

MYTH AND REALITY IN THE SELECT PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD AND RATAN THIYAM: A CRITICAL STUDY

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**Submitted by
Lucy H. Swu
Registration No- 16/2017**

**Under the supervision of
Dr. Rosemary Dzüvichü
Professor & Head
Department of English
Nagaland University**



**Department of English
School of Humanities and Education
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema**



CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, **Lucy H. Swu**, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled, *Myth and Reality in the Select Plays of Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam: A Critical Study*, submitted for the award of M. Phil. in English is a bonafide record of research work done by me, under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Rosemary Dzüvichü, Professor, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema, during the period of my research (2016-2019), and it has not been submitted either in full or in part to any other University or Institute for the award of any other Degree, Diploma, or Title.

Dated: Kohima, July 3rd, 2019

(LUCY H. SWU)
M. Phil. Scholar
Department of English
Nagaland University

Countersigned

DR. ROSEMARY DZÜVICHÜ
Professor and Head of Department of
English Nagaland University
Campus - Kohima.

DR. ROSEMARY DZÜVICHÜ
Supervisor
Department of English
Nagaland University



Nagaland University

(A Central University established by the act of Parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Kohima-797001

3rd July 2019

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ***Myth and Reality in the Select Plays of Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam: A Critical Study*** is a bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Lucy H. Swu, Regd. No. 16/2017, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2016 - 2019. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation is the fruit of her original investigation conducted during the period of her research.

Ms. Lucy H. Swu has successfully completed her research work within the stipulated time.

Kohima

3rd July 2019

SUPERVISOR

(Dr. Rosemary Dzüvichü)

Professor

Department of English

Nagaland University

Campus - Kohima.

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Dated: Kohima, July 3rd, 2019

M. Phil. Scholar

Department of English

Nagaland University

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The origin of literature is the presentation of different stories of the myths, which are also connected with religion and rituals. These stories refer usually to prehistoric periods apparently outside the human world, yet basic to it. A theory of myths says that myths are distorted and fragmented historical qualities representing our desires, hopes and aspirations and gods are the embodiments of the feelings of mankind. The myth as we understand in its broadest sense, is a sacred narrative explaining the growth of mankind and the world of man. So far there hasn't been any singular and universal theory of the origin of myth. Besides the abstract ideas and the concepts that we had have been given human attributes in the myth, creating allegories of philosophical or spiritual concepts. Myths, in a sense, arose from the personification of the powerful feelings of mankind. The literature of the world in the beginning are filled with the presence of myths in different aspects and are concerned with the oral tradition based on religious rituals and ceremonies. In fact, literature started as narratives of the religious rituals in many cultures of the world. The myths and the legends simply tries to relate the events, conditions and deeds of the people, apparently outside the human world in certain cases, yet basic to it. If we have to trace the growth of the history of myth, we come across a number of chaotic accounts of super human characters, or even gods and goddesses, indulging in significant activities of creation, destruction and preservation. We see that myth is almost tied to religion, For example, Greek mythology cannot exist without ancient Greek religion, as all religious histories are myth. The galaxy of deities which we find in the

mythologies along with other ghosts, spirits and monsters are indeed the creation of our belief and imagination. They reflect our lives, they are the symbols of our hopes, our miseries, our fears and sufferings. With our desires to lift the quality of life we live, we gradually have started incorporating the lofty ideals and our desire to everlasting peace and happiness. Thus, the abstract thoughts and strange rituals in religion, art and literature were invented. So myths are narratives relevant to a particular society in which they had been originated and are often considered to be truthful accounts of the incidents that happened in the past. The only measure of truth however is our own perception of truth.

Over the years scholars and writers have been incorporating myth with that of the real situations in order to instill the sense of reawakening in the minds of humankind for a peaceful coexistence. Their contribution to literature has had a tremendous impact to the people. Their motif was to bring the universal concept of truth and to change the mindset into a positive thought, also enabling them to see the things happening in and around them, to understand it and making each one realize their sole purpose of existence. It is indeed meaningless to exist without knowing the meaning of existence itself. Indeed, Myths are the expression of the primordial experiences of a race inherited as the 'collective unconscious'; Myths, legends, stories or folk narratives are the parts of cultural constructs intended to shape the individual in accordance with the moral and traditional codes. Social codes and cultural influences are all inherent in myths and folk narratives. Symbolical in nature, they disguise the truth not only to maintain the social and cultural order, but also to express the hidden instincts whose open expression can pose to be a threat to social order and conduct.

1. Works and influences of Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam:-

Girish Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. He hails from the Semi-Marathi and Semi-Kannada. His childhood was spent growing up in a small village in Karnataka where he had first-hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. His encounter with the Natak Companies during the early years of his life made a lasting impression on his mind. While spending his childhood in the small town of Sirsi, Karnad developed interest in native drama because it was his parents' addiction to plays and his own interest in them that started shaping him into a successful dramatist. In his childhood, in the small town of Karnataka, he was exposed to two theatre forms that represented irreconcilably different worlds called the *Natak –Companies (Natak Mandalis)* which was played on Proscenium Stages with wigs and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps. Another was the traditional performances like *Yakshagana* with a platform containing a black curtain, erect in the open air and lit by torches. Karnad then realized the essence of Sanskrit Drama which is based on the primordial instincts of humans though now it is presented in folk theatre. Later, Karnad received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship and went to England for his Master's Degree. It was during his tour to England that Karnad trained himself in writing in English although he had more confidence in Kannada, the language of his childhood, the language spoken by a few million of people in the state of Karnataka in India. During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between Western and Native tradition. It was India of the fifties and sixties that surfaced into two streams of thought—adoption of new Modernistic techniques, or continuing with a legacy of the Colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. His acquaintance with western thought and theatre of the

western dramatists like Brecht, Anouilh, Sartre and Beckett has exerted an indelible influence on his dramatic art. The resulting voice however, is the subtle fusion of the grandeur of Sanskrit Drama, the profundity of the Greek Theatre and the sophistication of the Western mode of Dramaturgy. Karnad, in the early phase of his writings, was also greatly influenced by the Existentialists- like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) and Albert Camus (1913-60). These writers put a great stress in the course of his studies, on choice and responsibility. Taking the same theme in his first play *Yayati*, Karnad himself admits their impact in one of his interviews, when he says:

I was excited by the story of *Yayati*, this exchange of ages between the father and son which seemed to me terribly powerful and terribly modern. At the same time, I was reading a lot of Sartre and the Existentialists. This consistent harping on responsibility which the Existentialists indulge in suddenly seemed to link up the story of *yayati*. (Karnad 2)

Karnad also admits Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) influence on his later play *Nagamandala* (Play with a Cobra), a play which is based on two oral tales heard from A.K. Ramanujan. Brecht's aim was to teach men to think to shake or to enrage them to revolutionary action against social evils in a significant way. While discussing with B.V. Karanath about the meaning of the mask in Indian Theatre and theatre's relationship to music the idea of *Hayavadana* started forming in the mind of Karnad. He observes: I remember that the idea of my play *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in the head right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanath (who ultimately produced the play) about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre's relationship to music. The play is based on a story from a collection of tales called *Kathasaritsagara* and further developed of this story by Thomas Mann (1875-1955) in the transposed heads.

Some of his notable works include *Yayati* (1961), *Tuglaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Anugumalinge* (1977), *Tale Dande* (1990), and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995), *The Fire and the Rain* (1998) etc

Karnad won the Natya Sangh Award of 1971 for the best play, *Hayavadana*. Sangeet Natak Academy Award for *Tuglaq*, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya Award for *Tale Dande*, Jnanpeth Award for his entire works of Literature. He was also awarded the Padma Shri in 1974 and the Padma Bhushan in 1992 etc... All these awards speak about his passion for the stage.

Ratan Thiyam also known as Thiyam Nemai was born on 20 January 1948 at Nabadwip West Bengal, Naida District and brought up at Haobam Dewan lane, Imphal. He grew up surrounded by art and art-making as he was born into a family of artists, his father being most respected gurus of classical Manipuri dance Shri Thiyam Tarunkumar and mother Bilasini Devi a renowned dancer. He is an Indian playwright and theatre director, and the winner of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in direction in 1987, given by Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's National Academy for music, dance and drama, and the Padma Shri given by the government of India in 1989 etc. One of the leading figures of the "Theatre of Roots" movement in Indian theatre which started in the 1970's. He is known as writing and staging plays that use Ancient Indian Theatre traditions and forms in contemporary contexts, he showed greater interest in literature, in particular poetry and painting. He was deeply influenced by the literary movements of the Seventies when creative expression was at the peak and the whole Manipuri society was driven by the urge to find out the true Manipuri identity. He went to New Delhi and joined the Premier Institution of Theatre Studies, the National School of Drama in 1971 and passed out in 1974. Two years later he formed his own Theatre group named Chorus Repertory Theatre formed on the

outskirts of Imphal, Manipur in 1976. He was equally inspired by his father and his mentor Ebrahim Akazi in reaching this elevated status. Delving into his works, he seems to have been influenced by Ancient Greek Drama, The Noh Theatre of Japan and Natya Sastra, which made him to experiment on Bhasa's plays, ultimately, he was inspired to write the two plays *Karnabharam* and *Urubhangam*. His approach to theatre has been shaped by years of study under the tutelage of several major exponents of the traditional Manipuri Performing Arts. He uses Metei Traditional Folklore along with Indian Classical Tradition and brings out the play which usually links Myth with Reality using the theme of Socio-Political problems confined not to Manipur alone but the whole world. However, his objective is mainly to highlight or advocate peace only.

Among the most notable productions of Thiyam, mention may be made of *Urubhangam* (1981), *Andha Yug* (1984), *Chakravyuha* (1984), *Lengshonnei* (adaption of Sophocles' Antigone), *Karnabharam*, *Uttara Priyadarshi*, *Ritusanghar*, and the trilogy comprising of *Wahoudok* (The Prologue), *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, and One Valley) and *Hey Nungshibi Prithibi* (My Earth, My Love).

2. Transition of Indian Theatre :-

The word Theatre was derived from the Ancient Greek word Theatron, "a place for viewing", itself from Theaomi, "to see", "to watch", "to observe". Theatre, as a major form of art, has always been facilitated mankind with an expression through all times- present as well as past to allow the glimpses of the future. As a collaborative form of art theatre can never be performed alone but rather as a community which is constituted not only by a wide range of performers including actors, directors, designers, musicians, etc. but also by an equally diverse group of

audience. It has assisted mankind to discover and comprehend its relationship with the world around where the central focus is laid on the human being with larger questions concerning his existence.

The earliest form of the Theatre of India was the Sanskrit Theatre. It flourished sometime between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE although its origin cannot be summed up with an exact formation. However, there are two opinions which tries to explain the origin of Sanskrit Drama. One of the views tries to assert that drama had originated from religious faith whereas the other view considers that drama has never come out of religious faith but rather a secular or popular root foundation. It is, however, undeniable that whatever be the origin of the Sanskrit theatrical performance in India it always had some sort of relationship with religion as religion have always been a key role in affecting the lives of the Indian people being deeply connected to it. So far as the subject matter and the plot of a Sanskrit drama in general and *Natyashastra* in particular is concerned, the dramatists in the past had no restrictions to select the theme for a play. The dramatist had the choice to choose to determine the theme or the subject matter either from the historical facts or something that he conceive on his own. However, the dramatist, at the same time had to work keeping in view two essential attributes- the *Adikarika*, the principle and the *Prasangika*, the incidental, in order to assist and complement the core subject matter. In spite of being a highly artistic and influential means of entertainment Sanskrit drama could not retain its supremacy in the later period. The language (spoken only by the upper classes providing only a limited, aristocratic audience) as well as the form of drama, and the foreign invasion has ceased to enjoy the popularity which it once did. Although Sanskrit drama is questioned over its relevance in the present context yet the dramas and the theories it propounds through the *Natyashastra* (treatise

of dramaturgy), written before 200 A.D and attributed to a Hindu sage named Bharata Muni, which details the requirements of theatre architecture, costumes, actors training and performance, music, playwriting and the emotional exchange that takes place between the actors and the audience have always been the ideals for all the major forms of Indian drama. From the 14th century onwards with the gradual decline of Sanskrit drama Folk Theatre began to wear a regional outlook. "Folk theatre as a typical theatre form gradually emerged as a regional form of drama based on the attributes of local religion, legends, art, vernacular history and mythology." The traces of the early folk drama are found in the great Indian epics i.e. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, Patanjali's *mahabhasya* or the literary texts of the ancient times during the 19th century. Old legends, Puranic tales, mythological love, philosophy, and stories of Sanskrit plays were popularized by the present folk theatre. Thus, folk theatre flowed from classical to folk. The essential features of Indian folk theatre includes loud music dance, masks, colorful curtains and singing of chorus, etc. which are different from modern theatre offering a panorama of existence. These folk theatre offers richness of culture and passion of the people for life and drama. During the 18th century under the British rule, India has witnessed the effects and influence of the west in all forms of life, not only Political, Social, Economy, etc but Art was also shifted from Indianans to Western as it is evident in the form of theatre too. Before Colonization though there was no 'Proscenium Stage' yet theatre in India was found in home and villages. The Britishers wanted a proper theatre, it was simply used as a means to remind the British Colonists of home. The first major theatres were built in Bombay and Calcutta developed by the British East India Company in 1753. It was the similar theatres found in Britain containing a pit, gallery, painted scenery and backdrops, footlights, chandeliers and a large front curtain. The British tradition of

dramatic literature , which included a very linear and singular narrative, a heavy emphasis on language, a unity of space and time, a rarely unbroken five act plot structure, a style of acting based more on emotion than dance, and the idea of spectacle was upheld as necessary and paramount in the British Indian theatre. However during the late 1800's a large separation emerged between the upper and lower classes, since the Britishers viewed Indians as lower classes. With the realization of being discriminated the Indian people began to revolt against the British, though uneducated they could feel and understand the humiliation which were being acted out. Through theatre the Indian people began to take the conventions forced upon them for so many years, and use it against the upper classes. What once overshadowed traditional Indian culture became the tool to fight for change.

Pre-Independence India saw the emergence of many playwrights in English, but only a few among them were prominent. Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyar, Bharati Sarabhai, the first woman playwright during the colonial period, J. M. Lobo Prabhu, T. P. Kailasam and V. V. S. Ayengar were the notable names. While many of the playwrights of this phase wrote short plays only a few wrote full-length plays. Barring a few exceptions, the playwrights of the pre Independence phase did not fully exploit the abundant sources of history, epics and legends. Similarly most of the playwrights of this phase have not availed themselves of the rich tradition of Classical Sanskrit Drama and the folk theatre for models and techniques. Many of them followed neither the Western nor the Indian tradition. They showed little sense of dramatic strategy as their main interest appeared to lie in composing dialogue for discussing their topics. Language was a big problem to almost all the playwrights of this phase. They wrote in literary or poetic or symbolic language rather than in the idiom of the characters and their

times and situations. On the whole, most of the playwrights of this phase did not seem to write with an intention of staging their plays. Their plays were primarily meant to be read.

After India got independence from the British rule in 1947 the “Theatre of Roots” movement came into being. It was an effort to challenge the aesthetics of British artistic influences and to create a new way of perceiving the world which was not dictated by the colonizers “because theatre was used (by the British) to disseminate colonial culture and demonstrate cultural superiority, it became a powerful tool with which to challenge the same colonial authority” (mee, p.4). The medium of Indian theatre was re-infused with many of its Pre- Colonial Folk elements. Many artists within the movement began to reconnect the theatre with religion. They brought back religious myths that were familiar to many Indians, as well as religious symbols that had specific understood meanings to Indian audiences. These elements were used as a basis for creating new theatre work. Folk forms of theatre, dance and storytelling from all over the world were reinvigorated. Although the roots movement took at times a vehemently anti-western tone, “ practitioners were still searching for a theatre that could reflect the complex political, historical, social, and cultural realities of a newly independent nation , which often meant using elements of western theatre.”(Mee, p.10) for example a proscenium stage was used but the Indians in many ways had to succumb to Western ideas of performance in order to keep a sense of Cultural identity alive.

3. Girish Karnad’s Contribution to Theatre of Roots Movement:-

Karnad stands out as one of the significant playwrights who contributed to the modernization of the state after India got Independence in 1947. That was the time

when the Indian theatre as Anuparna Mukherjee informs, “Was suffering from acute identity crisis, being torn between its ancient cultural past and its more recent colonial legacy which gave birth to hybrid dramatic forms.”(Mukherjee,1). Karnad along with few other theatre personalities like Satyajit Ray, Habib Tanvir, K.N. Pannikar, Ratan Thiyam, Vijay Tendulkar , Utpal Dutt showed an immense interest in articulating the aspirations of a newly independent nation by attempting to, as Anuparna comments , “ decolonize the aesthetics of modern Indian theatre by retracing its roots in the repository of India’s classical and folk traditions.” These playwrights started to look for divergent ways of returning to the roots i.e. Indian myth, history, literature, social, political etc. in other words the twentieth century Modern Indian drama maybe viewed as a blend of East and West i.e., the legacy of western education under the impact of British regime and on the other hand the legacy of Indian tradition which have been there for ages.

In Karnad’s introduction to three plays – *Naga-mandala*, *Hayavadana*, *Tuglaq* he states:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule .It, therefore, had to face a situation to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and the colonial past, between the attraction of the western modes of thought and our own tradition, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom is achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries. (Karnad 1)

One of the most significant thing which he has made was his attempt to retrieve the cultural and mythological rich tradition of the Indian past as we see in his plays that

time and again he returns to the roots for quest of identity. In his plays the themes taken from folklores, myths, and Indian history are turned into a vehicle to express contemporary issues like Feminism, Marginalization of Caste and Minority Religions, Fundamentalism, Existentialism, Increasing Violence, etc. also the characters in each of his play is a representation of multiple ideologies. He makes use of myths and folk forms to expel Socio-Cultural evils. He says: "The energy of folk tale comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. (Karnad, 251). In his first play *Yayati* Karnad reinterprets an ancient myth of King Yayati and Devayani. The source of this myth is "Adi-Parva" of The Mahabharata. The symbolic theme of Yayati's attachment to life's pleasures and also his final renunciation is retained but his originality lies in the successful treatment of the motives of Yayati's ultimate choice. His play, *Hayavadana* an "urban folk drama" which is highly enigmatic, borrowed its plot from the *Kathasaritasagara*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit literature. He is equally indebted to Thomas Mann's (1940) retelling of the story in *The Transposed Heads*. Both the main plot and the sub plot are drawn from the rich tradition of his native folk theatre *Yakshagana* and other traditional form that have been used with enormous skill like mask, curtains, songs, commentator- narrator dolls, horse -man the flames, the story within story are used wonderfully. Karnad also suffuses Brechtian techniques of alienation with a number of folk motifs. In his next play *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad has deftly woven two Kannada folk tales. The play, *Naga-Mandala*, is based on folktales about Naga, popular in Karnataka and in several other parts of India in its different forms. Karnad had heard these tales from A.K. Ramanujan, who had collected many folktales and their variants prevalent in different parts of India. Karnad use of techniques and

devices used from Sanskrit play, Company Nataks, Parsi theatre, Yakshagana, Bayalala, have helped him to bridge the gap between the actor and the audience as is typical of traditional performances. The techniques of using the western plays and forms of dramatists like Brecht, Anouilh, Sartre and Beckett, Eugene o'neill, has also exerted an indelible influence on his dramatic art . This perhaps is one of the reasons of the wide global acceptance and application of Karnad's plays.

4. Transition of Manipur Theatre :-

The state of Manipur, the 'Jewelled Land', is a part of the North-Eastern region of India and has a very rich tradition of art and culture particularly in the field of music, dance and theatre. It was formerly a Princely State which became a part of India on 15th October, 1949 and later attained full Satehood on 21st January, 1972. The sate shares a long international boundry with Mynmar in the South-East while Indian States Nagaland falls in the North, Assam in the West and Mizoram in the South. The people of Manipur have an inherent love for the different performing arts adorned with lyrical beauty and rhythm. In fact, they constitute the very core of life of the Manipuri people. The Manipuri theatre is the outcome of the old ritual dances and in the later phases, the product of the Vaishnava movement.

The literature of Manipur, till the eighteenth century, was centered on mythology, legends and some history which is usually referred to as puya(Book of knowledge written in ciphers) literature but the entry of the British in 1891 marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Manipur as a number of major changes in the domain of social, political, cultural, and even educational were brought in. The long span of the reign of maharaja Churachand Simha who governed the land from 1891-1944 is considered as an era of renaissance as region of Manipur witnessed

great amount of progress in various fields which includes Cultural Renaissance as well. The martial art, dance and theatre in Manipur had undergone innovation and changes to be known worldwide. As far as Manipuri language is concerned it has always been the court language of Manipur having a distinctive script of its own. But unfortunately, after the coming of British and the Bengali Vaishnavism, the Manipuri script was gradually replaced by Bengali script. The theatre in Manipur had undergone drastic changes not due to the coming of the British alone but more because of the Bengali people who were brought along to do the official works under the British government. It was during this phase that Manipur had for the first time experienced the taste of Proscenium theatre. Manipuri theatre, for more than two decades starting from 1902, remained closed to Bengali drama. In the first two decades of the 20th century Manipuri drama was chiefly dependent upon the adaptations and translations of plays from other languages mainly from Bengali language. The proscenium theatre gradually replaced the traditional open type of theatre space where plays based on the religious themes adopted from epics Ramayana and Mahabharata were presented. However, the first ever original Manipuri drama titled *Narasing* by Lairenmayum Ibungohal Simha (1895-1966) was staged in 1925 basing on the historical figure of king Narasingh which deals with the grandness, the ideals of sacrifice, nobility and great achievements of the king himself. King Narasingh is greatly admired for his accomplishment to defeat the notorious Burmese army which entered the region and created havoc upon its people. The play marks a new beginning for the theatre in Manipur as it paved way for the other dramatists to try their hands with themes that had direct attachment to their life and culture. Some other playwrights such as Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, Dorendrajit Singh, Hijam Angahal also dealt with social situations and interactions of individuals that are

defined by the prevalent situation of that time. The feature that binds all these playwrights is that they were all wonderfully acquainted with the literature of the west as well as with Bengal and Sanskrit literature. Although most of these writers received the new western education yet they could find out ways to focus on themes which belong to their roots and this made their plays and Manipuri theatre, in general, more particular. The audience were able to taste and enjoy both traditional and modern experiments with drama. During the period from 1925-42, several theatre halls were established such as Manipur Dramatic Union, Aryan Theatre, Society Theatre, Rup Mahal which contributed the growth of theatre in Manipur. But the atmosphere, conducive for the growth and development of theatre in Manipur, did not last long as the Second World War began and on 10th may 1942 Japanese planes dropped bombs on Imphal. The war created a lot of havoc among the people which resulted in dramatic activities being stopped for quite some time. The situation changed only when the war was over in 1945.

