays, the suffering of the leaders takes

strange precedence over the suffering of their victims; their subjects. In the mythological plays, so

much focus is given to the unravelling selfhood of the desiring subjects, that agency takes a back

seat. It then becomes possible to argue that Karnad's violence, by giving prominence to the

suffering of leaders over subjects in the historical plays and giving prominence to individuals over

issues in the mythological plays, suspends the possibility of political action. In 'Postcolonial in the

postmodern: Or, the political after modernity', Dhareshwar comes up with three 'scenarios of

postcolonial political identities' (PE104), the third of which is based on a study of Kwame Anthony

Appiah. As Dhareshwar quotes Appiah:

> Far from being a celebration of the nation, then, the novels of the second, postcolonial, stage
> are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only the western *imperium* but also the
> nationalistic project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. And, so it seems to me, the
> basis for that project of that delegitimation cannot be the postmodernist one: rather it is
> grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal […], in an appeal to a certain simple respect
> for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years.
> (PE108)

Of course, Appiah is referring specifically to Africa, and Dhareshwar himself points out that the

double-rejection of both colonialism and nationalism (which Appiah infers is in actuality a kind of

neo-colonialism) that Appiah reads in postcolonial novels is more likely to be a feature of African

novels than Indian ones because 'the nation state has already disintegrated in Africa' (PE110),

whereas in India 'it may be that the narratives of citizenship have not undergone the same

wrenching disidentification or disinvestment as in Africa and therefore still retain their political

possibilities' (PE110). Nevertheless India has undergone crises of governability, and the possibility

of a sentiment similar to the African context prevailing in India one day certainly exists

(Dharwadker, *Theatre* 252). Significantly, Dhareshwar feels that Appiah's humanism 'depoliticises

– its invocation, possible anywhere and anytime, absolves one of evolving concepts that tell us what

we are and how we are related to one another' (PE110), thus taking away the need for political

action. Dhareshwar sees in postcolonial modernity a *displacement* of politics, the actual aporia that

characterises contemporary modernity, what he calls 'exhaustion of modernism' (PE105).

Modernism now, according to Dhareshwar:

> 'has none of the force that an energetic modernity (including and especially Marxism) had brought to its critique of society. That critique and the politics made possible by it is already perceived as violent, although the terms of that critique are seen perhaps as the only available political and aesthetic vocabulary – now used with increasing irony and skepticism.' (PE105 – PE106)

Partha Chatterjee posits that political action is still possible within postcolonial modernity in his response to Arjun Appadurai in 'Beyond the Nation? Or Within?'. Chatterjee realigns the role of postcolonial nations, using India as a case in point, within the context of globalization. Differing from Appadurai's stand in 'Patriotisms and its Futures' that there needs to be a cognitive shift from national to transnational, Chatterjee claims that there is a lack of understanding of postcolonial nationhood and nationalisms, which problematizes the nature and need for this cognitive shift. Chatterjee distinguishes between civil society and political society, civil society being the institutions and structures that are perceived by agents of globalization as national and which are destined to be replaced by new transnational structures in the new globalized world ('Beyond' 33). Chatterjee however asserts that the civil society in postcolonial nations only represents a small percentage of westernized intellectual elite, while political society represents the masses. While civil society is concerned with modernism and modernity, political society is concerned with democracy. Chatterjee then infers that the survival of political society is probably of paramount importance in ensuring that the nation continues to exist as a bulwark in dealing with the negative aspects of globalization by making the political possibilities of modernism actually viable and vital ('Beyond' 33).