The theatre of Manipur in the post- independence phase showed tremendous progress with the writing of plays. During this time Gandhi and his ideologies were considered seriously by some playwrights such as G.C Tongbra, H. Motilal, and S. Krishnamohan. Here, the situation of Manipur from the 60's began to change. On the one hand with the imposition of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958), and on the other the various armed opposition groups claiming for their respective community a greater autonomy. The menace of growing influence of drugs, corruption at all levels brought further troubles to it. Under such circumstances, there emerged among the youths a sense of discontentment against Indian governance and a desire to achieve their identity and indigenous spirit. As a result of this urge, theatre in Manipur also began to undergo changes with new directors and playwrights inspired by the new

ideas from the west as well as the likes of Badal Sircar of West Bengal , tried to experiment with the existing theatre and even tried to bring a radical transformation . Among the frontrunners H. Kanhailal was one who wanted to practice experimental theatre and in 1969 formed Kalakhsetra Manipur though its regular theatre productions began only in 1972 with the staging of a short play *Tamnalai* (The Hunting Spirit). Developed a kind of theatre rooted in his own tradition, Kanhailal produced a number of short plays like *Wahang Ama* (A Question) , *Kabui- Keioba* (Half Man Half Tiger) , etc. these plays deal with themes of rootlessness as well as restless-condition that prevailed in the late sixties and early seventies. Kanhailal headed the new movement in the recognition of the body and its language. He was thus, instrumental in bringing a spirit of change and revolt in art of theatre and his insistence on the potentials of the human body as the medium of expression encouraged other theatre workers to give away fixed methods of proscenium for a more flexible, open, physically more demanding and accurate kind of theatre.

Theatre of Manipur in the seventies witnesses the influence of the western theories about theatre affecting its stage production. N. Sri Biren, in his short plays such as *Khongchat*, *Hallakpa*, and *Ani* demonstrates the tendency to echo the quest for identity, meaninglessness or absurdity found in the works of Eliot and Becket. These plays have appropriately portrayed the general mood of restlessness and concerns of Manipur whether social, political, economy or cultural. The growing demand for Statehood through agitations, the resurgence of the youth of Manipur in search of Pan-India Manipuri identity and prevention of cultural misinterpretation. Arambam Somorendra Singh, is also considered to be one who has attempted for the first time to take theatre seriously taking contemporary issues critically and rationally. His works also dealt with the conflict between the old and new values in society that was

undergoing tremendous change. The history of Manipur is impacted by various factors such as the enforcement of Vaishnavism on the people of Manipur without the wholehearted willingness to do so, the political conflicts in the Post- Independence era, the negligence of land and its people by the mainland- all contributed to the feelings of anger and disappointment. His plays, however have been treated as the expressions of the larger mood of the society though at times criticized for being too radical. We see that the contemporary theatre in Manipur has been able to create a niche for itself on the global platform with its distinctive style of presentation. Ever since the beginning of the modern theatre in Manipur the traditional forms have also been equally given importance. Usually the traditional folk theatres deal with the mythological or social themes and are didactic in tone, but in the hands of the new directors of stage they have undergone changes to certain extent and under the shifting circumstance it has tried to accommodate issues like Communal harmony, Insurgency, Drug abuse, etc. that are pertinent to the present times. Besides such human predicaments, all contemporary issues have also been incorporated in their plays such as moral, mythical, local and universal crisis. An example of one such playwright who have brought an immense change in the field of theatre by implementing the Indian Tradition, Western, Metie folktale, and also creating his own new tradition is Ratan Thiyam whose contribution on theatre will be discussed in brief.

5. Ratan Thiyam's contribution to Theatre of Roots Movement:

Among the pioneers of "Theatre of Roots" movement which started in 1970, Ratan Thiyam is one of the most powerful Theatre Director and Playwright who according to him have invented a new theatrical form. As mentioned earlier, the spread of English drama which followed mainly the Elizabethan model in Proscenium

Theatres not only changed the concept of Traditional Theatre but also affected the separation between the caste and the audience which was new to traditional theatres of India. Ratan Thiyam and other Post-Independence Indian Playwrights forged to reclaim classical and other pre-colonial Indian traditions of performance as the way of decolonizing the influences of the western system. The return to the classical Indian theatre and folktales however brought a distinct voice for them as they were trying to restore back their own original identity and not the hybrid form which was imposed on them. Through this movement, when the mainland Indians were trying to get back their identity as purely “Indianess”, Thiyam on the other hand, played an important role in retrieving back his own unique identity i.e. being an Indian yet having his own unique culture and tradition of Metie. He was deeply influenced by the literary movements of the seventies when creative expression was at the peak and the whole Manipuri society was driven by the urge to find out the true Manipuri identity. He shows his deep interest with native traditions, myths and history in his theatre productions, by revisiting the myths, traditions and history of India in general and Manipur in particular. He brings out the socio-political problems not restricted to Manipur alone rather by those that have affected the world. It is to be noted that even though his plays are concentrated on war or violence in general, his main objective is to advocate peace only, it is through his plays that he expresses the overall welfare of the people. Like any other writers of the North-East, he was also influenced by the violent history experienced in the colonial, post- colonial and the present times. His works thereby portrays the turbulence provoked by a conflict ridden past and present. On another level by, exploring the myths, legends and folklore, it is his conscious decision to evoke a component of his ethnic identity. Over the years, Ratan Thiyam has enriched the world theatre movement with his masterpieces like *Chakravyuha*

(The Wheel of War), *Uttar Priyadarshi* (The Final Beatitude) and Blind Age. Most of his plays have been adapted from folklores, epics or writings of great masters. But, all the three plays of 'the Manipur Trilogy' are wholly created by him. His much acclaimed play *chakravyua* is taken from the Mahabharata, the Drona Parva, chapter 34-40. It exploits the story of Abhimanyu's assassination from the Mahabharata to depict the contemporary socio-political scenario. Abhimanyu, the protagonist represents an individual who succumbs to the social machinery and his assassins, the *Saptarathis* (Seven Charioteers). Often this play has been related with the denial of the Civil Rights experienced by the Manipuris at the hands of the state machinery empowered by the Armed Forces Special Power Act. Generally, the play is symptomatic of the ever existing clash between the individual and the society. The play incorporates the various gestures representing the heroic sentiments (Vira Rasa) through the Manipuri martial art Thang-ta. The delicate movements of the body parts which are used to express the dialogues more comprehensively are imitations of the gestures dedicated by Natyashastra and the Abhinaya Darpana. But in some places Thiyam has reduced the frequency of the Natyashastric body gestures and has stressed upon the use of dialogues. His closeness with the Classical Indian dramaturgy built on the principles of Natyashastra led him to experiment with Bhasa's plays. He took up Bhasa's play *Urubhangam* which is based on Duryodhana from the Mahabharata. He was immensely influenced by Bhasa's style of drama which many a times reversed the concepts of a hero as laid down by Bharata in his Natyashastra. Ratan Thiyam also picks up another of Bhasa's brilliant play *Karnabharam* (The Burden of Karna, 1989) by attempting to show how Karna is torn within for being called the son of a low caste in spite of his knowledge of the fact that he belongs to the rank of high birth. In Bhasa's *Urubhangam* and *Karnabharam* too, he seeks the voice of Manipur and gives

it his own tongue within the reality of alienation. The scene where Kunti ‘floats’ Karna across the stage to be gathered by Radhe, a memorable moment in Indian theatre, echoes the divide between the ‘royal’ society of the mainland and the Manipuri identity.

The revival of Meitei roots is also seen in his three plays ‘The Manipur Trilogy’ *Wahoudok*(Prologue), *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi*(My Earth, My Love), *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills , One Valley). In all these plays he has taken the forms of native Manipuri performing arts such as *wari-leeba*(Narrative technique which paints picture with word), traditional martial art *Thang-ta* , traditional dance forms; such as *Nata Sankirtana*, *Lai Haroba*, *Rasa Lila*; traditional narrative singing forms such as *Pena*, *Lairik Haiba Thiba* etc. and has shown his master over archaic Manipuri thus adding another dimension in the theatre world. Speaking about his cultural rootedness, he says:

My roots help me evolve creatively. I am just taking ancient knowledge and presenting it to our future generation, in the form of my art and my art is the constant evolving process of my identity. (Manipur Trilogy, p.112) Feeling of alienation and an existential search for roots in the rich cultural storehouse of Manipur become central to Thiyam’s artistic endeavours and enterprises. ‘His Manipur’, says Kavita Nagpal, ‘is eternally present in Ratan’s drama, even in those based on stories from the Mahabharata’ (‘The Theatre of Ratan Thiyam’). Nagpal writes: In Bhasa’s *Urubhangam* and *Karnabharam* too Ratan seeks the voice of Manipur and gives it his own tongue within the reality of alienation. Chuck Berg says: “Thiyam, by reframing the issues of modernization through the lens of his native culture transcends the usual polarized terms of the globalization debate by means of the poetics of Manipuri speech, music, movement and myth.”(Berg 153).

6. Aims and Objectives:-

This study tries to explore the origin and emergence of the Indian drama as an important genre to examine the chief concern of Existentialism in the works of Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam, which is a significant area of intellectual exercise in the contemporary literary circle. Their plays voicing the problem of existence of human being, importance of the individual, importance of choice, anxiety regarding life, death, and contingencies will be critically analyzed. These playwright who opted for the return to the roots but also pursued subaltern aesthetics as alternative modes of perception of contemporary realities will be studied. The study will also provide a more perceptive understanding of the past without which history will have little or no meaning for the present and the future.

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Chapter 2

Girish Karnad: Quest for Completeness in *Hayavadana*

Girish Karnad's plays present a tragic drama of man's desire to create meaning. His plays are mostly based on reality, the reality of human predicaments at the present stage. By putting an intellectual questions in his works, Karnad tries to state that there is meaning in this meaningless world and it is the individual and his consciousness, despite all the differences, the inner and outer conflicts that he as a person needs to find an answer within himself as well as free himself from all the social and cultural structures that has tied him in such bondage. Albert Camus said "Everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it". Likewise, Karnad tries to explore the psychology/consciousness of an individual , firstly to eradicate the collective consciousness about the misconceptions of age old customs and believes and secondly , to instill a rational thoughts in the mind of every individual , to seek a feeling of completeness and an identity of one's own, despite the impermanence and imperfections. Whatever man does is indeed a repetition of the past deeds so when we think about the past, the existential going back plays a vital role in a person's psycho-physiological process, in order to correct oneself from the false concepts. Myth thus, provides a delusion that everything has been said or has happened for a reason, be it moral or ethical. If it can be constructed for a reason, it can deconstruct and reconstruct as well. The play *Hayavadana* is one great example to show how ancient believes have in many ways taught a considerable number of knowledge and values of life yet everything cannot be retained in the present stage. In order to cope with the reality, impersonality, and ambivalence of nature, people turn

to myth as “myth helps man to transcend his own limitations and conditions...” (147: Mircea Eliade). So, Karnad took refuge in myths, folktales and legends, as he thought it necessary to reconstruct the real logics of existential agonies by taking certain examples of past events. He says “ The myth had enabled me to articulate myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally”.^(9) He also says that “ In India , as has often been pointed out, the past is never totally lost; it coexist with the present as a parallel flow”.^(10) Thus, keeping this in mind, Karnad invests the myth with new meanings, making it the vehicle of highly contentious contemporary issues like the Problem of Being, the Search for Identity, the Search for Completeness and the Existential Agonies of man. The play also highlights the physical, biological, psychological, emotional detachment and the desire of a female to exorcise the bondage of traditional concepts imposed upon them by the normative society. Karnad also endeavours to explore the Patriarchal forces which is inevitably at work in the relationship between men –women, regardless of the progress of the society and changing gender roles, women are less valued and dare not raise their heads or voice their feelings when it comes to the matter of choice for their own life partner.

Girish Karnad has highlighted a number of issues, but above all, a Man’s Search for and for Completeness and this is best explained in terms of Existentialist theory. Existentialism is an important aspect of modernism in art and literature and as conceived today, it is basically a philosophy of existence which was pioneered by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and later disseminated by Sartre etc. It implies ‘Quest’ of an individual for the assertion of ‘Self’, despite his failures and limitations. Amidst grim facts of life, Existentialism presents a philosophy of hope, ecstasy and exultation. In the present study an attempt has been made to explore Existential elements in Girish Karnad’s play *Hayavadana*.

The play *Hayavadana* written in 1971 has originally been found in the 11th century Sanskrit text '*Kathasaritsagara*' an ancient compilation of stories in Sanskrit. The mythical tales of the two sources, based on '*Vetal Panchavimshati*' and Somadeva's '*Brihat katha Sarit Sagara*'. In these stories it talked about prince Dhavala who married Madansundari, the daughter of a king named Suddhapata. One day, Svetapata, the son of Suddhapata proceeds to his own country along with his sister and her husband. On the way they come across a temple of goddess Gauri. Dhavala goes into the temple to pay homage to the goddess. There he happens to see a sword, thus offering his head to the goddess. Svetapata goes to the temple in search of his brother in law, but stunned to see Dhavala dead with head as offering to goddess Gauri, seeing the sword he also made the same sacrifice as Dhavala. Madansundari also enters the temple to look out for her husband and brother but seeing both of them dead loses control and took the same sword to cut off her head . The goddess suddenly appears and forbids her and asks Madansundari to make a wish. She request the goddess to restore back her brother and husband. Goddess Gauri then allows her to fix the heads on their shoulders but out of excitement Madansundari puts the head of her husband on the body of her brother and vice versa. Both of them came back to life but the problem arises when she realizes her mistake. At this stage Vetala ask Vikram, "Who is Mandansundari's husband"? The king's verdict was "of course, the person with Dhavala's head on his shoulders." This original tale of *Katha sarit sagara* ends with a solution to the riddle.

Thomas Mann, a German writer criticized such absurd solution in his book 'The transposed heads' (1940), a symbolic reinterpretation of the same tale .He ridicules the philosophy which hold the head superior to body. Mann endeavours to retell an ancient tale by analyzing the logical and metaphysical implications to the

story. He argues that if the head is superior, and the man with the husband's head becomes the husband, what happens to the body? What about the woman, who is aware of the husband body living elsewhere? Can she accept such a solution without reacting to it? Mann attempts to seek an answer to such questions. Girish karnad claims to be influenced by Mann's rendering of the story rather than the original tale. Both Mann and karnad is of the opinion that king Vikram's verdict does not solve the problem. The mythical story proves that the head is superior but in reality an individual cannot be identified with the head alone. It is absurd because the Individual's Selfhood cannot be achieved with it.

Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in 'The Transposed Heads' (1940) talked about two good friends named Shridaman who is Brahmin by birth but merchant by profession and Nanda, a cowherd and blacksmith. When the two friends were travelling Shridaman falls in love at first sight with Sita, Nanda then becomes a messenger for his friend for which Sita accepts the proposal of Shridaman. Later Nanda also gets attracted by Sita. Some months later while the three were travelling in a cart to Sita's parents house, they came across the temple of goddess kali. Shridaman visits the temple alone and offers himself as a sacrifice to mother kali. Nanda goes to the temple and on seeing his dead friend, kills himself too. Sita could not bear the tragedy and decide to kill herself. Goddesses Durga appears and ask Sita to fix their head on their bodies, Sita was too excited that she sets the heads on wrong bodies. Now the problem arises, who is her husband? The hermit Kamdaman advises them the body with Sridaman's head should be Sita's husband. The body with Nanda's head becomes a hermit and lived in the forest. As time goes by Shridaman's head begins to control Nanda's body. Sita pines for Nanda's body and at last she ventures out in the forest with her son Andhak. She finds Nanda in the forest after a tiring

journey. They spent the night together, the next morning Shridaman comes there. He suggest that Sita should perform ‘ *Sati* ’. At last both Nanda and Shridaman died and Sita burns herself on the funeral pyre of her two husbands. The Sanskrit tale told by a ghost to an adventurous king, gains a further mock-heroic dimension in Mann’s version. The original posses a moral problem while Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between Body and Soul.

The play *Hayavadana* consists of two plots. Both have a double layered meaning. The main plot is borrowed from Thomas Mann’s ‘The Transposed Heads’, but while Mann’s work is concerned with solving a metaphysical riddle and tries to work out the logical implications of the ancient tale by combining it with the dialectic view which depicts the antithetical nature of reality , Karnad on the other hand is not interested in dialectical metaphysics, although his play does express the paradoxical nature of human existence, he stresses more on the psychology, the consciousness of the protagonists. In *Hayavadana* we see that the three protagonists Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini undergoes a series of thoughts erupting now and again in their conscious mind, dream, memory. Albert Camus said, “The ultimate function of consciousness, is not the retrieval of truth but the higher- order synthesis of meaning.” Like Camus, Karnad has projected an analysis based on Consciousness of human being as Consciousness produces the feeling of authentic ‘Self’ and ‘Being’ which are the most basic elements of Existentialism and it is the most complex entities. The play however does not attempt to uphold that the mind is superior to the body, karnad seems to advocate the view that man, is by nature, incomplete. Thus, Karnad’s characters in *Hayavadana* appear like lonely figures having a split personality and a divided self because of being victims of existential sufferings and predicaments.

The sub-plot of *Hayavadana* (horse headed man) is purely his own invention which adds to the total impression and significance of the play. It provides the framework of the play both as a prologue and as an epilogue. The sub plot on one hand gives importance to the totality of a Being (head and body), not as separate entities. On another level it talks about a woman(Karnataka princess) who was cursed just because of her Choice, a choice of marrying a white stallion instead of a Prince, and Hayavadana, her son suffers by feeling incomplete and detached from the normal being .

If we take a close reading on Thomas Mann's version and the sub-plot of *Hayavadana* we see that completeness is impossible to achieve, because a man's identity or Self is not characterized by the parts of the body. The union of both body and mind is essential to know who the person is or what the person wants. Hayavadana achieves completeness in a more comical way by becoming a complete animal. By analyzing the difference between an animal and a man we see a huge difference because unlike Animals, man's totality of behavior and freedom is shaped by one's consciousness and choice. Karnad's play touches the consciousness of the protagonists in some way or the other especially the female protagonist Padmini just because she yearns for completeness. Her yearning is in some way or the other being effected by her own desires and thoughts, her thoughts are at the same time disturbed or effected by the social norms which at the end allowed her to submit her whole being to the norms by performing Sati. Her consciousness was thus binded by the system of the society which did not permit her to make her own choices.

“Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.” This is the first principle of Existentialism. According to Sartre, men are not merely developing their personalities by a growing understanding of the different aspects of their human

nature, but are creating themselves, entirely and arbitrarily. Human freedom is real; but “we shall remain free only if we choose actions which gives substance to freedom and increase it. If we merely act as we like we may succumb to unnoticed compulsions from within and without and thus bury our freedom again” (Roubiczek, 114). “ There is a pattern of becoming, where cause and effect operate , man chooses and becomes what he chooses by acting” (Gregor ,195). Human beings have to take the responsibility of his own work for it is then that the freedom holds its meaning.

In *Hayavadana*, the opening narration of Bhagavata who is an avatar of the Sutradhar in ancient Sanskrit drama opens the play with the offering of worship accompanied by signs to the God Ganesha, for ritual worship. Ganesha symbolizes the concepts of Completeness and Incompleteness. There is also the suggestion thrown in at the very beginning that the idea of totally of being is best left to the gods, it is a goal beyond human comprehension and knowledge. Karnad good humouredly yet critically evaluates the very concept of the rational and the physical. The multiplicity of the characters and their individual psychic circles playing into each other build up a complex pattern of human relationships. And by projecting these gradually intensifying clash of personalities, Karnad presents a comprehensive picture of the human living. In the beginning the readers are introduced to two best friends Devadatta and Kapila , from different social background and totally opposite personality yet, they are considered as “ One Mind, One Heart”. The problem arises when Devadatta confesses his love towards a woman named Padmini, requesting his friend Kapila to act as a messenger. Padmini accepts Devadatta’s proposal and marries him .She is initially happy after her marriage with Devadatta, who possesses intellect, is gradually attracted by Kapila’s, strong physique later realizing that she may have made a wrong Choice in choosing her life partner. A few months into the

marriage, the three travel to Ujjain. On the way, they rest between two temples, one devoted to Rudra (The Howler-a form of Shiva) and the other to Kali. Seeing his wife yearning for Kapila, Devadatta is consumed by jealousy, his consciousness however disturbed him when he sees his wife staring and admiring the strength of his friend Kapila. Although Kapila was also attracted towards Padmini his conscience did not allow him to get close to his friend's wife. Devadatta then leaves the two and goes to the kali temple deciding to offer himself to the goddess, but Kapila too is not left behind. The two men behead themselves in the Kali temple. On seeing the dead bodies, Padmini grows self-centered and conscious of the possible events. She knows that she would be held responsible for their death: "...And who'll believe me? They'll all say the two fought and died for this whore. They are bound to say it. Then what'll happen to me?" (31) The people would certainly discuss that Padmini had extramarital relationship with Kapila and in their fight to take possession of her body both have killed each other.

The pregnant Padmini, afraid that she might be blamed for their deaths, then decides to kill herself. However, Kali stops her and offers to bring the men back to life by joining their heads to their own body. Padmini in her excitement, without even thinking acts quickly and transposes their heads by mistake and then the real problem of the play arise. At first, Devadatta and Kapila rejoice that they have now become one, but Padmini realizes the complexity of the situation: Who would now be her husband? The three unfortunate seek the help of a rishi in search of a solution to their problem. The rishi, remembering perhaps what king Vikrama had said, gives the solution:

As the heavenly kalpa vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the

head among human limbs. Therefore, the man with Devadatta's

head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of

Padmini. (2.40)

It was a moment of joy for Padmini because she wanted Devadatta's mind and Kapila's body so her desire of wanting to have both brain and brawn was momentarily fulfilled when she say " what a wide chest. What other canopy do I need? My Devadatta comes like a bridegroom with the jewellery of a new body"(41)

The central episode of the play –the story of Devadatta and Kapila is based on a tale from *kathasaritsagara*. But the problem in the play *Hayavadana*, of Karnad's, begins where the story of Vetala ends. He develops the play in his own characteristic way and treats the theme of incompleteness very appealingly. If we take a look at the structural theory of Myths, it is said to be myths based on human emotions. These myths shows the two sides of the human mind; the good side and the bad side. They show the divided Self and the duality of human nature. In the play, the three protagonists, Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini undergoes dual personalities. For instance, when Kapila agreed to help Devadatta get his love Padmini , Devadatta felt fortunate for having such a good friend by his side and said to himself

... How fortunate I am to have a

friend like him. Pure gold. But should I have trusted this

to him? He means well- and he is a wizard in his smithy, in his

farm, in his fields. But here ? No. he is too rough, too indelicate.

He was the wrong man to send. He's bound to ruin the whole

thing. Lord Rudra, I meant what I said. If I get her,
 my head will be a gift to you. Mother kali, I'll sacrifice my arms
 to you. I swear. (1.16)

The ambiguous nature of human personality is revealed even though
 Padmini's remarks:

What are you afraid of Devadatta? What does it matter that
 you are going soft again, that you are losing your muscles? Im not
 going to be stupid again. Kapila's gone out of my life—forever. I
 won't let him come back again. Kapila? What could he be
 doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still, and
 his face dark? Devadatta changes. Kapila changes . and me?(2.49)

This implies that she has a sense of Incompleteness in trying to understand herself. Through the play Karnad examines the human predicament and laid great stress in the lack of stability and permanence in human personality. According to existentialists, lack of stability and alienation is the estrangement from one's own being. In the play we find how Padmini struggles because of being unstable in her choice. She is continually pre-occupied with deeper questions of life and existence, innocence and experience, good and evil morals and ethics. Her conscience pricked her now and then, making her to want more than what she has. One of the most remarkable aspects of consciousness, Rosenfield points out, is "its utter subjectivity, the uniqueness of each individual human perspective." We remain by and large entrapped in our own subjectivity leading us to feel alienated, as in the case of Padmini who is invariably

shaped by her own circumstance. This notion of alienation can be seen in Padmini's character not only in her conscious state but also in her unconsciousness which is expressed via the representation of dolls in the play *Hayavadana*. The use of animate dolls works as a device to report us what is going on in Padmini's unconscious mind. The dolls report to each other what Padmini dreams, is building castles in the air. Through her dream about Kapila, We see that unconsciousness is a store for all the desires and emotions which can't be fulfilled and anything that can't be fulfilled after a hefty dose of thought could lead to a psychological disturbances. Not only Padmini suffered but we see that neither Padmini nor Devadatta or Kapila was free from the plethora of problems. Though the moral problem of identity crisis is solved, the psychological problem remains. They suffered continually because of the choice they made. Albert Camus says, "The body's judgement is as good as the mind's , and the body shrinks from annihilation . We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking" just as in the case of Devadatta when he tells Padmini of how his body reacted instantly at the gymnasium " you know , I'd always thought one had to use one's brains while wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body just doesn't wait for thoughts- it acts!"(42)

It is thus, the choices and decisions that we make without giving a proper thought and when we reflect on our freedom we realize that we are responsible for whatever happens to us and this results in a form of Anxiety to which there are no metaphysical solutions offered. According to many existentialists, man is bound to face this, as devoid of any religious and metaphysical consolations, he has to cope with it and find his own solutions. Watts says :

So long as the mind is split, life is perpetual conflict, tension, frustration and dillusion. Suffering is piled on suffering, fear on fear,

and boredom on boredom... but the individual mind is free from this tension of trying always to stand outside oneself and to be elsewhere than here and now. Each moment is lived completely, and there is thus a sense of fulfillment and completeness.(Watt 103)

In the play, we see that the three main protagonists goes under the tension of split personality. After the transposition of head both Kapila and Devadatta suffered from intense selfhood. But Padmini was drawn more towards the psychological despair of not being able to choose her happiness. From the first place, their consciousness had created a problem and the problem not only effected them physically but also chained them psychologically. Karnad presents the conscious and unconscious self of an individual , trying to reveal that , man lives at the point of intersection of these two flows of thoughts which are incompatible but both of which they must inhabit. Since Devadatta and Kapila have a split and fragmented personality they are perpetually tormented by the conflict that arises due to the different roles that they play. Thus, such curtain of darkness hides man from his Being. The protagonists due to the ignorance of the Self, becomes isolated and under extreme struggle for survival. On a consciousness level , we risk being only half-human when we worship at the altar of the outrospective intellect to the exclusion of our introspective intuition, the seedbed of belonging to the integrated wholeness of the universe- that is, when we approach the world as separate experiences of it rather than as participatory parts of it. Alan Watts admonishes:

The unity of inner experience, despite all theories, you will feel that you are isolated from life so long as you are divided within. But you will cease to feel isolated when you recognize, for example, that you do not have a sensation of the sky: you are that sensation. For all

purposes of feeling, your sensation of the sky is the sky, and there is no
 “you” apart from what you sense, feel and know.(Watt 111)

In *Hayavadana* when Kapila and Devadatta meets in the forest Kapila says “do you remember how I once used to envy you your poetry, your ability to imagine things? For me, the sky was the sky, and the tree only a tree. Your body gave me new feelings, new words. I felt awake as I’d never before.” (60)Devadatta and kapila slowly and gradually changed to their own former Selves, although they were able to retain their identity they were still not free of human predicaments. Kapila was haunted by his memory. He says, “Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?” He further states that:

... one beats the body into shape, but one can’t beat
 away the memories trapped in it. Isn’t that suprising? That the
 body should have its own ghosts, its own secrets? Memories of
 touch—memories of a touch—memories of a body swaying in
 these arms, of a warm skin against those palm—memories which
 one cannot recognize, cannot understand, cannot even name
 because this head wasn’t there when they happened. (2.57)

This is the very essence of memory: its self referential base, its self- consciousness, ever evolving and ever changing, intrinsically dynamic and subjective.

We notices that Padmini’s inner feelings for Kapila never changed. Padmini once again finds herself in a predicament. The urge in her, to find a complete being as a partner, motivates her actions. .Her experience with Devadatta in the form of Kapila’s

body could not be erased from her mind. Padmini still struggles with the anxiety of duel self and tells to Kapila “ yes , you won, kapila. Devadatta won too. But I—the better half of two bodies – neither win nor lose.” Karnad here clearly projects that Padmini needs ‘a man of steel’ (90). Devadatta is not the man for her. Even the transposed Devadatta loses charm for her. Finally, Devadatta and Kapila realize that they love Padmini deeply but cannot live together ‘like the Pandavas and Draupadi’ .Hence they decide to put an end to their unsettled triangular life by fighting with each other and ultimately killing themselves. Padmini stands a mute spectator to this deadly fight because she also knows in her blood that they cannot live together. After the death of these two friends, Padmini is made to face the crisis. She says that “If I had said yes I’ll live with you both, perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I could not say it. I know it in my blood you could not have lived together” (62). Thus, Padmini torn between the two and under the social burdens she decides to offer her life as sacrifice in front of the goddess Kali.

She hands over her son to the Bhagavata to whom she says:

.. Give him to the hunters

who live in this forest and tell them it’s Kapila’s son...

When he’s five take him to

the revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapur. Tell him it’s Devatta’s son.

(62)

Padmini aims at creating through her son a human being who is as much a child of nature as that of culture. Even as she enters sati, Padmini is painfully aware of her identity crisis. She prays to her prototype:

Kali, mother of all nature, you must have your joke even now.

Other women can die praying that they should get the same
husband in all the lives to come. You haven't left me even
that little consolation.”(2.63)

The identity crises of Padmini, of Devadatta as well as of Kapila lead all of them to find liberation in fire. Their “mad dance of incompleteness” comes to an end and there was no solution to human predicament. The two men change to their ‘original self’ but Padmini remains in her primordial procreative self. Karnad examines the psychological and sociological identity of these characters but has no method to cure them. Actions decides our destiny and it is our action that can inevitably save us from the predicaments or ruin us, but again the bitter truth is that ,when it comes to a matter of destiny for women, their destiny is pre-decided by the calculative norms of patriarchy. Without raising a voice of their own women are made to accept that imposed destiny. Karnad through the play tries to bring an awareness of rationality and humanity in contemporary society by letting go off the patriarchal shackles. Karnad also urge the people to be rational even in terms of their emotions and believes, customs.

In the play, the absurd has also been highlighted in the accepted norms of social behaviour and Karnad has employed a very existential approach to human life. When Hayavadana seeks his help to get rid of his horse head, instead of finding a solution for him the Bhagavata says,“ who are you? What brought you to this? Was it a curse of some Rishi? Or was it some holy place of pilgrimage, a punyasthana, which you

desecrated? Or could it be that you insulted a pativrata, dedicated to the service of her husband? Or did you....”(9)

Hayavadana tries to justify that he has not done any wrong yet it is his fate to become so. A dual mindset and individuality finds it hard to grapple along with a society, he has no specific identity of his own, Hayavadana says, “my personal life has naturally been blameless. So I took interest in the social life of the nation—civics, politics, society... I have tried everything. But where’s my society? Where? You must help me to become a complete man, Bhagavata Sir.” (9) The solution that Bhagavata could offer was to visit famous holy places and temples such as Banaras, Rameshwaram etc Hayavadana thus inclined saying that he has already visited all the temples and holy man yet nothing has helped him with the struggle. Karnad, tries to mock the mindset of the age old tradition that visiting shrines, temples, consulting with priests, sadhus, saints are all lame. It is the problem of an individual alone. Unlike the gods and goddess who are immortal and whose existence we the mortal have no right to judge. When it comes to the mortals, each individual has his/ her individual existential problems. It is a person himself to solve his own dilemmas and problems. In the end of the play nobody attains completeness, Hayavadana searches for human completeness but attains animal completeness, contrary to this longing he changes to a full fledged horse like his own mother.

To conclude, Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana* is a play about consciousness, a sense which makes an individual search for ‘Self’ or a wholeness/ completeness within himself, which itself lead to the very existential agonies of human life. A situation of crisis is developed by the protagonists to experience the truth of their authentic being. They had the freedom of Choice, their choice ultimately gave them the guilt, bearing the responsibility of their own freedom. The mind is the seat of

consciousness, the essence of our being. The mind is indeed a system of self organizing, without optimal self organization , we may arrive at either chaos or rigidity. Our thoughts, feelings, memories, attention, all that we experience in this subjective world is part of our mind. Our mind goes far beyond the physical workings of our brain. To seek for a meaning of life, science, philosophy, religion nothing can answer the seemingly yet paralyzingly profound question. Hiding our true inner feelings, we become separated from our souls. We end up living divided lives, denying or hiding some fundamental part of our identity in fear of being judged or rejected. Search for Perfection oppresses the soul. In a culture like ours which devalues or dismisses the reality and power of inner life. It is often an external code of conduct, an objective set of rules we are told to follow. When we understand this, we stop obsessing our codes of conduct and embark on the more demanding journey toward being whole and “ Wholeness does not mean perfection” it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.”. Consciousness and choice is purely subjective, a two- edged sword that both divided us and can help us become whole. Therefore, wholeness is a choice, a choice which may lead to one’s freedom or a choice which may degrade our entire Selfhood.

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Chapter 3

Ratan Thiyam : Modern Man's Existential Anxieties

The writers from the Northeast are mostly influenced by the violent history experienced in the Colonial, Post- Colonial and the present times. There are multidimensional problems which the contemporary literature of Northeast deals with. The conflict in the region is mired with complex political- economic issues, such as struggle over natural resources, migration related issues, displacement, social exclusion, insurgency, growing unemployment, disappearance of traditional ethos, youth losing sense of direction, a sense of intolerance towards political unrest, intensification of the crisis of moral values and so on. The writers of this region thereby explore the myths, legends and folklore, which is a conscious decision to evoke a component of their ethnic identity. In their quest for Roots, the writers have brought the landscape of this region to life and personified it as an extension of their native identity. Amidst the widespread sense of helplessness, there is an overwhelming desire and force to be free from such a situation of conflict which cripples the people from all sides. The fundamental insecurity or Existential Anxiety of Northeast makes the people of this region to question that something is not quite right with their social system, depriving them from freedom. The writers, thereby tries to reclaim community as the space for individual freedom or authenticity.

Ratan Thiyam an Indian playwright and a theatre director hailing from Manipur, is considered as one of the major pioneers of the theatre of Roots Movement, he shows his deep intimacy with native traditions, myths and history in his theatre productions. By revisiting the traditions, myths and history of India in general and of Manipur in particular, and relocating them in the context of present socio-political and cultural

milieu, Thiyam brings forth issues both perennial and contemporary, such as war and violence, death and destruction, oppression and exploitation, anxiety and crisis of identity besides others. Feeling of Alienation and an Existential search for roots in the rich cultural storehouse of Manipur become central to Thiyam's artistic endeavors and enterprises, besides the Existential Anxieties of human being in general. Whatever he does echoes his 'Passionate Love' for Humanity. He firmly believes that plays should be based on logic and reason – it should mirror the society; it should be able to analyze the social changes and give comment on it. In other words, plays should point out the wrongs in the society and correct it by putting questions on human intellect. This is exactly what he does in 'Manipur Trilogy' a collection of three plays namely *Wahoudok* (Prologue), *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley) and *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love). In these three plays Thiyam has tried not to narrate the history of the story but have tried to communicate the history or the tradition with a lot of the contemporary world, linking it in a different way. His thematic content in all of these three plays are mostly War, Violence or Terrorism. War has no end and he questions about what war has given us? He says that war is not always about guns and missiles. He is of the opinion that the main problem of the modern people is that we have become so individualistic selfish and subjective. Through his plays, he questions the modern men, are we leaving behind a kind of civilization which is full of darkness for the younger generation? His concern is to wage war against war which should be a kind of collective thinking that will ultimately give peace to the world. It is to be noted that even though Thiyam's plays are concentrated on war or violence in general, his real objective is to highlight or advocate peace only. In his forward note to the Manipur Trilogy, eminent writer Dhirendranath Bezbaruah comments:

Ratan Thiyam's plays present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and demands that a remorseless technological world makes on all of us. And through his presentation of opposites and conflicts, he puts across the clear message that unless mankind resists war, halts the rat race of a frenetic existence and reverses the destruction of the only planet that we have, there is only one doom in store for us .(151)

1. Wahoudok (Prologue):

Wahoudok (Prologue) is a play of four scenes which explicates the creation myths as per the Meitie traditional folklore and mythology. How the universe was created out of the void with the very first utterance of the first word by the Almighty and this complex world continued to expand, exploiting the bounty of nature and how exploitative activities of the human mortals have brought about disasters and have dragged the whole humanity into difficulties. The play is profoundly prophetic in tone and links myth with reality. This play tries to explore the history and traditions of the Meitie race. In the late 1960s there happened a kind of discomfort as well as a discontentment against Indian rule, a strong feeling of being exploited and ignored and thus marginalized a sense of insecurity, identity crisis started shaking the Manipuri mindset. All these have led to a Separatist Movement and eventually violence and insurgency. Thiyam thus, gives an immense importance on the early Meitie roots to revive the land's rich culture and traditions in his works. In order to retrieve back the early ethnic race of Manipur and their identity he makes a special mentioning of some ancient believes, practices, mythological stories , historical facts and evidences which are almost lost in oblivion.

The play starts with an incantation to the Almighty God of Meitie *Pu Atingkok*, glorifying him for creating the Universe, who also created the leaders of the Seven houses to carry on the lineage with sons and daughters. The ethnic group Meities, as we find it today was formed by the amalgamation of the Seven different but close knit and allied Principalities, once settled in different parts of Manipur, each independent of each other. The components of Meitie confederacy were: the *Meities*, *Khaba-Ngamba*, *Chenglei*, *Angom*, *Khuman*, *Luwang*, *Moirang*. The seven *Salais* were formed on the basis of powerful Meitei clan system so people talk only about these clans even though there are more than seven clans in early Manipur. But the question of how and when the seven *Salais* originated is still a matter of controversy. There are several myths and legends which try to explain the origin and interconnectivity of the seven *Salais*. Contrary to the myths and legends, historical evidence reveals that the *Salais* did not come simultaneously but emerged in different ages and different areas. Thiyam tries to state that the modern man have grown so ambitious overtime that the past glory or the early formation of the ethnic groups of Meities in particular, is almost lost in oblivion.

There is a mention of the manuscript known as *Puya* in the play. The history of Manipur is chronicled in *Puyas* or *Puwaris* (stories about forefathers). The *Puya* discuss cosmology, genealogies of gods and goddesses, history of solar (son-based) and lunar (daughter-based) dynasties of kings, and the reign of *Manus*. If we take a look at the mythical story we see that the manuscript was written by the inspired writers/ ancient scholars who told of god who worked in history to accomplish his will in the world about the amazing facts of the ancient history of *Kangleipak* which helped to discover the lost history of *Kangleipak* after the vandalism of *Puya Meithaba* in the beginning of Hindu rules in *Kangleipak* in the 18th century. The

Maichou Chaopa, under imminent threat to life, copied the *Puya*, not only his fear of his life but for loss of the *Puya* forever to the Meitie race. The Maichou was under frightening psychological conditions during the copying of the *Puya* from the fact that the Maichou left out some important lines of the original *Puya* in the copying. (In the later part of the play we see how the Maichous i.e., the seven wise men relies on the king of *Kangleipak*). Thiyam tries to revive the age old tradition of the Meitie roots by stating that there is so much knowledge and facts behind such manuscript but sadly the modern people of Manipur are not aware of the history of Meities or has lost in touch with such knowledge .This revival of Meitie roots is seen in the play when *Ojha Sheishakpa* (master singer) reads the book of knowledge written in ciphers known as *Puya* (manuscript):

We have prayed a few flitting moments
to the lord

For something called 'birth as a human being'

Bereft of maltreatment to the weaker sections

Without torturing the guiltless ones

Without suppressing the sentimental thoughts....

Establish an independent society....

Those who believe in your might, Lord

And those who do not believe

in your existence all are equal to the creator of the universe.

Everyone receives the fruit of his deeds. (14-15)

Referring to these particular lines and supplementing it with the theory of Existentialism we see that Religion is a deeply contested point within Existentialism. Some Existentialist reject the reality of God, other Existentialists have no problem

with God and see an appropriate tension between divine and human freedom. But if we reflect on our Freedom we realize that we are Responsible for whatever happens to us and this results in a form of Anxiety to which there are no metaphysical solutions offered. This dreadful situation constitutes our existence. In other words, it is our existential situation from where there is no escape. According to many Existentialists, man is bound to face this, as devoid of any religious and metaphysical consolations, he has to cope with it and find his own solutions. While the universe itself isn't inherently imbued with meaning, it is in this self-conscious human act of paying attention that meaning arises. Thiyam's religion is thus the religion of humanity as he seeks to find a meaning regardless of all the shackles of meaninglessness. He is deeply concerned about moral malaise of modern man and deeply occupies himself to solve the riddle of the man, faced with the problems of pain, death, social and moral responsibility.

In Prologue, Thiyam invokes the Divine Goddess *Lairembi* by reading out from *Puya*(manuscript). She is capable of seeing four directions, eight barriers and nine boundaries. The divine mother and her seven manifestations spring out of the book and dances, on a song called *hoirou* (song sung during *Lai Haraoba* festival). “It's a dance searching for the bloodline it's a dance searching the family of flowers”. (17) The “World View” of the Meiteis is not merely frozen into the classics and archaic manuscripts, but is given adequate respectability in the form and festivals of the traditional *Lai Haraoba*, the Meitie's celebrate this festival in honour of the traditional Sylvan Deities and ancestors. The festival is a part of recollection of the creation stories played by the deities with the first origin of this universe and evolution of the plants and animals. Thiyam employs this very traditional form of creation in Prologue where the different stages in the creation myth unfold with

various species created by the seven goddess such as fish, toad, monkey and ultimately man comes to life. The goddesses depart leaving an innocent human behind in the world :

Living world, it is the play of gods, perform
 your duties keeping your mind under control,
 don't forget your obligations and
 responsibilities, when the words of truth are
 sung gods and goddesses residing above and
 below would be pleased and start singing
 Ougri. (29)

Basing on the creation of human being as innocent, and the Responsibility vested upon them by the deities, human beings were given the Responsibility to find meaning of their own life. It was each one's duty to choose their Actions which in the end may give freedom and peace or chain them with tensions and miseries. And what actually is the meaning of life for the humans? This is the very question which the Existentialist has been trying to solve and which every human beings are battling with. The matters that constitute the core human being such as freedom, decision and responsibility are conspicuous in all the Existentialist philosophers. It is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from the other beings on this earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself. On the other hand, freedom or responsibility does not often involve a subjective experience. As Debra Bergoffen explains :

Though I can never act for another nor directly influence their freedom, I must accept responsibility for the fact that my actions produce the conditions

within which the other acts. In this regard, the situation of our freedom / responsibility is marked by the communal interconnectivity of individuals.

In the play, after the *Lairembis* (Sylvan deities) leaves the human being responsible for themselves in the world, the mythological characters, Seven *Maichous* who are the messengers of god (the seven great wise-men, the forbearers who can foresee the future) have already foreseen the future of the land and the existential crisis that each individual and the society as a whole was about to suffer.