In the analysis of Dhareshwar and Chatterjee, Karnad would no doubt be seen as part of the minority group of westernized intellectual elite, who, for Dhareshwar, are representative of the depoliticized aporia of modernism and for Chatterjee, represent those incapable of understanding or being part of the 'political society'. In Nandi Bhatia's seminal work *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, Karnad is not directly referred to, but Dharwadker's article about Karnad's *Tughlaq* is mentioned twice, and both times in

footnotes. Bhatia first refers to cultural texts like theatre playing a role in 'discourses of history',

seeing that as comparable, though not identical, to the subaltern recovery of history (3). In the

footnote, Bhatia sees historical fiction as an example of this, with reference to Dharwadker's

reading of Karnad's *Tughlaq* (126). In a later chapter, Bhatia refers to 'politically committed artists

[in postindependence theatre] who repeatedly return to the colonial archive to excavate, emplot, and

restage historical events' (95). The footnote in this case refers to how 'a play such as *Tughlaq*

performs through its emplotment of a historical figure and its engagement with the discourses of

European and Indian history' (159). Why this relegation of Karnad to the footnotes? In a work

dedicated to discussing authority and resistance, one definitely concerned with political and activist

theatre, Karnad does not seem appropriate for discussion. Yet it is strange how he nevertheless

appears in the periphery of such a discussion, as though Karnad's theatre comes close to being

political, to participating in the rewriting of history and inscribing subaltern accounts into dominant

historical discourses, but falls short.

> In his review of Nandi Bhatia's book, Alan Johnson affirms that:

> Indian theatre could not avoid being political, either in colonial times, when dramatists had to contend with censorship laws, or in the years following independence, when underrepresented groups, including women, had to struggle against some of the very 'Indian traditions' that had helped sustain resistance to colonialism' (108).

If Johnson is right, then Karnad's plays too should be considered political, and demand a reading

strategy that allows the politics to be perceptible. In his criticism of the Parsi theatre, Karnad

himself asserts that to 'have any value at all, drama must at some level engage honestly with the

contradictions that lie at the heart of the society it talks to and about' (336). Yet Karnad's politics

are unclear in his plays. This contributes to the problem of situating Karnad perfectly within the

discourse of Indian postcoloniality. He is both too visible and too elusive. V.M. Badola of *The*

Pioneer felt the greatness of the *Rakt Kalyan* (*Tale Danda*) was that it did not 'unnecessarily

attempt to politicize the issue' (Badola). This would very likely be the principle objection

Dhareshwar might have to this play, that it does not garner political action. At the same time, when

giving a reading of *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* at Spenzer Plaza, Karnad was asked 'Did you write

it to send out a political message or to entertain?' and Karnad answered, 'There's always a political message' (Muthalaly). Thus, Karnad himself acknowledges the possibility of reading politics into his plays. He even concedes he had political intentions when writing his plays. At the same time his plays clearly, as Badola says, do not 'politicize'. Karnad does not seem to insist that his plays be read as political. Nevertheless, he would probably not be comfortable with his plays being read as apolitical, as Dhareshwar infers from Appiah's reassessment of third world literature as documents of human suffering. Does Karnad's violence push away politics, or does it perhaps do violence to the concept of politics?

Perhaps Karnad's comment in Ahuja's interview provides the framework for bridging politics and human suffering. He states that '[to] have any value at all, drama must engage itself seriously with the contradictions that lie at the heart of the human situation in general and the society it addresses in particular' (Ahuja). There is a connection between the suffering of the individual and the ills of their society. The human suffering that Karnad documents is in fact the *outcome* of politics. Karnad's plays hence allow for discussion of politics, especially the politics of a non-negotiated secularism, but their focus is on the human suffering such politics entail, especially the enduring of violence. This is precisely where the overlap between trauma studies and postcolonial studies might prove especially useful. Thus, the discussion thus far of Karnad's historical and mythological plays as national allegories show the possibility of political action in Karnad's plays. Politics need not be suspended into a modernist aporia as Dhareshwar suggests. Examples of alternatives to non-negotiated secularism do exist in Karnad's plays, as I have indicated. The initial negotiation between Devadatta and Kapila in *Hayavadhana* for instance, or Basava's decision to leave Kalyan in *Tale Danda*, can be seen as political acts rather than just expressions of individuality. As such, in Karnad's plays, politics and the possibility of political action is seen vis-à-vis the trauma inflicted by Indian secularism and the unending cycle of violence. Whether this pattern continues on in Karnad's future plays remains to be seen.

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