The life of human, two third would be suffering, only one –third would have happiness....during the course of history, groups of aliens with the thought of devastating our society have inflicted serious diseases on the future generations and poisoned their minds, but you have not disclosed the remedy, O' Father! Ancient traditions , its value is on the wane in the minds of the younger generations...wrong pens have started scribing on the departmental scrolls forcibly; the purses of the dignitaries looking after the departments have started bulging....man has turned into beast, man will stop loving another man, man will devour man....fire breathing out from the mouths of the rich nations with sufficient arms and military power has started burning the weaker sections....eating habits and lifestyles have changed. Wise men have gone into hiding. Only a few wise men are left behind....In the race of civilization , in the passage of time, grudge among nations have become very frequent, killing and wanton murder, arresting and kidnapping would happen more frequently, news of wars and devastations would reverberate in all the four directions and eight corners. (37-38)

There was a time when human beings freely mixed and conversed with the divinities. But coming to the present modern Manipur, just as the *Maichous* (wise men/ancient scholars) have predicted, men have lost the sense to understand the meaning of life, they have forgotten their responsibility. With the passage of time, population multiplied. Pressure on food and natural resources increased manifold. Natural calamities occurred. Human beings started fighting one another for greater share of the diminishing resources. Advancement of knowledge and technology failed to liberate them from the virtual hell they were trapped in. Wars, diseases and scarcity of food led to political and economic complexities. Disparity of culture and tradition compounded the matter further multiplying the woes of human beings. The worried human beings thus started looking back in time. They opened the pages of human history one by one looking for a pragmatic solution to their plight. The helpless people called upon their forebears, the Seven Wise-Men lost in oblivion and the seven Nymphs who had helped in creating human beings, to save and release them from miseries. Thus, the play clearly links myth with reality and Thiyam by portraying this in Prologue shows or tells the readers that there is so much to learn from the past. History of mankind is a treasure trove of knowledge. Relics of the bygone era are irreplaceable books of wisdom. Invaluable information is hidden in the culture and tradition of the forebears discarded by the present generation blindly. Thiyam says, “the human race has come a long way, especially due to technological advancements, but in the course of our development, we have somehow lost touch with our emotions. The more we become advanced, the more our society is forgetting its traditions, roots and the importance of human relationship.” Thus, in order to know and understand one’s predicament which is leading to an ever existential struggle one has to find the roots of the problems. One also has to realize the factors

leading to such problems. Ratan Thiyam, through this play laments that human beings were born free, free of choice and decisions but human beings failed to understand the deep meaning of living. In every kind of problem, solution is required be it land disputes, communal violence, ethnic conflicts, identity crisis etc. and without a solution the root cause of the problem becomes the problem itself. In order to find an answer to all these predicaments Thiyam says that man has to seek wisdom and knowledge from the past for which without past, the present is meaningless and without the present there is no future.

2. *Chinglon Mapan Tampak* (Nine Hills, One Valley) :

Ratan Thiyam's play '*Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama*' (Nine Hills, One Valley) refers to the glory of the culturally rich Manipur, the mystical land comprising of nine concentric ranges of hills encircling a valley Imphal. Invoking the evil spirits and propitiating them for the peace and prosperity of the denizens in a way to realize the deep ecology this play of three scenes presents the cultural traditions of the land in propitiating the evil in the animist principles. It is interwoven with a strong thematic concept which focuses on Thiyam's interpretation of a drastically changing world and the need of acquiring traditional wisdom. It also evokes concern about War, Peace and Social Justice. The play, in a way, is a quintessence of Ratan Thiyam's anxiety that he has felt over several years. As he points out, it is about sharing the emotions and the suffering, " Unless you share it together, there will be nobody to think about it. Without a collective vision, without collective thought about peace as our target, it will be far away." Though the play does not have a conventional plot, as Thiyam said "Is a poem by birth, a collage of many thoughts and a presentation of contemporary ideas without a conventional plot- a document of a restless society and its political

turmoil where the sufferers are only poor people.” It has a thin but evocative storyline having a document of a restless society and political turmoil, evoking myth and legend with a primal cry of despair.

In the play, *Seven Sentinels* overlooks the realm of Nine Hills and a Valley invoking the evil spirits of the land, in an effort to pacify them and bring about peace and harmony in the region. The demonic time then takes its toll on the people, while terror and trauma rules supreme. Helpless mothers wail and plead to the wise men, trying to save their children amid such chaos. But the wise ones have, by then, faded into oblivion. All they can do is turn in their sleep and herald the ominous times that are to come. The play is a poignant allegory dealing with the universal themes such as good versus evil, individual versus collective duty, the relevance of history and the impact of modernity which unfolds like a dream. A tale of seven old women seeking a better future for their sons and daughters, the play ponders over the future of a mystical land of Manipur in which traditional, cultural values and history have been marginalized. The consciousness of these marginalized people has given them a new outlook towards their ‘Selves’. This awareness created an identity crisis in their mind. Amartya Sen says that sense of one’s identity creates a sense of exclusion from mainstream and in “many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups.”(2). The broad racial differences between India and Manipur and tenuous geographical link contributed to a sense of alienation, a feeling of ‘Otherness’ that subsequently gave rise to a political culture of violent separatism. Homi K.Bhabha’s The theory of ‘Other’ may help to represent the cultural identity of the Manipuri inhabitants which comes into conflict with Indian identity, social exclusion, which in many cases, leads to identity assertion and in turn cause conflicts, sometimes violent and an individual self cannot be located within the community

which is facing a huge level of identity crisis. Identity crisis thus produces a feeling of anxiety which gives birth to a sense of meaninglessness and meaninglessness brings the sense of absurdity. Thus, there develops a crisis and the crisis forces one to take a 'leap' into authentic existence. The challenges faced by Manipur are both Internal and External, Internal challenges are those which we inherit from the primordial past. External challenges are born out of political, socio- economic and environmental changes that have been experienced in the recent past. Both of these challenges thereby makes the people precarious. The inhabitants of this marginalized area have been deprived of all the privileges and the rights that their land itself is starving making it barren. In Nine Hills, One Valley, Ratan Thiyam has employed the root cause of such issue of existential struggle which is still prevalent in the Manipur land .

The women in the play appeal to the seven wise men to wake up from their sleep and save their people:

Hey! Evil supernatural- beings. We have offered 'your delicacies'; we have laid down your stuff, we have suffered to the extreme; the wail of pain and grief have made the ears bleed. We are dying of hunger and thirst. You liberate us from this agony. Wipe away darkness, bestow on the future generation knowledge and courage to enable them to step out in light. (84)

These women in the midst of such social problems seeks for a ray of hope for their land and the future generation. "Thousands of mothers are waiting at the gates with flaming torches in their hands for the return of their beloved sons and daughters.. you ,paupers, who have gone out to earn your livelihood in this chaotic land.. With all the means cut-off, our society is starving and becoming thinner and thinner with the passing of each day."(85).

In Manipur amidst many problems education system and employment have also been a factor which has affected the modern generation, leaving no hope of ameliorating the condition. This has created a sense of discontentment and frustration towards the youths, due to an ever existential struggle the younger generation has either given up hope for peace or have fled to the mainland India despite the discrimination faced from the Indians who still treats the Tribals as the 'Other'. In the play the Seven Sentinal mothers call their children to come back to their land and find their roots and tradition as it is the younger generation who now have to get up and fight against the injustice, and make a vigorous effort to revive their identity. They warn their children not to get lost, they call their sons to find peace and fight for the survival in their land.

In the first scene, mythical characters, the *Maichous* (Seven Wise Men) have gone into deep slumber, they dream of a bad omen. On waking up, they discussed among themselves:

“Peepul tree was on fire; dead bodies were floating in a row in the river; for how long we, *Maichous*, have been sleeping, how many years have passed, how many eons have gone?....I hear the call of my sons and daughters echoing through the nine ranges of hills...heard the sound of wrong footsteps in the land..children were swimming in the river of blood with no one to save them they were calling for their mothers before being drowned..there are some who are instigating the brothers to create chaos in the land..” (87-88)

These wise men deciphers the dream and recognizes the crisis that haunts the land but goes to sleep again. Just as the *Maichous* have dreamt, the modern Manipur and its people witnessed a number of conflicts making the inhabitants almost difficult to

survive. The land is being bombarded by all kinds of existential crises, political and social issues. The problem of economic distribution and political power and authority, Genocide, insurgency, venality, unemployment and extortion by unlawful elements etc. have disrupted the land.

In the second scene the seven wise men wake up again to see their dreams turned into reality. They were disheartened to see their beloved land being completely transformed. They dreamt of *Matam*, cutting away dancers wrists, *Matam* which symbolizes 'Time', a friend of *Puwari* (history) and a husband of *Rajniti* (Politics) has devoured their children along with their culture and traditions. One of the *Maichou* says that this very *Matam* takes the form of beauty, kindness and gentleness but most of the time he takes the form of brutality, one who instigates people to hate and kill one another and so human beings keep themselves in the 'prison of discontentment and suffering' *Matam* brings forth both happiness and suffering. The wheel of time thus rolls on. It is thus the duty of the present generation to reform and bring peace and harmony to the ever existential struggle. The failure of society to cope with such struggle makes Thiyam question the existence of an individual as well as the society which is in transition. A restless society with the sheer speed of life, the problems of communication, the mechanization, the computers, industrialization, technological advancement. Talk of peace, talk of war, or talk of struggle. An individual is trapped everywhere and with all these things Thiyam had to take a position against the violence going on, against the corruption, against the system in the play. The play thereby, serves as a wakeup call to the modern citizens of Manipur that each individual must make a concerted effort to combat violence as violence does not instantly erupt but with a long cry of heartaches, seeking to find love and hope for peace. The predicament and tragedy is that the people of Manipur and Northeast have

multitude of problems but not a single proper solution in sight and thus existential anxiety arises when people deeply contemplate their existence. This contemplation leads to thoughts and feelings of freedom and responsibility, which burden the individual to find a purpose in life—and to live genuinely according to this purpose. It may also lead to a sense of alienation and isolation in the world and a heightened awareness of mortality. According to the Existentialist, A human being can be alienated from the society or social system, and considers their society as meaningless vacant, from other individual being. And the most profound alienation is from one's consciousness. "Alienation is one of the greatest problems confronting modern man. Its corrosive impact can be seen in the form of generation gap, the anti-war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap, the compartmentalization of our lives, the stunting of personal development, the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life, and so on."

As for violence, Thiyam did not only talked about violence in one place. He does not use violence like a subject:

I may be in Manipur, but my mind is travelling all over, from America to Iraq to ground zero. I don't have a story. I don't have a story to tell (the play) is how I think nine hills...has no story line, and is like a collage of thoughts that deals with issues of peace and restlessness in the world. One cause of the restlessness or the lack of a collective philosophy of peace is that we have alienated ourselves from our culture and traditions. We have created giants . like terrorism , and then lost control of them.(Thiyam 23)

He has taken an issues in terms of Manipur's lack of factory, industry, employment, education, disturbed areas act, inner line permit, bribery, corruption, tax such as sales

tax, underground transport tax, food tax, goods tax, border tax, thoroughfare tax, protests, strikes, economic blockade, Armed Forces Special Power Act etc. There are multiple of problems that Manipur inhabitants are still struggling to escape, if not from all at least few of it. Thiyam, however thinks that Insecurities have chained them from a proper survival

In the third scene the seven wise men call upon the Celestial Nymphs and the mothers to help them write a new book of knowledge drawing upon the ancient scholars, ancestors and preceptors, who have been the pillars of wisdom. One of the *Maichou* says:

Let's proceed to the beloved land to write an
easily Puya on the back of
time as the scroll, with the knowledge of
the olden Puya as the ink, a new Puya that
carries a lot of meaning, one that can be
carefully followed by the new generation. (94)

The completed book contains the wisdom of freedom, peace, religion, politics, economy, human rights and responsibilities for the present times: "Teach the tender babies to beat the rhythm of peace by imbibing in their heads the song of love even before they start learning to walk...in the new age Independence comes in many forms. Independence starts with self...if a society wants to be an independent society it has to do away with murder, loot, torture, violence, illiteracy, not taking others seriously, keeping bad companies, imposition of orders, subduing others, working with apolitical motive, the habit of taking undue advantage, having a number of self-proclaimed leaders...looking from the economic point of view, economic

independence of a society means –a society can be said to be economically independent only when it can escape from the governance resulting in unemployment, lack of job, venality, a wide gap between rich and poor, empty food stock, incompetent persons occupying the key posts, poverty, people suffering from hunger, muffled discontentment flowing down as tears from the eyes, lips parched with thirst...the beautiful word independence means religious independence can be achieved if one can escape from the unfair jobs and sins; causing harm to people with different faiths believing that the sayings of God or His disciples he believes in is the best one, all others are useless; the numerous systems touchable and untouchable...As a human being personal independence is more important and better than political independence. One cannot be said to be independent only by not depending on others. Independence can be achieved only when a country as a whole can make progress and become civilized...one who is truthful is beautiful both physically and mentally. If one is compassionate, then his character is good. If his character is good then his family is peaceful. If each of the families is peaceful then a society or a nation can have peace.”

The seven wise men thus, leaves behind the book of knowledge for the younger generation and departs to the mythical *Hiyang Hiren* or Dragon Barge . In the epilogue the mothers relate to their children the glory of the past, the evergreen world of nature along the unwelcome changes of the recent times. The play ends with lamps being lit on top of the Nine Hills symbolizing the ray of Hope for the future. Through this surrealistic play, Thiyam probes the sickness that ails his land and looks for a solution in the soul rather than in politics.

3. *Hey Nunghibi Prithivi (My Earth, My Love):*

My Earth, My Love is another masterpiece of '*Manipur Trilogy*' but with a difference. The play is charged with allegorical even esoteric overtones and Ratan Thiyam's fantastic vision of peace and prosperity blend with the most ghastly acts of humans. Chuck Berg says:

Thiyam, by reframing the issues of modernization through the lens of his native culture transcends the usual polarized terms of the globalization debate by means of the poetics of Manipuri speech, music, movement and myth.
(153)

Coming to the storyline, the scenes are taken from the horrendous events of the past that had occurred all over the globe during different periods of time—seven year devastation of Manipur by the Burmese, starving hundreds of thousands of people to death in concentration camps by the Nazis, dropping of atom bombs at Hiroshima, raping of fifty thousand German women by Russian soldiers as revenge for killing five hundred thousands of their people at Stalingrad, Genocide during the Khmer Rouge Regime in Cambodia. The events in the play are pieced together so well like the flowers in a beautiful garland. In a way, the play has been able to transcend the barriers of time and space. In the play, seven sisters, Celestial Nymphs(mythological characters) who can assume any form acts as the link connecting the unrelated incidents. They fly around the earth as birds and incarnate as human beings to open the chapter from the past, soaked in blood.

In the first scene six Nymph weave a cloth, the traditional symbol of love and honor, in a loom for offering to the Almighty with a prayer to put a stop to war. These Nymphs laments by saying :

Seven-year devastation is over.

Genocide by suffocating with the smoke of
burning chillies is also over. I had thought,
the time of slitting ears with cane-splits was
over but there is no stop to war. The Earth,
eaten bare to bones by its children would
one day be annihilated, definitely. (53)

The Nymphs laments of the diverse ways in which the people have destroyed the beautiful world by indulging in hatred and violence. The people have forgotten the past glory of the land. The eldest Nymph says to the other Nymphs :

why are you crying, my precious sister? Its
not the likeness of a celestial Nymph to cry.
Human beings have themselves broken their
age- old traditions, good manners, courage,
character, rules and regulations. They are
fighting among themselves and killing each
other like wild beasts.(56)

When it comes to the conflict of war and violence, women have had the battlefield played out on their bodies for centuries around the world. As for the saying goes “ Rape is as old as war itself.” This conflict of sexual violence lead to devastating physical and psychological ramifications for survivors. What could be a more shocking decision a victim has to take the decision to discard her new born baby because of the extreme stigma she faces or of the marginal issue, a side- effect of

anxiety and insecurities. This is shown in one of the scenes. A gravid woman, carrying enemy's child, talks to her baby yet to be born:

First woman: Why don't you die in the womb.

Why are you torturing me ,
over and over again?

It's unbearable—its unbearable. (74)

Women and children are in fact, the worst sufferers during war. One of the women characters speaks of this pathetic condition of women throughout the long history of human civilization:

First woman: War, you have made us prostitutes,
you have made us prisoners.

War, you have made us bonded slaves.

Never-ending story of revenge and invasion
in the fight for supremacy,
women and children are fed to war, the Demon.

The epic of the Earth and voluminous
chapters of thousands of pages would not be
sufficient to describe the woes and sufferings
of women alone.(73)

Talking to Kavita Nagpal Ratan says:

Think of the kind of violence there is today in different systems. There is genocide of a community. You arrest 2000 women and put them in prison and they become victims of thousands of soldiers who rape them, and do not allow

them abortion- so they feel that the enemy is growing inside them. And then they are asked to give the children to the enemy. There are many ways of committing genocide. It is not always war with tanks and armour, there can be many levels of violence. It is a case of one human community trying to wipe out another human community, and doing tremendous harm to ordinary people who are not concerned with politics, whose only crime is to be part of the community into which they were born. I feel that there must be a place to say and also to show that human beings were born to love each other, to embrace a religion, to embrace a friend of a different religion.

The play ends with the nymphs, symbolizing the peace loving citizens of the world, offering the cloth they have woven so meticulously to the almighty with a prayer for peace and harmony. Ratan Thiyam thus voices all the concerns about society—political instability, terrorism, communal hatred and looks for solution in the most aesthetic possible way. Violence and the question of identity are inextricably intertwined in Thiyam's perception of reality, Manipur and global. The one persistent theme that Thiyam pursues relentlessly is that of an individual trapped by the powers.

Understanding the world is conceiving the world in terms of structuring and restructuring. The long silences has become a nearly unendurable torment. Fear gives birth to apprehension and anxiety in life and that society which faces an uncertain future produces angst in living. By the term Angst, Soren Kierkegaard means a deep and subconscious condition of insecurity and fear in the free human being. It is generally considered to be the experience of human freedom and his responsibility. According to him, freedom leaves the human being in constant fear and dread about its consequences or the outcome, and failing his responsibilities in his/her life. Since every individual or society as a whole is confronting with the impossibility of finding

meaning in a meaningless universe, seeking to find rational justification and for which failing to get justice produces an existential crisis forces an individual or the society to investigate or reinvent everything in terms of their beliefs and the society which understands that absurdity should be solved are able to rebel, create meaning and value of life. Ratan thiyam projects to the human society that the solution to the problem of modern man does not lie in war and violence but in re-capturing love and innocence of the natural self. He insists that a solution can be found in a harmonious co existence of subjective Self / Being to that of the other beings. He wanted to project that without any vision a civilization is bound to perish .On careful analysis, we find that Thiyam is more concerned with understanding the gap between the public and the private conscience. He believes that the hope of man lies in the resting point between his Private and Social Selves. While understanding his plays we realize that there are two ways to deal with Society, one by reforming the structure of the society and the other, by revolutionizing the consciousness of man.

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Chapter 4

Human Identity in a World of Tangled Relationship:

Select Plays of Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam

1. Identity:

Human beings are characterized with different kinds of identities. The identity of the ‘ self’ is a complex issue which many existential scholars has been trying to understand and the ‘identity of one’s own nation or community’ which the postcolonial writers has been trying to find. These two forms of identity have been widely researched or is being an important topic for both the existential as well as the postcolonial writers. The oxford dictionary defines identity as ---the fact of being who or what a person or thing is, the characteristics, feelings, beliefs that distinguish people from others a sense of national/ cultural or personal. Personal Identity as we know, refers to how we understand and define ourselves. Our sense of identity informs our values, guides our choices and gives our lives a sense of direction and coherence. It is a product of the constant conscious and unconscious interaction between the range of alternatives offered by the wider society and our self-understanding. In a traditional society or one that is relatively stable, our self-understanding is generally in harmony with the way our society encourages us to think of ourselves. Speaking on identity, Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) points out that “the assertion of identity is by no means a mere ceremonial matter in the contemporary world” identity is a vital as well as a hotly disputed topic in literary and cultural studies (Said 42).

1.1 Exploring Post Colonial Identity in the works of Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam:

The study of postcolonial literature inherently involves the study of Identity. It designates the terrain of discourse that consists of reaction to or analysis of the cultural legacy of colonialism. It applies broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity itself are represented in the modern era, after the colonized countries gained their independence. The colonized subject tries to reclaim their cultural identity as a sign of resistance to the colonial and imperial oppression. Identity however becomes the fulcrum upon which the postcolonial character revolves. Each character that is created suffers from a certain lack of direction in their lives. They all seem to “suffer a crisis of identity in the absence of a strong traditional culture”. The identities of the postcolonial characters are mired in the struggle to form an emotional, cultural, and societal identity that reflects the experiences of a distant past they cannot recall.

However, Colonialism operated differently for women and men, as women had to go through double colonization, which refers to two orders of reality: women are victims of colonial representations and they are equally oppressed by patriarchal norm. Within the colonized societies, where male domination also occurs, the women are further viewed as a subgroup by their own men, which in turn justifies their continued subservient status. Gayatri Spivak states that:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world

woman' caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development. (Spivak 102)

As a postcolonial writer, Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam plays reflect a struggle to find a personal, cultural and societal identity that once existed, reconciling the cultural past they lost through colonization and so intending to make their cultural future. They both have a craving for 'return to roots' as going back to the indigenous culture and traditions brings a distinct voice and identity for them. In this heady quest for rediscovering the centuries –old roots, Karnad and Thiyam experimented with the paraphernalia of 'folk theatre'. Both experimented with different ingredients of Sanskrit as well as folk theatre by incorporating masks, mimes, half-curtains, dance and music in their plays dealing with diverse subjects and belonging to different genres. These two playwrights broadly aimed at two contradictory things- As Bhabha claims in his *Introduction to the Location of Culture*:

“What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of Originary and initial Subjectiveness and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences... the very concept of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions , or ‘ organic’ ethnic communities – as the ground of cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition (Bhabha 2&7)

Karnad impressively exposes and subverts the hegemonic structures of the nation like casteism, racism and patriarchy in the plays. Karnad's employment of retrospective narratives of the nations - myths, folktales and history- can be seen as his strategy to bring in the elements of native culture to the dominant Eurocentric

theatrical tradition. His theatre is essentially a syncretic or interfusional theatre which serves as tool of resistance. Karnad makes use of the techniques of the traditional enactments like rituals, the designs of Yakshagana, the folk theatre of Karnataka, the puppet theatre of ancient India, folk conventions like half-curtains, songs and dancing, oral style of narration, and so on. The plays also highlight the western influences on him: masks, miming, chorus, Brechtian, Shakespearean and Greek elements. He carefully incorporates indigenous narrative elements into the Eurocentric dramatic form. These blending of different forms make Karnad's theatre truly syncretic. He exemplifies himself as a postcolonial writer through the form and structure of his plays. In his theatre European dramatic forms are superimposed with native Indian and Kannada theatrical forms. Karnad's Postcoloniality is a result of his innovative application of traditional dramatic forms. He effectively domesticates the dominant theatre tradition and moulds it to give a distinct Indian experience. The identity of his theatre is defined in terms of its cultural difference from both modern European theatre and ancient Indian theatre. Karnad's theatre is a visual presentation of the resistance to colonialist discourse of theatre. It is a theatre in search of completeness of Indian experience. He has gradually evolved a postcolonial Indian theatre, indianising each of the western dramatic elements embedded in it. Karnad's play, *Hayavadana*, is in fact his understanding of the Indian theatre where each character seeks a completeness of experience .

Ratan Thiyam's plays emerge out of the crisis of cultural and political identity which has been conspicuous in the colonial and pre colonial history of Manipur. Thiyam considers theatre as a political and moral critique and uses myths and histories of war and violence as vehicles to express his protest. While challenging the colonial paradigm of realistic theatre, he also challenges the very notion of a national

theatre representing India's cultural unity. He uses his productions as a means to showcase cultural richness of Manipur and to assert his Manipuri identity. His rootedness with his native land Manipur with its rich and varied cultural heritage inspired him to construct a new theatrical form and to invent a new theatrical idiom. Speaking about his cultural rootedness, he says: "My roots help me evolve creatively. I am just taking ancient knowledge and presenting it to our future generation, in the form of my art and my art is the constant evolving process of my identity." (Karnad 112)

Assertion of identity, for the Manipuris has been a problematic issue both at the political and the cultural level. In spite of being a part of Indian Union, they find it hard to assimilate themselves with what can be called 'Indianness'. Consequently, assimilation to the great Indian tradition and culture has never been a complete process; there has always been a feeling of alienation from the mainstream among the Manipuris. 'His Manipur', says Kavita Nagpal, 'is eternally present in Ratan's drama, even in those based on stories from the Mahabharata' (*The Theatre of Ratan Thiyam*). Search for roots, search for identity, the experimentations with various dramatic traditions, such as Natyashastra tradition, Western realistic tradition and native Manipuri theatre tradition, and their amalgamation with the traditions of native Manipuri performing arts become the core of Ratan Thiyam's productions. What is conspicuous in his relation to the national theatre but least noticed is that while challenging the colonial paradigm of realistic theatre, he also challenges the very notion of a national theatre representing India's cultural unity. He uses his productions as a means to showcase cultural richness of Manipur and to assert his Manipuri identity. In Mee's words ,

[Nonetheless], by putting Meitei culture centre stage, Thiyam undermines attempts to establish and promote an uncomplicated 'national culture'. His work serves as an important reminder of the fact that regional theatre is often an articulation of a regional identity that is distinct from, if not in opposition to, a national identity and culture. (Mee 253).

The alienation from indigenous culture, their inherent difference from the received culture, has allowed these two playwrights to search for a unique cultural identity. Both these playwrights have a deep longing of returning to their roots but in their quest of roots the ontological question that these theatre of roots playwrights questions themselves as As Badal Sarkar asserts: "who am I? Where do I belong in this complex social structure in this complex world? What are my times? What is my language? What is my theatre? What is the language of my theatre? (Sarkar 9).

Since Girish Karnad himself experiences the immediate crisis of identity between the transition of the colonial past and the present nation as he said in the introduction to three plays:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tension implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self justification: tension between the cultural past of the country and the colonial past, between 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. (Karnad, qtd in Erin B. Mee. 141)

In his plays, we find that his characters are always in search for identity. His male and female characters try to find their real 'Self' and they want to set their image in the mirror of contemporary society. One of the root cause of such crisis is the effect of colonial oppression and the process of being marginalized and the other being the effects of upholding the cultural and traditional values so rigidly. The former effected both men and women in general with tensions and conflicts, of split identities and the later sees the effects of mostly women.

All of his plays have a multi-layered messages, however the basic idea that one can get from his plays is its exemplification of the divided self within the postcolonial subject. Most of his plays deals with a serious issues of identity crisis, this is so because right after India got independence from the British rule the individuals were caught between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, and the dilemma to find a new identity of their own.

2. *Hayavadana*:

His play *Hayavadana* is a complex play and it reflects and symbolizes Karnad's deep concern and keen understanding of human problems. He uses Thomas Mann's story to comment on the complex web of human relationships and their identity crisis. *Hayavadana*, is in fact his understanding of the Indian theatre where each character seeks a completeness of experience. The very opening of the play begins with the Bhagavata singing verses in praise of Ganesha, "an elephant head on a human body , a broken tusk and a cracked belly- whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection , of incompleteness."(Karnad 1) The main plot itself gives the appearance of being an Indian folk tale, but in fact it is a European story which he borrowed from Thomas Mann. The hybridity of the play lies in the fact

that the European models are presented through a form derived from Indian folk theatre, particularly *Yakshagana* as India was slowly finding her place after the process of decolonization, and there was a need to simultaneously relate Indian culture to that of the western influence and to reassert the values of traditional forms that had been ignored as primitive or shallow under colonialism.

2.1 Split Identities in *Hayavadana* :

In 1971 the play *Hayavadana* won the Natya Sangh Best Play Award. By exerting the devices of myth, folklore and history, Karnad tackles with the problem of subjectivity. These devices are exercised by him not simply to look through the past but even to give the impression of being at the present and also to predict the future. The play talks about the age-old discussion of self at one level and on another level it depicts the nation's effort to break away from the mark of cultural dominion obligated by the colonial past. Culture defines society and Karnad's plays are a reflection of the culture in our society. With *Hayavadana*, Karnad has taken us back to the myths and legends of the Hindu religion.

The first level is that of Hayavadana's story which forms the 'exterior' plot of the play. By fully emerging as a man, Hayavadana, the man with a horse's head, tries to seek 'completeness'. By this way Hayavadana becomes representative of a fragmented identity, which is very appropriate in the modern day.

The title of the play, *Hayavadana* has a significant meaning where, *haya* means horse/body and *vadana* means man/ head. In the sub plot of the play, Karnad created his own character i.e., Hayavadana (a man with horse head) who is disturbed about the very fact of his birth and his identity, being born to great princess of Karnataka and a celestial Being and goes on to narrate the details of his parents. Hayavadana's

mother was allowed to choose a husband of her own choice by her father. So princes of every kingdom in the world were invited from different countries like China, Persia and Africa. However, she did not like any of them. Then one day prince of Araby came to see her riding on a white stallion. She faints the moment she saw it. The king and the queen were convinced that she has fallen in love with the prince of Araby but the princess recovers and announces that she is in love with the white stallion and insist on marrying the horse instead. The horse then is declared as her husband by her father after a lot of efforts to dissuade her not to marry with horse. Apparently this celestial being had been cursed by the god Kubera to be born a horse for some act of misbehavior with the condition that he would turn to his actual self as a human after leading the life of gaining a human love. Therefore, the horse is always in a search of his identity. The princess lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she wakes up and no horse! In its place stood a beautiful celestial Being, a gandharva. After fifteen years of human love he had become his original self again. Having released from his curse, he asked the princess to accompany him to his heavenly abode but she refused. She poses her a bet that "she would come only if he becomes a horse again." So he cursed at her nonsense to be horse again. He does not agree to leave his identity again because only he, could understand the pangs of losing identity. The princess becomes a horse and roams freely; whereas, the fate of the child born to them becomes questionable.

Hayavadana, the hybrid being cries with anguish in lack of proper identity which questions his roots and makes him rootless and meaningless. The identity of Hayavadana is a cause of disbelief as he has worn the silly mask. He is tired of his identity as we can assess in his feelings:

What temple did I desecrate? What woman did I insult? What...."He further says:

What 'else? What rishi? What sage? What? Who have I
wronged? What have I done to anyone? Let anyone come forward
and say that I've done him any wrong. I haven't—I know
I haven't yet. (1. 7)

He says to Bhagavata: "Only I...the child of their marriage was left." He again questions Bhagavata helplessly, "But where's my society?" (9)

Erin Bee states that:

Hayavadana- the human with an equine head, was still trying to grapple with an acute identity crisis, the confused identity left to him by his parents. He represents any person who has been torn between the cultural past of the country and the more recent colonial legacy, which gave birth to a curious *mélange* that can be termed neither exactly western or precisely Indian, but perhaps both ' Western' and ' Indian' (Mee 142).

Mee further states that the horse –head creature represents the minority section of society who strives for recognition amidst the majority groups. The horse head creature embodies the postcolonial subject struggling to attest his identity engulfed in the midst of cultural identity and colonial influence: Hayavadana comes from two different worlds, but does not feel at home either. He represents the divided self of the post-colonial subject- a character attempting to decolonize his own mind .

The second level, which is of the primary plot, is that of two close friends, Kapila and Devadatta. They despondently dream for Padmini. Karnad also portrays the caste restrictions in the society and how a person is confined to the so-called 'caste occupations'. This plot of the play is drawn from Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads* (1955) which actually has its source from the eleventh century ancient Sanskrit collection of stories *Kathasaritasagara* by Somdeva. Thus, the Hayavadana's origin is "inter-generic, a folktale transformed into a novella into a play." The Sanskrit tale simulates a moral riddle where Mann queries to probe the reason as of which holds the head greater than the body. In the story of *Kathasaritsagara*, a woman travels along with her husband and brother. She finds the decapitated bodies of her husband and brother in the temple. She then attains a boon from the goddess *Parvati* to bring back both of them to life. But by mistake switches their heads which results in the problem of 'true' identity. An explicit solution is given in this version- that is: in view of the fact that as the head stand for the man, the one with the husband's head can be considered as the husband. Karnad constructs on Mann's line to find out the theme of individuality in a world of perplexed relationships.

The central plot of the play *Hayavadana* gyrate around the scrambled relationships involving the chief characters of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila. It also investigates the nature of humans and how they constantly desire for more and are drawn towards imperfection devoid of being thoughtful of what they actually own. In the play, Karnad deals with the query of Head and Body through a different motive. Amusingly, both the main and the sub-plot of the play deal with the ethical and idealistic feature of the predicament which elevates more essential issues concerning the human survival. In the play *Bhagavata* illustrates the story thus; the close friends

Devadatta and Kapila are like - “one mind, one heart”. Devadatta is a man of mental power where as Kapila is a body builder and is also better-looking. When Kapila discovers his best friend Devadatta miserably daydreams about Padmini, he decides to organize Devadatta's marriage and goes to her and understands that Padmini is not only intelligent but also beautiful. Even Kapila is attracted to her, however he arranges the marriage. Padmini ascertains herself getting mesmerized to the strong-bodied Kapila, and Devadatta becomes obsessive with jealousy. The three starts for the Ujjain fair all the way through a forest and take a halt at the halfway to take a rest. Burning with jealousy, Devadatta offer himself to Goddess Kali. Kapila goes in search of Devadatta and finds him dead. But apprehensive with fear that he may be accused of killing Devadatta to marry Padmini, he too beheads himself. Then when suspicious Padmini finds them dead, is horrified that she might be held responsible for their deaths, then comes to a decision to take life of her. However, goddess Kali stops her and offers to bring the men back to existence. Padmini rearranges the heads so that Devadatta's head is on Kapila's body and vice versa. When they all ask an astute, he affirms that as the head is the utmost organ of the body, the man bearing Devadatta's head be supposed to be her husband. Devadatta who is on Kapila's body gradually changes to his previous personality. So even Kapila's. After the replacement of heads, Padmini, who had felt that she had the supreme characteristics of both men, is slowly dissatisfied. The story ends with her self-immolation which follows the both friends' death who slay each other in a duel. The death of the friends appear to be melodramatic, but evidently signify the absurdity of life. Devadatta and Kapila come to the decision that the only solution for their problem can be attained through death. Most ironical thing is that Padmini performs sati and hands over her son to Bhagavata. However the son of Padmini also undergoes identity crisis and the issue of

biological father becomes very complex on his part. The reason for their suffering is because of their incapability in finding their identity in the relationship of triangular love. The man in the modern society is suffering from alienation. He isolates himself from his associate men, and the society and restricts himself in the world self-created by him. Both Devadatta and Kapila undergo through the segment of self-alienation. Devadatta feels himself isolated from Padmini whereas Kapila is incapable of discussing his distress and pain with neither Padmini nor Kapila.

There are a number of civilized implications in the play, which are fitting even in the modern day. The play is regarding an exploration of a Man's own self in the midst of a web of complex relationships. Culture exemplifies society and Karnad's works are a manifestation of the said culture in our society. Focusing on our folk ethnicity, he acquires stimulus from folklore and mythology. Karnad takes us back to the myths and legends of the Hindu religious conviction through the play, Hayavadana. Kapila and Devadatta are the characters which gives the expressions of the metaphors of diverse castes which exist in our society. Mann argues, that : "the human body is an appliance for the achievement of human providence. Even though the transposition of heads took place, it did not set the protagonists free from the psychosomatic confines imposed by the environment." (Mann 124)

The play replicates an unrelated predicament so as to have human distinctiveness in a world of tousled relationships. The basis of the play lies in the innovation for uniqueness in the midst of scrambled relationships. The play spotlights on "the theme of incompleteness" and the preeminence of mind on body. From beginning to end of the play, the author has simulated his power to modify the conditions into a creative experience. On the whole, the play encompasses the limitations of the human and the theme of liability.

3.Yayati:

The play *Yayati* is Karnad's first dramatic venture, written first in Kannada in 1961 and translated by the dramatist himself into English language in 2008. He goes back to the ancient Indian culture, the myth of '*Adiparva*' of Mahabharata which he has re-shaped by giving it a modern touch in order to talk about the issues of identity which are rampant in the contemporary society. Karnad has taken this myth from *Mahabharata* with a view to expose the absurdity of human life with all its elemental passions and conflicts, man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection, escapism from responsibilities and self sacrifice, dreams and desire, identity crises and women predicaments. By exploiting myths and legends, Girish Karnad tried to show how they are quite relevant in portraying a modern man's dilemma. In other words, the myths and legends provide him ample scope to take up significant issues like problems of identity, patriarchy, man-woman relationship, selfishness and pervasive sense of alienation. Thus, right from the beginning of his dramatic career Karnad immersed himself in Indian mythology of his motherland and brought to life such mythical characters like Yayati on the stage with an amazing touch of contemporaneity.

This topic also explores the experiences and plight of women living in Phallocentric society as embedded in *Yayati* as the most important feature of this play, viewed from several perspectives, is the creation of female protagonists in a radical manner. The women in the plays are portrayed as the victims of phallocentric society who strives to revolt against the male dominated society and traditional concepts imposed upon them since Indian culture and traditions are male dominated, hardly giving any scope for women to exercise their freedom for fulfillment of desires and development of identity. The play reveals that the status of women whether belonging to past or present, educated or uneducated, high caste or low caste their condition is

no better. It highlights various hidden and oppressive aspects of man-woman relationship. Through the play Girish Karnad envisages profound changes in traditional, socio, psycho cultural status of a woman and tries to establish the identity of a woman. All the characters in the play are seen struggling for their existence because of their desires or actions, juggling with their life, and their lost of original self or identity. But despite all the predicaments faced by men folk, the women in the play are seen as the worse sufferers.

3.1 Pooru's Identity as Constructed by the Cultural Structures:-

Yayati displays the complex structure of relationship between the trio of Devayani, Sharmishtha and king Yayati on one hand and Pooru and Chitrlekha on the other. The play opens when Yayati is married to Devayani, the daughter of demons' guru Shukracharya. Sharmistha, the daughter of the Demon King Vrishparva, is shown as her slave. Yayati was carried away with a wave of emotion to find the miserable plight of Sharmistha, a princess, in fact, and secretly married her in spite of the warning by his Father in-Law that he should never let Sharmishtha share his bed. When Shukracharya came to know this, he uttered his curse on Yayati to become an old man. Shukracharya also said the only concession he could give was that if Yayati wanted he could give his old age to someone and take their youth from him. Yayati is a true ambassador of modern common man, who in spite of having much pleasures of life, still feels impatient and dissatisfied.

Pooru the son of Yayati and the husband of Chitrlekha battles with personal as well as social identity. On one hand he want to seek for his own personal solace in finding his own self and on the other he is oppressed by the weight of dynastic tradition and the social identity of being an Aryan prince which he himself finds

difficult to associate with. Pooru suffers from the modern existential crisis of being lost in understanding his own self and at the same time suffers from trying to keep up with the cultural identity as a prince.

The crisis of his identity is seen when his father, king Yayati talks to him about the official description of his wedding ceremony. Yayati says to his son that what matters in prince Pooru's case is the public memory of the events. Then Pooru asks clarification : so what a person is going through within himself doesn't matter? It is a clear instance of identity crisis. Here he doesn't have a choice since he should show to the public that, what he goes through is the experience of his dynasty, not the experience of the inner self. He is forced to act for the public memory of the events. Like every patriarchal ideology, Pooru is forced to maintain the legacy of the Aryan dynasty, the dynasty of his father. We see that Pooru is not interested in being an Aryan prince rather he wants to track the path of his great grandfather's belonging to his mother's community, as his mother belongs to a Rakshasa race. He says 'I wanted to glorious ideals'. His choice has been suppressed by the strong patriarchal force. Even though he does not desire to be identified by his father's lineage yet as a son he was responsible to take up his father's place.

Every individual is free to shape his own unique identity according to his choice, but most of the time our personal identity is also constructed by the cultural structures being imposed on us knowingly or unknowingly. Pooru is the victim of such case since his father who had a colonized mindset in trying to direct or force Pooru to be identified according to his own will. Yayati subjugates his own son Pooru in trying to make him as he desires, not according to Pooru's decision. He did not pay a heed in trying to understand what Pooru actually wants. This instance is also seen in the playwright's life itself. He wanted to have a free thought and live according to what

he desires but his family especially his father had the inclination or is dissatisfied with him. He was asked to come back to India and live according to the culture and traditions of his nation. He was in dilemma whether to come back and serve his own country or whether to understand what he wants and further pursue with his own dreams.

Further occurrence of Pooru's identity crisis can be noticed when he gave away his youth to his father Yayati. Karnad doesn't adhere to traditional glorification of the son's 'self sacrifice' rather raises question against this. Yayati requests his own son Pooru to accept his curse and to find his own identity, he spoils the identity of his own son Pooru who willingly offers his youth as a mark of filial devotion. As for Pooru it was also an escape to such crisis. "What is the use of being youth, when one is not able to find his own identity?" It was a question that Pooru wants to find an answer. And on the process of finding such solution, again he being a man like his father he selfishly thought about his own predicaments. Not once did he had a concern for his wife Chitralka who would suffer when he exchanges his youth to his father. In trying to escape his own crisis Chitralka his wife was put to a subordinate position.

After the exchange of king Yayati's age with his son Pooru, both of them suffered from a split personality in which Yayati ultimately realized his mistake and tries to resolve the broken issue. Yayati feels cataclysmic disillusionment and loss of faith in life. His torment and burden for Pooru's youth is revealed in the following words; "Please help me, Pooru. Take back your youth. Let me turn my decrepitude into a beginning." In the process all the women characters such as Devayani, Sharmishtha, Chitralka had to face the consequences .

3.2 Depiction of Women Characters –Their Identity and Resistance to Patriarchy:-

Karnad's deep-rooted humanism allowed him to give voice to the silenced majority through his plays. The plays of Karnad abound with subalterns especially women and lower caste people subjected since ancient time by patriarchy or upper hierarchy of the society. Karnad has not only exposed their subalternity but also fused energy in their lives so that they can speak; shifted their position from "margin" to "centre". Yayati amply exemplify the above notion. In the play, Devayani, Sharmishtha and Chitrlekha display subalternity of the class they represent. Karnad as a cultural administrator goes beyond this and attempts to provide them their due space and defy the traditional hierarchies prevalent in Indian society. Aparna Bhargva Dharwadker rightly comments: "the most remarkable feature of Yayati...is its quartet of sentient, articulate, embittered women, all of whom are subject in varying degrees to the whims of men, but succeed in subverting the male world through an assertion of their rights and privileges"

Devayani, Sharmishtha, Swarnlata and Chitrlekha are generic; represent the subalternity of woman in masculinist society where she is identified as "other", "non-man", or "second sex" despite her high position in the society.

In the play, Sharmishtha who is depicted as the maid of Devayani in the palace of Yayati is often of the view that Yayati married Devayani because of her father's art of sanjeevani so that he could receive nectar of immortality, to enjoy a youthful life . She taunts Devayani for not having real love for Yayati and mocks her by saying :

And what would you see in His Majesty's eyes?

Have you tried to find out ? have you ever dared examine those
eyes and acknowledge the lust burning there?

Except that he is not lusting for you, you poor darling,

he lusts for immortality. Your father's art of ' sanjeevani' .(1.11)

Had Shukracharya not possessed the power of 'Sanjeevani' Yayati perhaps would not have married Devayani. His selfish aspirations to rule over the kingdom forever makes him marry Devayani. This plan of Yayati is tactfully unfolded by Sharmishtha when she comments on Devayani's past :

I was discussing that story with one
of the palace concubines the other day. And you know what she
said? 'the king was no doubt in a hurry to have some quick fun
and go', she said. 'Even with prostitutes picked off the street, the
first thing a man does is ask her name'. And you say with you,
the king dispenses with even that formality?'"(13)

Sharmishtha develops a secret relationship with Yayati. The king who is known for his immoral codes of conduct is unable to resist her. When Devayani senses it she bluntly asks Sharmishtha to leave the palace, but Yayati does not agree to it and says:

Because I feel bewitched by her. Even now, at this
moment, I want her. I have never felt so entranced by a woman.

What is it? Is it some spell she has cast? Some secret sorcery? I

can feel youth bursting out within me again. Her beauty, her intelligence, her wit, her abandon in love. Not to marry her is to lose her, don't you see? I must have her. I have to keep her with me. Please try to understand. (2. 30)

According to Wollstonecraft, "men have always been more anxious to treat their wives as alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational creatures"(Wollstonecraft 49) .women have always been subordinated to men. We see that Devayani's right as a wife has been suppressed by her husband. Her feelings and emotions are secondary. Yayati wants to let her understand his feelings for another woman, yet he on the other hand does not bother to think about her. Simone de Beauvoir comments that "man, for reasons of prudence , vows his wife to chastity , but he is not himself satisfied with the regime imposed upon her".(Beauvoir 52)

When the illicit relation of Sharmishta and Yayati is revealed, Yayati is cursed by Shukracharya with pre-mature old age. Devayani instead of owing her responsibility, chooses to leave the palace. If Yayati can choose to have an extramarital relationship then Devayani can also leave him and her responsibilities as a queen in the palace. Though suppressed and subjugated by her husband she retains the reasoning power and thus liberated herself from such patriarchal authority by making her own choice to leave. De Beauvoir asserts that:

women are as capable of choice as a men , and thus can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the 'immanence' to which they were previously resigned and reaching transcendence ', a position in which one takes

responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses one's freedom. (Beauvoir 60)

Another strong character is Chitrlekha who revolts against the basic system of power that always suits the male in reigning over female in a male-oriented society. In the original myth there is no mention of Chitrlekha. Karnad, by introducing the character of Chitrlekha and deviating from the original myth endeavours to expose the 'root-cause' of women's oppression, which is based strongly on patriarchal power politics. For this reason, in the play, Yayati has robbed Pooru of his youth. Chitrlekha on hearing that her husband Pooru, has exchanged his youth with his father, becomes hysterical. Yayati tries to pacify her by saying:

This is no time for recriminations. My heart goes out to you.

But you are an educated woman, versed in the arts, trained in warfare. You could have displayed more self-control. Now act in a manner worthy of an Aryana princess and Bharata queen. Act so that generations to come may sing you glory and Pooru's. (4. 61)

Even an educated woman still faces the predicament like all other women. She is still expected to do her duty and understand, or have patience. Her education is also used against her. Beauvoir observes that; when women rights are legally recognized, prevailing custom has always prevented and restricted their full expression in the mores.

Chitrlekha does not give in to Yayati's persuasion to accept her husband's old age nonchalantly, and stands unmoved and unconvinced. Then Yayati exercises his

authority as a king and as a father-in-law and orders her to accept her decrepit husband. To this, Chitrlekha who has by that time taken her stand as a rebel—a rebel against the patriarchal set up and the rituals which treat women not as subjects but as objects, replies with ferocity:

You are the one who has taken my husband near the funeral pyre; not I.

And on the top of it you have come to preach to me!

Without understanding my grief you are giving me lectures!

What have you done ? You have got an idiot as your son on

whose shoulders you have transferred the burden of your sins

and then you come to give me lectures on duties of a female as a woman and wife! (4. 61)

By this, Yayati even intimidates her as a king and demands obedience from her in the name of religion reminding her of the marriage vows:

Do you remember the vow you took not so long ago- with

the gods as your witnesses, in the presence of the holy fire? That

you would walk in the path marked by his footprints: whether

home or into the wilderness.(4. 62)

This attitude of the king Yayati reflects that he is the very epitome of patriarchal tyrant who misuses his power vested in him. But Chitrlekha is very well aware of the true meaning of the marriage vows and holds Yayati responsible for pushing her closer to death. When Yayati tries to idealize her sacrifice—“ This is not merely a question of

an individual. We are talking of the future of our entire people.” (65) and implores her to rise above petty considerations and be a great woman, she however does not yield to his arguments and brings Yayati to his sense saying “ All right, Your Majesty, I shall try. But when I do so please don’t try to dodge behind your own logic.” (65) To escape from this maze Chitrlekha proposes that Yayati should take the place of Pooru in her life so that she can bear a child for the family:

I did not know prince Pooru when I married him. I
 married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed
 of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He
 doesn’t possess any of the qualities which I married him. But
 you do .(4. 65-66)

Chitrlekha reminds us about the realistic aspects of marriage. Idealization of marriage has led women to remain meek and passive sufferers. If a woman is expected to follow certain ideals even man has some ideals to follow.

Karnad paints the picture of chitrlekha as a strong modern emancipated woman who questions against the injustice of the masculine authority. It is evident in her remark , when yayati accuses her for wishing death for her husband. She questions him:

I did not push him to the edge of the pyre,
 sir. You did. You hold forth on my wifely duties. What about
 your duty to your son? Did yu think twice before foisting your
 troubles on a pliant son?(4.62)

Chitralkha does not remain silent and simply accept male hegemony, rather she freely expressed her thought and rejected the old traditional belief of women's subordination. Although Chitralkha strongly argues with the injustice yet she is also aware that she is surrounded by strong patriarchal values. She may be educated, rational but the only honourable solution to revolt against the premature old age of her husband and to liberate herself from such patriarchal authority is to sacrifice her life because on one hand she cannot live a submissive life and on the other hand, she cannot run away like a weak person. Chitralkha in Yayati, rebels against the unjust and gender-biased norms and structures of the Indian patriarchal society. Though she finally ends up committing suicide, she becomes a vehicle to demand the rights of a woman, which are so easily crushed in the patriarchal order.

It is very evident that social standing (caste/ class/ race) hardly seems to affect the condition of the woman. Chitralkha is an Aryan princess, born into a royal family and coming from a privileged clan, the Aryans. Despite her caste and class superiority, she has to undergo oppression and suppression at the hands of men. In the same play, there is another character Swarnalata, the maid confidant, who comes from a low class and who too like Chitralkha does not receive the love of her family and husband, because the latter believes her to be unchaste. A woman in Indian society is considered good only if she is chaste. Though Swarnalata is chaste, she cannot make her husband believe her and finally in order to free her husband from the dilemma, she falsely acquiesces to the lie.

Devyani and Sharmishtha, both come from royal family, but the former is an "Aryan" princess while the latter an "Asura" or an "Anarya" princess. Sharmishtha is made to serve Devyani, but Devyani's condition is no better; her husband seems more interested in Sharmishtha than her and finally she leaves her family out of a feeling of

insult. Thus she too, like Shramishtha becomes deprived of the security of family and love.

Thus, the woman in the Indian society, whether of high or low social standing is always looked down upon by virtue of being a woman and ill-treated by the domineering patriarchy. Whether a Queen or a maid, women are always relegated to the background forming a marginalized group in the patriarchal order.

4. *Naga- Mandala:*

The play *Naga-Mandala* is a blend of a Karnataka folktale and a myth, a drama of male chauvinism that weakens and degrades females and rests on the exploitation and confinement of women. It is based on two stories which the playwright, actor, director Girish Karnard heard from the poet and academician A.K. Ramanujan in his childhood. It employs the device of a story within a story. *Naga- Mandala* is a socio-psychological study which mainly deals with gender – bias search for self, and the subjection of woman in patriarchal Indian Society. Gender discrimination is the basis of all kinds of domination and subjugation amongst the sexes. The marginal position of women in the Indian society as a result has become an integral part of the socio-cultural identity of the country. A woman has no identity of her own, a victim of ‘incompleteness’ she craves for completeness in her relations, in love but usually finds none. Though traditionally the man-woman relationship is compared to the two wheels of a cart, both equally important, yet in reality the female is always the broken, fragmented wheel clinging to the other (male) for support and survival. This inequality and imbalance is clearly visible in the relationship of Rani-Appanna.

4.1 Rani: Trapped in Double Silence :-

The play is basically a story about Rani, who from the very outset of the play becomes the victim of male chauvinism and child marriage. Rani is born in a south Indian family deeply rooted in orthodox beliefs where women are tame to exist only for men and everything about their life are controlled and monitored according to the standard of man. Rani was married off to Appanna by her father at a very tender age without any formal inquiries about the character of Appanna. The relation of Rani, the central character in the drama, with Appanna is plagued with disharmony and neglect. Rani's married life brings her a train of sorrow and pain as she was tormented day and night by her abusive husband. Appanna does not recognise her identity as his wife.

Rani experience physical torment and emotional detachment after her marriage. Rani, who dotes on her parents love and affection was shattered by the wild treatment meted out to her on the very first night of her wedding. She was locked up inside her room while her husband Appanna went to his concubine to quench his sexual desire. Appanna visited Rani only for his lunch and bath and leaves her again at night. She is exposed to psychological violence which is another way to oppress the woman as 'the other'. She is seen as 'the other' because society 'others' people who cannot be classified in their masculine functioning system as Irigaray puts forward: "Who and what the other is, I never know. But this unknowable other is that which differs sexually from me." (emphasis added, Irigaray, "Sexual Difference" 238). Appanna's verbal assault to Rani underlines his manner as befitting a white man norm which directs verbal violence towards the other because of race, class and gender. In other words, he sees Rani as 'the other', which is constructed by a set of features belonging to the othering discourse.

He does not allow her to ask any question and he says , “ Look I don’t like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand?”(Karnad 7) There was hardly any conjugal relation between them as expected of husband and wife . Appanna hardly communicates with Rani and all he says was, ‘ Do this’ ‘Do that’, ‘Serve the food’.(11) From this perspective, he symbolises all the paternal cultural norms and institutions which regard women in the domestic space as opposed to men who are responsible to deal with affairs outside in the public place while dominating over the domestic sphere at the same time. Appanna even tries to objectify and ‘other’ Rani by isolating her from all her contact with her friends and relatives. Rani was not allowed to talk to anyone, not even his mother’s childhood friend Kurudavva and says, “ she won’t talk to anyone. And no need to talk to her.”(14) Appanna’s authoritative nature in isolating Rani makes her miserable. It shows that he sees Rani as nothing but an unintelligent sexual object who has no abilities other than taking care of the household.

Rani in order to relieve herself from the miserable isolation often fantasies about her freedom from the clutch of her tormentor. In her fantasy she was rescued by an eagle:

...So Rani asks him:Where are you taking me? And the

Eagle answers: ‘ Beyond the seven seas and seven isles. On

the seventh island is a magic garden. And in the garden

stands the tree of emeralds. Under the tree, your parents wait

for you’. So Rani says: Do they? Then please, please take me

to them-immediately. Here I come. So the eagle carries her

clear across the seven seas. (1.7)

Rani's reverie is not a child dream but it reflects the agony and mental condition of Rani as she was devoid of emotional attachment. Her reverie also reflects her longing for a world where all barriers based on sexual differences come to an end. Rani longs to be liberated and live a normal life like every human being deserved.

Rani in the play was given an opportunity by Kurudavva to win her husband love by giving her a piece of aphrodisiac root which will charm Appanna. However, Rani like the traditional Indian women thought about the safety of her husband. She cannot think of causing any harm to her husband, not because she has no courage, but because she is unaware of the enormity of her action. She cannot imagine of her existence without a husband in a patriarchal society and says to herself, " Shall I serve this?... suppose something happens to my husband? What will my fate be? That little piece made him ill. Who knows...?(16-17) Rani could have used the magical root to end her misery but she chooses to protect her husband in case it might do harm. Even though her husband abuses her physically she cooks, clean the house and serves her husband well and hold no grudges even in her loneliness. Shradha comments that Rani's care not to cause any harm to her husband and his punishing hard for her impeccable behavior are juxtaposed to bring out the injustice meted out to women in our patriarchal society. He like many men who are the slaves of patriarchal culture is only playing the role expected to him. Rani lives according to the societal expectation by being submissive to her husband as her mind has been chained by the rigid socio-cultural customs and practices. Rani's docile nature reveals that women have lost their individualities and live a life as constructed by society. Indian society is not an individualistic society, and especially in case of a woman her claim to individuality is

out of question. The emphasis is more on duty than on individuality, and resultant effect is repression of individuality.

Rani, fearing that the aphrodisiac root will cause harm to her husband pours the curry into ant-hill where king Cobra lives. The king Cobra (Naga) who consumes the aphrodisiac falls in love with Rani and appears before her every night in the form of her husband Appanna. Naga's affectionate behavior and gentle touch confused Rani of the sudden change of personality of her husband yet, the temporal fulfillment of the love and concern that she was yearning for a long time develops her confidence and helped her to find her place and identity as a woman. However even Naga, the supernatural being was no different from Appanna in terms of the dominative nature. When he sense that his identity would be revealed, he asks Rani not to question concerning his presence during night and about the change in his behavior and says:

listen, Rani. I shall come here everyday twice.

At night and of course again at mid-day.

At night wait for me here in this room. When I come

and go at night, don't go out of this room, don't look

out of the window- whatever the reason. And don't ask me why. (2.26-27)

Once again, it makes the functioning Western ideology come to the very surface: man is dominant, woman is subordinated. This ideology is functioning like a "machine" to repress the others as Cixous claims: "subordination of the feminine to the masculine order ... appears to be the condition for the functioning of the machine." (Cixous, "Sorties" 231.) Thus, through physical and psychological violence at home by trying to bring the other in, the patriarchal order is maintained and functions in the smallest

structure of society, which is the metonymic extension of the patriarchal norm dominating the Western thought.

Naga and Appanna are both alike when they impose their authority on Rani for their selfish gain. Naga attempted to keep Rani ignorant about his true identity for he wanted to use her as an object of sex for gratification of his sexual desires. He cannot claim as a husband because their relationship was illegal. Naga who exploited Rani was disappointed when he learns that she was pregnant and ask her to keep it as secret. Rani was compelled to obey his command and cries out:

Yes, I shall. Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you. Don't ask

questions. Do as I tell you. Don't ask questions. Do as I told you.

No. I won't ask questions. I shall do what you tell me. Scowls in

the day. Embraces at night. The face unrelated to the touch at night.

But day or night, one motto does not change: Don't ask

questions. Do as I tell you. (2.23)

Rani is bound to live a mechanical life without questioning. She has no right or self expression. Her identity and voice as a woman is suppressed, the voice of the "subaltern" in Spivak's terms is silenced by male oppression, which gives no opportunity for the voices to speak from 'the other side'.

Rani's husband Appanna was ferocious when he learns about her pregnancy and he condemn her, "Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you Harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who is it, who did you go to with your sari off?"(33) As usual Rani was not allowed to say anything , not even for her

pregnancy. Appanna abuses her, kicks her and beats her. He even tries to kill her unborn child by throwing a big stone on her, but she is saved by the cobra. The play is not only the story of gender oppression but also of cultural dominance. In this sense, women in colonial contexts are doubly oppressed as they are subordinated not only because they are female but also because they are colonial objects. She is double-marginalised in the gaze of the 'Other' by the society. Not only is her identity of being a woman suppressed but she was forced to prove her chastity as well. When the village elders call Rani in the midst of the villagers to prove her chastity Naga advises her to take a snake trial instead of fire ordeal in the village court. With the village elders sitting in judgement, Rani passes through the cobra ordeal in their presence in order to prove her chastity to them by swearing by the king cobra. She confesses that she has not touched anyone of the male sex except for Appanna and the cobra. At this the cobra "Slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head" (33). The people are gasped at such a miracle and the elders declare Rani to be a devine being.

Rani could not become a mother if it was not by the intervention of supernatural force like the king cobra who in the form of Appanna makes her attained womenhood and motherhood. It was when Rani proves her chastity through snake ordeal that her emotional and social integration is uplifted.

The more powerful she gets, the less domineering Appanna became. The transformation Appanna undergoes is made even more apparent at the end of the play when he soon realizes that the one whom he has assumed as the powerless and passive is now the powerful and active. As Bary suggests, "a postcolonial point of view focuses on the importance of reclaiming the past and marginalised voices" (193). Rani as a mother is finally seen as having some authority in the household and Rani

even expresses her strange desire that the cobra has to be ritually cremated and the fire should be lit by their son. Appanna agrees and says , “ any wish of your will be carried out “ (44) Rani who has been subjugated at the beginning finally asserts her position and identity. In the Indian society, a woman’s identity is defined in relation to the other members of her family or to be more precise in relation to a man. She is a daughter, a wife or a mother. So, “...identity for them is usually a matter of relationships.” (Gupta, 1999: 252) In sudhir kakar words. “ An Indian woman knows the motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can.” (kakar , 56).

5.Chakravyuha:

The episode of *Chakravyuha* (1984) is taken from the Drona Parva(chapters 34-40) from the epic of *Mahabharata* to critique war, violence and the politics surrounding it. It is a play which has been performed widely and won critical acclaim, including the Fringe First Award at the Commonwealth Arts Festival in 1986. Bandyopadhyay comments, Ratan Thiyam plays are linked thematically through “ the central presence of an individual facing an onslaught of violence , that compels him to question his identity.” *Chakravyuha* raised serious concerns about the cultural issues, power manipulation, violence and the disintegration of the family due to changes in values and practices in the Manipuri society. Here, Thiyam is inclined to Bhasa because Bhasa challenged the *Natyashastra* and chose for his heroes characters like Karna and Duryodhana who were ‘traditionally ignored or denigrated in Brahmanic exegesis’ (‘Introduction’, *Chakravyuha*, p.ix).likewise, In *Chakravyuha* he shifts his focus from the mature anti-heroes to a young scapegoat/ martyr.

The play banks on the story of Abhimanyu's assassination in the hands of the Saptarathis (seven charioteers) from the Kaurava side in the battle of Kurukshetra. Ratan Thiyam employs this classical story to address contemporary issue from a Manipuri perspective. According to Samik Bandyopadhyay:

The Abhimanyu story offers him [Ratan Thiam] an opportunity to attack the cult of heroism which is only too often held up to the Manipuri youth by political forces playing for sectarian stakes, to drive them to senseless acts of virtual suicide. For him [Thiyam], Abhimanyu trusting so foolhardily his technique is one of the younger generations in Manipur. (Bandyopadhyay)

Thiyam himself has asserted that the classical sources are re- appropriated in the Manipuri context. Through the play, *Chakravyuha* he then interrogates the system , the state machinery, the power structures embedded in the society and finally the position of an individual in a society". Thiyam explains,

I am asking myself again and again : where do I stand as an individual? I feel a whole burden of anxiety. Talk of peace, talk of war, or talk of struggle, I feel an individual is trapped. With all these things, as an individual, I have to take a position against the violence going on, against the corruption, against the system. Talking about the system as a theatre worker I have always felt it my duty to attack, the system.(*Chakravyuha: Pre-text and reconstructed performance text* 10)

The North-Eastern states of India have gone through an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiations/encounters with the 'other', 'majoritarian' cultures from either 'mainland India' or from beyond the Indian border, says Tilottoma Misra. The sense of cultural anxiety, urgency for

identity recovery, choosing between paths of armed resistance and peaceful dialogue, and consequent violence (perpetrated both by insurgent and counter-insurgent side) become dominant theme of literature of these states.

Violence has been a recurring motif in Literature. Much of the discussion today in the literature of North East India focuses on violence as a thematic interest. The people of the North-East India have gone through a long history of negligence in their demand for economic and infrastructural development, denial of representation in the great Indian civilisational discourse, betrayal in terms of political equality, marginalization of the local people by the continuing migration of people from outside. The geo-political and cultural space which Thiyam belongs to moulds him to question the structures of authority.

5.1 Abhimanyu's Search for his Individuality:

In the play, Abhimanyu stands for the younger generations who have been induced to suicidal acts in the name of patriotism and heroism by the political leaders, the 'power grabbers'. Through the story of Abhimanyu, Thiyam questions the notion of false heroism which drives the younger generation to sacrifice their lives and ultimately become a victim. Ratan Thiyam uses an episode from the Mahabharata to relate with contemporary issues of humankind and mark his protest against social injustice. His concern for the youth and its continuous betrayal by the older generation is predominant in the depiction of Abhimanyu. Thiyam wanted the readers/ audience to understand the character of Abhimanyu and to relate him with the present situations which the younger generation have been facing. He wanted Abhimanyu to represent society. Talking about individualism, the man-woman relationship and the selfishness of the new generation, the womb scene in the play emerged.

The womb scene was a problem . At one point we thought we could create it with levers. Levers for Abhimanyu in the womb. Then I thought of Abhimanyu in a cave. Abhimanyu entangled in a spiderweb unable to breathe. The important point was that Abhimanyu is trapped in a space. He is listening to the cruelty in society(as expressed by Arjuna and Subhadra) and wants to get out and fight. In the Mahabharata he only hears the Chakravyuha ‘mantra’. But I wanted Abhimanyu to represent society. I wanted the audience to become Abhimanyu and listen to Subhadra and Arjuna’s conversation.(*Chakravyuha: Pre-text and reconstructed performance text* 19)

As in the play, “From levers to a spider’s web, the womb scene finally emerged as a red circle of light in which Abhimanyu is trapped by the seven cymbal-playing charioteers who will finally be instrumental in his death. Abhimanyu goes into a trance as he remembers the night when his parents spoke of war, and his father Arjuna of his hopes for their unborn son. The parents are bathed in blue moon light and Abhimanyu is soaked in a red circle on the ground level.”

At the very beginning of the play, Thiyaam tries to relate the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas with the conflict found in contemporary society. Thiyaam then goes on to highlight the process of manipulation that takes place at many levels of our existence. He describes the manipulation of Drona where Shakuni and the Kauravas try to incite Drona through the rhetoric of pressure , patriotism and provocation strategically manipulate Drona into forming the Chakravyuha by questioning Drona’s loyalty to the Kauravas. Drona in order to prove wrong the accusations of favouring the Pandavas and to mark his loyalty to the Kauravas agrees to form the Chakravyuha- “the cosmic formation of military warfare” (Thiyaam 20) and kill one chief charioteer of the Pandavas.

Similar to the Pandava camp, Abhimanyu is manipulated by Bheema and Yudhishtira to make him enter the Chakravyuha. Both the Pandavas knew that the young warrior does not know the way out of the Chakravyuha but they encouraged Abhimanyu to enter the Chakravyuha. We can sense the manipulation of Abhimanyu by the Pandava brothers from their promises and praises for Abhimanyu. Yudhishtira says: O my son Abhi(embraces him), you are so daring, so brave. I am pleased. In fact I am overjoyed. The movement, gestures, expression indicate a preplanned intention when they said :

O Abhimanyu, O valiant warrior.....try and

penetrate the *vyuha* by whatever means you know. You enter by

one gate and we shall follow you.

We will follow and protect you wherever you go. Remember you are as

valiant and expert at arms as your father (Thiyam 35).

Bheema also promises full support to Abhimanyu once he enters the gate of Chakravyuha. He says, “if you succeed in breaking through even a slight opening in the Chakravyuha, we will rush in full strength and destroy the Kaurava armies” (35). This clearly indicates both Yudhishtira and Bheema’s intention of visiting the young warrior. They even silenced Abhimanyu’s grandfather Sumitra who tried to dissuade Abhimanyu from entering the Chakravyuha. Sumitra is helpless with both Yudhishtira and Bheema strongly condemning him from speaking up for Abhimanyu. One can sense from the behaviour of both the Pandava brothers that they had come to Abhimanyu with a plan. Their intention was to use the young warrior in the war and sacrifice him for the cause of the Pandavas.). Also we can agree with

Pinak Sankar Bhattacharya who observed that the behaviour of the two Pandava brothers towards Abhimanyu symbolizes the war mongering leader, who out of his own interest compels his entire army and countrymen towards apocalypse. Further he opines that they even symbolize the corrupt political leaders who spin the web of false promises and grip the general public before elections to attain authoritative power (in Bhattacharya). We can find Abhimanyu's contemporaneity with the youths of today who are at some point of time manipulated by those in power and in the false notion of nationalism/patriotism are used as tools to meet their demands.

Thiyam says , But what is important is why the Chakravyuha was created and when. Why were so many tricks employed by both sides to entrap a boy? What was the truth of the situation? This was my concern. Dharmaputra Yudishthira stands for truth, but did he tell Abhimanyu the whole truth about Chakravyuha ? Did bheema the strong Pandava uncle warn his nephew, or did they just want to solve the problem, save the situation by exciting valour in the young man? They urge him to become a hero. Yudishthira pretends to dissuade Abhimanyu, but his words and gestures are designed only to spur him on.'

Ratan Thiyam's scheme to situate each of the classical character in contemporary time is clear when he talks about Duryodhana. In the play Duryodhana manipulates Gita's sloka to interpellate Drona. He also blurs the distinction between the dharma and adharma in order to force Drona to create Chakravyuha against the Pandavas. Ratan justifies:

I was looking at the Gita from the standpoint of Duryodhana and also from the point of contemporary reality. We live in a materialistic world and so how can any Duryodhana, a man who has fulfilled his duties as a king, find his

absolute truth? He has been systematic, calculating and aware of the course of events. For him truth stems from the concrete reality. He is logical. Duryodhana believes he is fighting a war because he has to. (*Chakravyuha: Pre-text and reconstructed performance text* 18)

Ratan further explains,'

when I take up Duryodhana, who always protests, and is aggressively materialist, I try to assess myself as a modern man. I like Duryodhana, for he swears by an ideology, and stands by it, performing the right duties, within a system. Abhimanyu trusting his technique so foolhardily is a symbol of the younger generation. (*Reinventing Identity: Theatre of Roots and Ratan Thiyam*)

Again the concept of Truth/Dharma is contested in Chakravyuha. Ratan Thiyam is quite sympathetic towards the character of Duryodhana who is otherwise considered to be the embodiment of evil. Duryodhana becomes the mouthpiece who questions the conventionally accepted notion of truth/dharma and he is presented as a righteous warrior. He says:

If I have transgressed, ever crossed the bounds of behaviour,

a king's rights and duties even by a half breadth during my tenure,

if I have spoken untruth, done injustice or been corrupt, then I swear

in the name of the Sun, you may drag me along the main street of

Hastinapur tied to the wheels of a chariot drawn by hundred horses,

till my bleeding body is tattered in shreds and I meet my end (Thiyam 18-19).

He also questions the validity of the war tactics used by the Pandavas in order to win the war. In doing so he criticizes the Pandavas who are conventionally regarded as the embodiment of truth and righteousness. Duryodhana observes: We have never traded untruths. When this war of Mahabharata becomes a legend, the future generations, who survive this age of Kali, will bear witness to what I say:

Those who are swayed by the superficial will side with the Pandavas,

but those who delve to understand the intricacies of and subtleties

of life will opt for the Kauravas. I shall be vindicated, for I have done no wrong (19).

We can say that Chakravyuha let us question the universally accepted notions about truth/dharma. What is truth/dharma? Duryodhana's search for truth/dharma is indicated through his "floor sweeping gestures" (Thiyam 16). Here Thiyam tries to highlight the futility involved in the search for truth/dharma. Also Abhimanyu's speech in the epilogue expresses his doubt in following the path of truth/dharma. He says, "Dhushasana killed me by my foul names. Yet I have never sinned and always firmly followed the path of truth" (51). He questions truth/dharma and therefore in his final speech to the audience he says "the search for truth will remain unfulfilled" (51). Abhimanyu's last speech is directly addressed to the audience and the audience are left to think about their ideas and concepts of truth. If Abhimanyu has never sinned, why did he have to die so young? What will the path of Truth lead us to? Thus we are made to think about the manipulation happening in and around our surroundings. We are to think if we are being manipulated at any point of our life and act accordingly.

Abhimanyu himself affirms within the play: “ I set out on this last journey with an unanswered question in my heart- Am I a scapegoat or am I a martyr?” (Thiyam 51), this question, addressed to the audience is not the only question the play asks. Nor is it necessarily the seminal one. But it provides the locus for a number of questions, including the existential one that every individual has to ask oneself at a political moment, before she/ he chooses her/his action. She/ he has to be sure to what extent she/ he is being manipulated/ controlled by a power formation operating only often through cultural/ rational/ ethnic constructions mistaken for natural sentiments like heroism or patriotism, and to what extent she/ he is deciding in historical / civilizational terms—on behalf of humanity, or of a class or a community, in a given historical context. (Thiyam 8)

Abhimanyu’s question also brings into questioning our own existence in relation with the various system/authorities surrounding us. If we consider Abhimanyu’s case he is more of a victim than a hero. He is an individual who succumbs to the violence of war and also against the violence committed by his uncles.

Violence and the question of identity are inextricably intertwined in Ratan’s perception of reality, Manipuri and global. The one persistent theme that he pursues relentlessly is that of an individual trapped by the powers to participate in violence—more as scapegoat than as victor or victim— under a spell in which he is divested of his identity, rising at the end to seek his lost identity and maybe to have a glimpse of it.

It is true that Thiyam was not directly addressing the socio-political concerns of his time in Chakravyuha, but it is also true that he was experimenting with form around this time and in Chakravyuha there was a symbolic expression of the sufferings of humankind under power politics which not only related to his society but

universally to all individuals and Nations. Through the play he gives an assessment of war and violence and tries to relate with the conflicts and tensions of contemporary society. The play provides a recasting of myth to critique the present.

Thus we can conclude that Ratan Thiyam's Chakravyuha is a protest against war and the ongoing circle of violence found in our contemporary society. It is a protest against the System which sacrifices the younger generations to meet their goals. By showing Abhimanyu as a victim, the play allows us to judge our own position in society.

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Chapter 5

Myth as Negotiation of the Present

1. Introduction:-

Drama is the oldest literary art which is meant for stage and action. Many Indian English dramas are found to explore the original ancient folktales and myths. It seems that themes taken from folklores, myths and Indian history turned into a vehicle to express contemporary issues like feminism, marginalization of castes and minority religions, violence, increasing fundamentalism, denigrating Indian politics etc. In Indian literary history, myth and folklore have always kept prominent positions. The two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata as well as the Purana have been an unending resource for literature as well as plays. The inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends that define our culture offers immense scope for the Indian dramatists. Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam uses myths and folktales to reveal the social realities. Both the playwrights have used themes related to the present social scenario to bring about social change and to make people aware of the need to renovate the present social structure and usher in a renewed and better social system. They present complex issues of the contemporary society. Their plays make the audience to ponder over the human life with a new perspective rather than making him emotional. The return to the indigenous culture and traditions also brings a distinct voice and identity for these two dramatists, as quest for identity has been the prominent concern for them. They both have a concern for their community and the individuals in particular and so draws upon their tribal tradition to articulate the perplexity of existence in a land riddled with conflict which gives birth to a sense of alienation and disruptions in their own diversified land. In order to fight with social, cultural and political upheavals, the

injustice of the system leading to the violence and corruption, and to change the existing mindset of the people which has been already corrupted by the old system, to bring a change or to instill a new thought to the people both the playwrights took refuge in their own roots which is so deeply implanted yet which has been carelessly ignored or forgotten . Both of them took an immense initiative in going back to the past in order to gain one's voice from the current blatant systems and also to allow the people to understand the misconceptions or misinterpretations of the past which is still prevalent in today's present context and that which has been a major concern of inequalities, injustice, leading to unending problems.

Girish Karnad has emerged as the most significant playwright according to the Indian critic P. Dhanavel. He emphasizes :

Karnad's humanism derived mainly from his profound concern for the "oppressed" and the "downtrodden" his compulsive return to and reinterpretation of the mythical past and oral tradition and his "determined demystification of the dominant beliefs and practices. (Dhanavel 106)

Aparna Dharwadker specifies that Karnad "employs traditional Indian narrative materials and modes of performance successfully to create a radically modern urban theatre." (Dharwadker 12)

Commenting on the use of techniques of the classical and folk theatre of India, Karnad says, "The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head." (Karnad 4)

Karnad's adaptations of myths and legends in his plays are more an act of impulse rather than intention. Karnad himself says in his *"Introduction" to Three Plays*: "The myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally" (11).

His creative genius lies in taking up fragments of historical-legendary experience and fusing them into a forceful statement. By using the 'grammar of literary archetype', Karnad links the past and the present, the archetypal and the real. All his plays are literary excavations of the Indian collective past – the racial, mythical, legendary and the historical and they have a strong contemporary relevance. Dhanavel says, the borrowed myths are "reinterpreted to fit pre-existing cultural emphasis". (4)According to Jyoti Sahi, "Girish Karnad's art can be described as a vision of reality". (Sahi 6) So, Karnad delves deep into the traditional myths to spell modern man's anguish and dilemmas that are created in his mind.

On the other hand, Ratan Thiyam, with a number of exceedingly successful plays to his credit, is often considered as synonymous with Manipuri Theatre. He is not only a pioneer theatre personality in Manipur, Northeast or India, but all over the world. His plays present a remarkable juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. Through the presentation of opposites and conflicts he maintains clear message that unless the mankind resists war, halts the rat race of a frenetic existence and reverses the destruction of the planet we live on; the fatal doomsday cannot be avoided. A staunch patriot in Thiyam also voices the environmental concern when he says,

the human race has come a long way, especially due to technological advancements, but in the course of our development, we have somehow lost touch with our emotions. The more we become advanced, the more our society

is forgetting its traditions, roots and the importance of human relationship.
(Thiyam 148)

Born to parents who were dancers of repute Ratan Thiyam was always drawn to the world of art and culture. In the early phase of his life Thiyam showed greater interest in literature, particularly poetry and painting. He was deeply influenced by the literary movements of the seventies when creative expressions was at the peak and the whole Manipur society was driven by the urge to find out the true Manipuri identity. Like many other sensitive theatre lovers Thiyam is also troubled by the socio-political problems but not restricted to Manipur alone rather by those that have affected the world over. He is aggrieved to see how the so-called hi-tech advancements of the present world have eroded the traditional system of values and culture threatening the very existence of the society. It is through his plays that he expresses his deep concern for the overall welfare of the people and at the same time longs for some kind of spiritual emancipation. The plays of Thiyam are representative of Indian tradition coupled with universal appeal.

As a playwright Thiyam seems to be very much concerned of the erosion of human values that has also resulted in the degradation of ecology. With a prophetic voice his plays have spiritual yearnings amidst the chaotic socio-political atmosphere of the present world. Apart from being a sensible theatre personality and an artist of high caliber, Thiyam is also an activist who is very much aware of and sensitive to various contemporary issues. He explores through the vibrant world of Manipuri tradition and culture by rediscovering the folklores, myths and legends of Manipur and bestows on them a contemporary meaning. For example, Ratan Thiyam's Mahabharata plays emerge out of the crisis of cultural and political identity which has been conspicuous in the colonial and pre colonial history of Manipur. Mythic

narratives like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have maintained a continuous presence in Indian culture. In the words of Dharwadker, “The issue, then, is not whether the past is real outside its modern constructions, but how it comes to be imagined during the modern period, and what role these reconstructions play in evolving ideas of nation and nationhood.” (Dharwadker 1)

Both Karnad and Thiyam uses myth and history as sources to reassess and de-idealize the past which is ethnologically and culturally so diversified. Thus, Karnad and Thiyam, took a sceptical and cynical view on heroic nationalist constructions of myth and history. Although both of them were influenced by the epic *Mahabharata* which reflects the full spectrum of Indian life yet, the epic in their plays is intertextual with the works of Bhasa, the classical Sanskrit playwright. For e.g Ratan Thiyam uses certain episode of *Mahabharata*(Chakravyuha) to focus on antiheroes, outsiders and victims. He is inclined to Bhasa because Bhasa challenged the *Natyashastra* and chose for his heroes characters like Karna and Duryodhana who were ‘traditionally ignored or denigrated in Brahmanic exegesis’ (‘Introduction’, Chakravyuha, ix). and Karnad reinterprets the epic and questions the age old traditions which has still been practiced in the contemporary world. “ These literary reversions register the clearest shift from heroic self praise to ironic self reflexivity and question the power of the past in the mythology of the new nation”. (Dharwadker, 181).By exerting the devices of myth, folklore and history, Karnad tackles with the problem of subjectivity in his plays. His plays are not simply to look through the past but even to give the impression of being at the present and also to predict the future.

2. *Yayati* :-

Girish karnad's *Yayati*() is an episode called "*Adiparva*" in the Mahabharata. But he had not exactly portrayed the characters as they were in the epic. It is the story of a king who, for the fulfillment of his sexual desires exchanges his old age with his son's youth. Karnad made slight changes in the myth, added some characters, portrayed the character of the king as a lustrous man who just want to fulfill his sexual desires at any cost. Yayati is a true ambassador of modern common man, who in spite of having much pleasures of life, still feels impatient and dissatisfied. Yayati takes the youth of Pooru, his youngest son, but soon realizes the impropriety of his shallow action and feels like an alienated common man. This act shows the influence of the patriarchal society where a father orders his son to sacrifice his young age so that he could enjoy his sexuality. But in the epic he understands the nature of desires that they are endless, when one is fulfilled the next one comes. The play is replete with the appearance of various typical themes, including the question of the reality of experience itself; the search for a ground of meaning in a world without God; the critique of the traditional values of the culture; the loss of hope and the meaning in the modern world and an exploration of how this loss may be faced, and the clash between materialism and spiritualism. In other words, the myths and legends provide him ample scope to take up significant issues like problems of identity, patriarchy, man-woman relationship, selfishness and pervasive sense of alienation. A modern character undergoes through all these tribulations, and Karnad rightfully captures those turbulances. Yayati is representative of the age old tradition of kingship and materialism, his world revolves around the well-being of his subjects and his bravery and chivalry

2.1 Theme of Responsibility:-

In the play, the Sutradhara says that neither a scholar nor an ordinary person can escape the burden of responsibility wherein lies the joy of life. Whether it is an old man in search of lost youth or a saint lost in the darkness or the mute. The Sutradhara brings forth the theme of responsibility.

The sutradhara, which literally means ‘the holder of strings’ introduces the play in a prologue by addressing the audience that the play ‘*Yayati*’ which deals with an ancient myth. However, he makes clear that the play is not ‘mythological’.

A mythological aims to plunge us into the sentiment of devotion. It sets out to prove that the reason for our suffering in this world is that we have forsaken our gods. The mythological is fiercely convinced that all suffering is merely a calculated test, devised by the gods, to check out our willingness to submit to their will. There are no deaths in mythologies, for no matter how hard you try, death cannot give meaning to anything that has gone before. It merely empties life of meaning.(5)

Karnad takes a different twist in the ancient mythology because myth provides fleeting glimpses of fear and desires sleepless within us. Thus the motive of Karnad is not about gods but of deaths. He employs a key element in the plot i.e., ‘*sanjeevani vidya*’ – the art of reviving the dead, which promises the release from the limitations of the fleeting life this self is trapped in. To the mythical story of Yayati he adds new characters and alters the story-line so as to deepen its connotative richness and gives it contemporary appeal. The play starts on a quiet note, with Swarnalata complaining to Devayani against Sharmistha. Though Devayani defends Sharmistha, Sharmistha does not accord proper respect to Devayani because she knows too well

that Yayati married the latter as she was the daughter of Shukracharya who could bless him with immortality. When Sharmistha and Devayani had an argument Sharmistha tells Devayani:

“Except that he is not lusting for you. You poor darling, he lusts for immortality. Your father's art of sanjeevani.” (11)

When Devayani insists that Yayati did not know her identity when he married her, Sharmistha sarcastically comments:

Even with prostitutes picked off the street, the
first thing a man does is ask her name'. And you say with you,
the king dispensed with even that formality? You knew what
would happen if you didn't act quickly. I mean, you didn't want
the Kacha experience again! (1.13)

Despite the on-going conflict between Devayani and Sharmistha, Devayani does not order the latter to go away from the palace. Thus she is the one who is responsible for Sharmistha in the palace. When the crisis in the life of Yayati comes, instead of owning up her responsibility, Devayani leaves the palace. She refuses to yield and the result is the curse of premature old age on Yayati. When Yayati learns that Shukracharya has cursed him with old age he does not accept the responsibility of what he has done. The curse demoralize Yayati. Yayati loses control on himself and does not know how to handle the situation. Sharmistha tries to pacify Yayati by asking him to accept what has come his way. Yayati gets violent and refuses to accept old age. He remains adamant. He goes to the extent of saying that Pooru must be

celebrating the occasion for it gives him an opportunity to assume the mantle of the King immediately. When Pooru comes back and informs that Yayati's curse can be redeemed if some young person accepted his old age. Yayati is jubilant. Again when Pooru informs Yayati that nobody is ready to accept the curse, the latter does not believe it. Pooru ask Yayati to accept his old age and go to the forest but in return Yayati cries bitterly and with folded hands begs at Pooru. He decides to accept the curse of senility inflicted on his father. When Pooru proposes that the curse given to Yayati should be transferred to him, Sharmistha tries to dissuade him. She then reminds him of his responsibility towards his wife. But Pooru doesn't resist from his decision. Yayati, thus succeeds in transferring his old age and his sins to Pooru. In the play, King Yayati is the representative of modern common man who in spite of receiving much happiness in life remains restless and discontented. This situation is revealed through Yayati's dialogue:

Solitude? What are you talking about? I don't want solitude. I
can't bear it. I want people around me. Queens, ministers, armies,
enemies, the populace. I love them all. Solitude? The very thought
is repulsive. I have to know myself, Sharmishtha, I have to be
young. I must have my youth. (2.43)

Yayati fails to understand his duties as a king and a father. He always tries to find new ways and means to quench his insatiable thirst for sensual pleasures. Similarly in the contemporary society a common man is also found busy with material and carnal pleasures. With his genuine artistic touch Karnad refashions the mythic theme to make a contemporary statement. Karnad projects the ancient king as a selfish

father demanding his son's youth in exchange for his curse and this selfishness of Yayati becomes conspicuous. Though the characters, the incidents and circumstances are related to the ancient times, the reality delineated in the play is applicable to contemporary life as well. When Yayati comes to know about the false of the curse, he loses his self control and totally fails to handle the situation. He is not ready to accept the responsibility of his own misdeed. On the other hand Yayati has a strong attraction for life and the fear of the curse. To him temptation of sensual pleasure is too hard to resist.

2.2 The Plight of Subalterns: Women Characters in *Yayati*:-

In the play the other women characters – Devyani, Sharmishtha and Chitrlekha, become pawns in the games that male characters play and are relegated to the background. The play is relevant as far as the socio-psychological study of women is concerned. Devayani, Sharmishtha, Swarnlata and Chitrlekha are generic; represent the subalternity of woman in masculine society where she is identified as “*other*”, “*non-man*”, or “*second sex*” despite her high position in the society. Karnad doesn't adhere to traditional glorification of the son's ‘self-sacrifice’ rather raises question against this. Karnad's deep-rooted humanism allowed him to give voice to the silenced majority through his plays. His plays abound with subalterns especially women and lower caste people subjected since ancient time by patriarchy or upper hierarchy of the society. Karnad has not only exposed their subalternity but also fused energy in their lives so that they can speak; shifted their position from “*margin*” to “*centre*”.

The character of Chitrlekha is Karnad's creation. She is not a modern woman but she is endowed with energy which she tries to use for a place in a male-dominated world.

When Swarnalata gives Chitrlekha the news that Pooru has accepted his father's old age, she is absolutely stunned takes the courage to accept the situation by consoling herself to be a lucky person. Pooru wants her support for the responsibility he has undertook. Chitrlekha gladly extends her support. But when she sees the face of old Pooru, Chitrlekha realizes what has befallen her. She gets frightened. She curses herself for not being as great as her husband, for turning her husband out. She requests Pooru to reconsider his decision but to no avail.

I did not push him to the edge of the pyre,
 sir. You did. You hold forth on my wifely duties. What about
 your duty to your son? Did you think twice before hoisting your
 troubles on a pliant son? (4.62)

Here, Karnad has endeavoured to paint the character of Chitrlekha not as a meek and timid person who accepts masculine authority but like an enlightened women who has the ability to revolt against masculine authority. She does not passively submit to the male hegemonic behavior of her father-in-law, who tried to mould her according to his will. She is indeed a woma who displays critical and analytical faculty .

Chitrlekha seems to be in search of a man who would define her and provide her some recognition in society ruled by males. Finding herself in such a sad plight, she says to Yayati ; “What else is there for me to do? You have your youth. Prince Pooru has his old age. Where do I fit in?” (66)

She seems to be 'New woman' not in the sense that she challenges the patriarchy but in the sense that she challenged the social obligation and moral laws. She remains a rebellious figure within the male dominated world. She emerges as a new woman

who boldly challenges the decision of Pooru and false rhetoric of Yayati. She doesn't allow Pooru to enter into her bedroom—who accepts the curse of his father for his moral transgression and becomes old: “I will not let my husband step back into my bedroom unless he returns a young man” (ibid 61) and frankly elaborates the reason of her marriage to Pooru:

I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of
the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He
doesn't possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But
you do. (4.65-66).

Yayati abuses her for these piercing words, “whore” (66). She defies everything i.e. kingdom and high reputation of Bharat dynasty and wants “room” for herself. She smiles defiantly and swallows the poison and dies. She prefers to die rather than yield before old conventions and assigned roles set for woman. Her death endorses new woman's quest for emancipation. Women are still suppressed by men. To show this, a very significant portion of the play is devoted to the study of the decisions of the patriarchal social set-up that expects women to surrender to the will of the male decision makers without protest. This fact is further illustrated through another relationship that forms the sub-plot of the play, the Swarnalata episode. The character of Swarnlata, the maid, is Karnad's creation. Swarnalata's narrative once again emphasizes the patriarchal norms of the society that expects a woman to prove her innocence. She is never taken on her own worth. The male dominance is apparent in the story of Swarnalata.

Caste difference is another issue of the play which is still relevant today. The first episode between Devyani and Sharmishtha brings the cause of war that is – issue of class / caste. The incident became the cause of their feud and generated bitterness and gall between them.

Girish Karnad's *Yayati* articulates woman's sense and sensibility in an effective and impressive manner. The play indirectly speaks of gender discrimination due to which women have undergone untold suffering and unequal social life for centuries. Feminist interpretation could very well be seen in the strong characterization of Sharmishtha and Chitrlekha. Whenever Chitrlekha raises her point of view it seems to be the revolt of an oppressed woman against tyranny and man's disregard for woman's sentiments. Even the delineation of Devayani and Swarnalata presents a strong base to consider *Yayati* as one of the modern classics to effectively bat for women's rights and privileges. The four women in the play strive hard to prove their point of understanding in relation to love, parental duty, caste and class struggle. That they rise against Yayati's hegemony over the state of affairs and his unbridled lust for power and women is itself an indication of woman's victory over man's (Yayati's) unjust use of power. The character of Sharmishtha and Chitrlekha do not stand by and see cruelty being heaped upon them (women) in the name of Bharata king, Bharata queen, family honour and reputation. Chitrlekha takes king Yayati head on and gives him a taste of insult and injury which he used to inflict upon his women so easily. All these women characters display a critical faculty with an investigative and analytical mind and spirit. Their social and family background has endangered this. Therefore, they reveal independence and individuality in their interpersonal relationships. They refuse to accept subjugation because of their female gender and do not conform to the words of Kate Millett- because of our social circumstances, male

and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different and this is crucial.

Thus, the play depicts Yayati as the champion of patriarchy and his attitude to women. He feels that a woman should not violate the norms determined by patriarchy with his masculinity and authority, he treats women as those who are made for fulfilling his carnal whims, but he is unable to rule totally over woman. Karnad does not appreciate the suppressed and subordinated position of woman, on the contrary, he creates her as a complementary to man.

3. *Hayavadana* :-

A Man's search for his own self among a web of complex relationships, Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* was influenced by Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, which in turn is borrowed from one of the Sanskrit *Kathasaritasagara* stories. While the Sanskrit tale poses a moral riddle, Mann uses it to question the logic that holds the head superior to the body. Karnad builds on Mann's line to explore the theme of identity in a world of confused relationships. The play aims at demystification of traditional values and concepts and presents multiple viewpoints that promote a dialogue on the basic accepted tenets of life. This is enhanced by the merging of three levels of experience – the divine, human and animal and the bringing together of the animate and the inanimate on a common plane. Culture defines society and Karnad's plays are a reflection of the culture in our society. Focusing on our folk culture, he takes inspiration from mythology and folklore. With *Hayavadana*, Karnad has taken us back to the myths and legends of the Hindu religion. In the essay "A Re-reading of Girish Karnad's Plays with Reference to Myth and Folktale" Veena Noble Dass says:

“Hayavadana is based on Indian myth. The’ play tells a story embellished with the harsh truths of life and the incongruities of our existence capsule in fantasy. It is simultaneously a story, a social satire and the psychological study of a woman. It is a comment on blind faith devoid of any reason.” (Dass 2)

Hayavadana deals most explicitly with the question of human selfhood beyond our everyday socially constructed identities. Karnad shows that while identity depends on the materialism of the mind/body, it also extends beyond this to include witnessing consciousness. In trying to identify solely with mind and body, both of which are essentially physical, the characters end up feeling confused and frustrated. In taking the audience toward a sense of completion, *Hayavadana* illustrates that while a mystery in terms of theoretical understanding, completion can be known through direct experience.

3.1 Using Myth to Portray Modern Man’s Anguish and Dilemma :-

Karnad delves deep into the traditional myths to spell out modern man’s anguish and dilemma. By his effective use of the myths, legends and stories he interprets the age-old human situation with reference to contemporary experience. In *Hayavadana*, he seems to play with the theme of incompleteness through Padmini’s strong quest for unattainable perfection.

Chakravartee says that “ In *Hayavadana*, the theme of the play is an old one -- - man’s yearning for completeness, for perfection. It is this yearning which makes people restless in their ordinary existence and makes them reach out for extraordinary things...” (Chakravartee 37)

The play opens with the projection of the myth of Lord Ganesha who himself being an ‘embodiment of imperfection’, of incompleteness’, is worshipped as the destroyer of incompleteness. The Bhagavata sings verses in praise of Ganesha, accompanied by his musicians:

O Elephant headed Herambha

whose flag is victory

and who shines like a thousand suns,

O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi,

seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake

O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness... (Karnad 1).

The Central theme of incompleteness is foreshadowed in Bhagavata’s worship. Karnad is seized of the theme of incompleteness and depicts the protagonist Padmini’s yearning for completeness and perfection. There is a covert suggestion that women are manifestations of ‘divine energy’ or ‘life force’ and it is they who hold the centre stage. Into the basic fabric of the stories which he has taken from myths, Karnad weaves new patterns. In Hayavadana, the thrust is made more psychological, and thereby the mythic content of the transposed heads is given a turn of the screw.

On the superficial level, it is the tale of three lovers, Devadatta -Padmini-Kapila. Padmini who is initially very happy after her marriage with Devadatta, is gradually attracted by Kapila’s strong physique. However, the two men behead each other and so the goddess Kali gives a boon to Padmini allowing her to fix the heads as

it is but in hurry Padmini exchanges the head of kapila to that of Devadatta and vice versa.

It seems difficult to blame Padmini, the protagonist who yearns for completeness and perfection. She, in a state of paroxysm, attaches the heads to the wrong bodies. She is unnerved, by the sequence of events. It is not surprising that when she rushes to attach the severed heads as soon as her prayers are answered, she would commit such an error in the darkness of the temple. As soon as she realizes the mistake that is too late to mend, she cries repeatedly in helplessness and despair: What have I done? What have I done! What have I done? Mother Kali, Only you can save me now-only you can help me-what have I done? (11)

Whereas Devadatta and Kapila rejoice that they have now become one, Padmini realizes the complexity of the situation: Who would now be her husband? The three unfortunate seek the help of a rishi in search of a solution to their problem. The rishi, remembering perhaps what king Vikrama had said, gives the solution: "... the man with Devadatta's head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini". (40) Not only is Padmini's desire for Kapila's body fulfilled, Kapila's body also finds the pleasure of joining with Padmini. It is demonstrated by Devadatta's (with Kapila's body) 'joyous dance and amatory utterance'

While such an incident is possible within the dramatic world of make believe, everyone is aware that it is not possible in the everyday world. Society functions within the frame work of certain norms that have to be followed by all its members. If Padmini represents the erotic principle or the life force, her nature may not easily accept the curbs put on the instinctual urges.

Karnad's play refers to the complex human predicaments that can have no easy solutions. Mankind cannot bear too much reality. A myth helps to dramatize the ideal-real conflict, or the nature-culture conflict.

Padmini is enabled with the opportunity of having the best of the two men, Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. This extraordinary situation helps Padmini to breach the moral codes framed by society. She wants Devadatta's mind and Kapila's body while the society forces her to seek these qualities in one man. But since such a perfect man does not exist, she creates such a man by transposing the heads.

Thus, for a short while, she succeeds in having both brain and body, the spirit and flesh. "My celestial bodied Gandharva...my sun-faced Indra". (41) She is overjoyed to have her 'Fabulous body – fabulous brain– fabulous Devadatta's (43), and so is her revived husband. Kapila retires to the deep forest with his friend's body. Though the moral problem of identity crisis is solved, the psychological problem remains. On the one hand, the human mind reveals itself as rational and self-conscious, while on the other hand it exhibits characteristics that are animal-like and instinctive. Human reasoning and instinct go together; whereas in other creatures, instinct is the only motivation of their choice.

Karnad strongly projects that Padmini needs 'a man of steel'. Devadatta is not the man for her. Even the transposed Devadatta loses charm for her. The two men change to their 'original self' but Padmini remains in her primordial procreative self. Karnad examines the psychological and sociological identity of these characters but has no method to cure them.

3.2 Hayavadana's Reconciliation of Self Identity:-

Hayavadana is the offspring of a celestial being in the form of a horse and the Princess of Karnataka. Not surprisingly then, he is born with a horse head and a human body. Perhaps there is a biological association between male and head on the one hand, and female and body on the other. Such an association seems to be true in the case of Padmini's son who is as sulky and morose as his father but as lively and exuberant as his mother. Nevertheless, the sexual symbolism is obvious but it has a mythical base. After fifteen years of having the human love of the princess, the celestial father who had been cursed by the God Kubera to be born a horse for some act of misbehaviour becomes a celestial being again. He wants his wife to go with him to Heaven but she urges him to be the same horse. Disappointed, he curses her to be a horse and disappears. The cursed princess joins the horse family. Only Hayavadana is left alone to search his completeness. Not belonging to any group of his own in his problem of identity, he is more than compensated for that with his intelligence.

Despite the physical identity crisis and the sense of alienation, Hayavadana seems to be superior to all the major and minor characters in the play. The horse head appears to symbolize plain common sense. He asks intelligent questions and points to several loopholes in the individual and social systems. His actual problem seems to be that he is not adequately aware of his superior intelligence. As a result, he is carried away by the deceptive figure of a complete man and finally changed into a complete horse, but with human voice with the blessings of Goddess Kali. The dramatist emphasizes the way our desires are fraught with anxiety and lack proper articulation that often complicates the human situation further. "Mother, make me complete!" She said, 'so be it', and disappeared even before I could say 'Make me a complete man!' I became a horse! (15).

Karnad had plainly suggested that reconciliation with one's self and one's environment is the best course of action for the incomplete and insatiable human beings. For the attempts of persons to achieve completeness and perfections usually end tragically or comically. However, the pathetic and ludicrous results are caused by certain external agents who may be described as supernatural beings, for they stand for superstitious beliefs. An examination of the catalytic agents of transformations in *Hayavadana* points to Karnad's humanism and his valuable solution to the problem of human identity crisis.

The play reveals the essential ambiguity of human personality which is apparently shaped or shattered by the human environment. Fundamentally incomplete and imperfect, human beings search and yearn for attaining the unattainable ideal of completeness and perfection. They usually tend to seek the support of some supernatural beings or the other to succeed in their endeavor. However these external agencies, in their effort to help, seem to cause and complicate the identity crisis of the seekers further. It leads the seekers to tragic or comic ends. Padmini, for instance ruins herself and all her relations. Even the child that she leaves under the Bhagavata's care is not normal because of her own compulsions. *Hayavadana*, for another instance, does not bring destruction to himself as Padmini does, but suffers the drastic consequences of his search for completeness by going down the ladder of existence from man to horse. However, *Hayavadana* is able to reconcile and is contented in the end.

3.3 Demystification of religious and cultural practice:-

In *Hayavadana*, the presence of goddess Kali also reveals the religious sentiment prevalent in Indian society, culture and psychology. Devadatta prays to the

goddess to win the hand of Padmini in marriage. Later he beheads himself as an offering to the goddess. Divine intervention unfolds the central theme of the play, 'incompleteness' and quest for completion. The theme also reveals the Upanishad principle that visualizes the human body as a symbol of the organic relationship of the parts to the whole. Religion and ritual not only forms a part of the narrative of Karnad's plays but is also integral to the dramatic representation of the plays, a take-off of the folk theatrical tradition of the country. In the play, Karnad mocks at the religious beliefs and practices. He boldly questions all the outdated practices and traditional mindset. This is best conveyed in Hayavadana's visits to different religious places to achieve perfection. As Hayavadana says: Banaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar – Dargah of Khwaja, Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of our Virgin Mary – I've tried them all. Magicians, mendicants -- saints and sadhus – I've covered them all. Hayavadana's identity has always been in oblivion.

Here, Karnad makes fun of the Indian belief that we can obtain anything if we visit such holy places as mentioned above. Through ironic presentation of Hayavadana's endeavours to be a complete man, Karnad criticizes the Hindu concept of gods and goddesses. In this context, Mohit Ray rightly puts it:

“The demystification & religious beliefs and practices -- which must be seen as a reflection of modern sensibility – is at its highest in Hayavadana.”(Ray 9)

Socio-Cultural practices like Sati, Varna and the Patriarchal moral codes are portrayed with remarkable clarity and precision by the playwright. As Bhagavata says in the play....Padmini became a sati. India is known for its pativratas, wives who dedicated their whole existence to the service of their husbands. Veena Noble Dass says:

Thus both in its thematic and technical strategies, Hayavadana is an innovative experiment that offers a new direction to modern Indian theatre. This experiment proves that the traditional form need not be treated as precious artifacts but can be adopted to treat modern themes suitable for the urban Indian audience. (Dass 15)

Girish Karnad makes use of myths, mythologies and folklore as his source for his plays, not for the glorification of the chosen myths but to relate the myths to the present and to the past beliefs found in these myths. Karnad provides us with a glimpse of the past as well as its relevance to an understanding of the contemporary world. In conclusion it can be said that myth and folktale merge and come together and weave a rich tapestry of meaning that explore the modern predicament. Myth can never be dismissed as belonging to the past, because a great deal of its charm lies in its principal quality- that of repeating itself. Thus the old-aged myth reappears in disguise form to confront us. Myths and folktales always interpret human life, and in the contemporary context they interpret modern sensibility or the modern consciousness. In this way by exploiting myth and folktale in Hayavadana, Karnad presents various problems of contemporary society.

4. Nagamandala :-

Naga-Mandala is a tale drawn from the written and oral traditions . These folk tales offer adequate scope for Karnad's dramatic imagination to weave his humanistic vision about the down-to-earth aspect of human life. Naga-Mandala is shaped from two Kannada stories that Karnad had heard from A. K. Ramanujan in Chicago. The preliminary story of the Man and the Flames is the outer frame for the main story of Rani. Naga-Mandala, like Karnad's other plays, belongs to a period of India's

decolonization, cultural transition, modernization and the associated socio- individual issues and conflicts. The obvious components in the transformation are the conflicts associated with tradition and modernity, subjective and objective perceptions. It was also a period when the war-devastated West, wrestling with issues of freedom, anguish, subjective conflicts and subjective choices, generated various thought forms and art practices. The play also offers an insight into the private lives of women. It questions the patriarchal rigid codes which demand the fidelity of a woman to her husband but not that of a husband to his wife. Naga- Mandala is dense with literary allusions, mythical references and evocative sensual images that stimulate the sensory perceptions of the readers.

The opening lines of the prologue suggest that “the presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified” (Karnad 247). The temple is ruined and there is an implied suggestion that past has been forgotten. The urge is to introduce, reshape or create something new out of the ruins. The temple thus becomes the ‘Mandala’ where the play would be executed.

Naga-Mandala is not only about the male difficulty to trust and love women, it seems to be about the socialization process of both men and women, particularly in the Indian society, where marriages is more often than not the first experience of sex and love for most people. It also deals with the question of woman’s freedom in a patriarchal society. Myths and folk tales in a patriarchal society represent primarily the male unconscious fears and wishes and are patriarchal constructs and male-oriented. In these stories the women’s experiences and inner feelings are not given importance. They do not probe much light on women’s fears, anxieties and psychological problems. It is a remarkable achievement of Karnad that he adapts this

male-oriented folk tale in such a manner that it becomes a representation of the experience of man and woman in the psychologically transitional phase.

4.1 Patriarchal Hegemony in *Nagamandala* :-

Naga- Mandala centers upon projecting the female protagonist, Rani, analogous to Sita in the Ramayana. The story of Sita in the Ramayana represents the current situation of the woman in the Indian society. The theme of the chastity of woman is the central theme of the play. History is replete with such examples in which women have to undergo cumbersome ordeals to prove their virginity. According to the Ramayana, Rama elates Sita from Ravana's prison. But after this Rama abandons her by accusing her of "sleeping in another man's house." Thus Sita undergoes a self inflicting trial and throws herself on a funeral pyre in anguish, and her purity is proven when she is spared by the flames.

The play is a story of a young girl, Rani, newly married to Appanna and their gradual understanding and the role of the institution of marriage. This story is presented in the play by a women-narrator, a " flame" which has come to tell a story. The play begins in a temple on the outskirts of a village , where a passer-by stops at night for shelter. He then finds many tiny 'flames' entering the premises, who then start talking to each other. All the flames have come from different households in the village, who, after the lights have been put out for the night, escape their houses, to collect, gossip and have some entertainment. Each flame is a female, a story teller, sharing with the others her observations and new experiences. The stranger, a writer himself, enters into their conversation, and listens to a 'new' tale that has just escaped from an old woman's head.

The story in the play represents the life of a woman, a commodity to be passed on and so the flame begins her story of Rani and Appana. In the main plot of the play, Karnad subtly acknowledges that gender is one of the reasons that prevent a women from achieving identity and freedom in patriarchy. To eradicate these socio-cultural evils, he very dexterously makes use of myth and folktales . he endeavours to show through the story of Rani that the family in patriarchy is a hindrance in the way of woman's realization of her identity. Simone de Beauvoir, the twentieth-century feminist critic, agrees with the view that :“ in patriarchy the young girl does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature but by society and yet she does not repudiate it completely. Thus she is ‘divided against herself.’”(9) In India woman can endure almost any injustice while serving her husband or family. Karnad in the play expresses his concern and pre-occupation with the distress of women in patriarchal society in which a man enjoys privileges while a woman has to be content with only a few. The women are the worse sufferers because, more often than not, it is the husband who torments and deserts his wife for another woman. Commenting on the central theme of the play, Sarat Babu observes that Karnad through this play:

... not only exposes male chauvinism , the oppression of women, the great injustice done to them by men and patriarchal culture but also stealthily deflates the concept of chastity. He seems to suggest that matriarchy which according to Bachofen's theory of Mother Right is the lost paradise of mankind will come again.(Babu 56)

Patriarchy is such a force that has enslaved women for ages or even from times immemorial. These culture cultural fetters are very potent yet invisible. Karnad's powerful depiction of the agony and anguish experienced by Rani stand as a paradox for the predicament of a young girl trapped in the net of patriarchy. Rani is

married to Appanna, but is deprived of her personal and familial needs. She is trusted not even like a maidservant. She is locked in the house like a prisoner. She is, worse still, not allowed to speak with her husband. When she attempts to communicate with Kurudavva, first a dog and then a mongoose guards her house. All this while, the husband lives with his concubine. By the strange magic of Kurudavva's roots, however, Rani gets the love and affection of Naga who finally gives her freedom from oppression. But she is left confused as she sees her husband in two unconnected roles as a lover at night i.e. Naga in disguise of Appanna (her husband) and a stranger (her real husband) during the day.

In a folk tale, there is a magician or a snake that assumes the form of the Prince, enters the palace and woos the beautiful Princess, locked up in the palace. When the Prince becomes aware of this, he gets the snake/ magician killed and the Princess then sets him a riddle. If he fails to answer, he has to die. This existential crisis is treated in the folk tale in different ways.

In the play we see that although Naga (the king cobra) gives the love and affection that she needs yet he is no different than her husband Appanna when it comes to male chauvinism. As Rani is bewildered by the bipolar attitude of Naga(in the form of her husband), Naga assures her that what she sees is not a dream , neither a figment of her imagination. Naga firmly asserts to Rani , “ I am afraid that is how it is going to be. Like that during the day. Like this at night. Don't ask me why.” This commitment of Naga proves a milestone for him. He succeeds in his mission and like a male chauvinist is able to prove that women are foolish and ignorant. This attitude of Naga also reflects the fact how men of patriarchal culture suppress the intellect of women and how their ignorance give men the freedom of doing whatever they like. Mary Wollstonecraft expresses a similar view,

These[women] fellow creatures are deprived of education and are rendered weak and wretched” Simone de Beauvoir also supports the same view when she affirms, “ to see things clearly is not her business for she has been taught to accept masculine authority. So she gives up criticizing, investigating, judging for herself, and leaves all this to superior caste.(25)

These are the reason why the masculine world seems to her a transcendent reality, an absolute. When Rani gets pregnant, she is summoned by the Elders of the village for a trial to prove her chastity. This also reflects that a female has no place when it comes to judgment. It shows how patriarchy inadvertently works and favors males. Such honor and privileges for passing judgment were given and are still given by men and women cannot expect justice. Does the life of a woman have to be such an ordeal? Karnad seems to ask and to suggest that women’s bodies cannot be kept in safety lockers, while their men can be thieves elsewhere. Even the protest expressed by women is not given much importance as in the case of Rani when she disapproves Naga’s suggestion of pulling out the king cobra from the ant-hill. These violent repulsions are less effective and are less valued when compared to the violence expressed by men. Simone de Beauvior points out:

When a boy revolts against his father, against the world, his violence is effective; he picks a quarrel with a comrade, he fights, and he affirms his standing as subject with his fists: in a word, he imposes himself upon the world, he transcends it. But it is not for the adolescent girl to affirm or impose herself, and this is what fills her heart with revolt: she may hope neither to change the world nor to transcend it; she knows, or at least believes, that she is fettered – and perhaps she even wants to be; she can only destroy. There is

desperation in her rage; when provoked she breaks glasses, window-panes, vases-not indeed to conquer fate, but simply by way of symbolic protest.(36)

In the end, Rani is able to prove her chastity in the presence of the Elders and villagers. This stage of Rani's social integration brings her a new sense of respect and her own worth. This is another significant aspect of the Indian social and cultural life in its treatment of women. In Kiranth's words, "... an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can".¹¹ As a mother, Rani is seen in the last part of the story to be in command of the household with some authority and decision making power. Appanna even agrees to her rather strange demand that their son should perform an annual "pinda-daan" in the memory of the dead snake. The unique challenge of *Naga-Mandala* lies in its exposure of its own limitations as a work of art. In this sense, the play is attuned to its contradictions with regard to women's experiences of desire, and the modes of self-expression available to them within existing discourses. The play hints, indeed, that these contradictions lie at the heart of myths as a whole. It can be concluded that, though the ending of *Naga-Mandala* is not within the orthodoxy of Indian epic texts, the play must be studied and interpreted not only by keeping elements of Hindu philosophy as points of reference, but also by taking into account the cultural context of the Indian woman of today who seeks to fulfill her needs and aspirations.

5. Manipur Trilogy

It is to be noted that although Ratan Thiyam's plays are concentrated on war and violence, his real objective is to highlight or advocate peace only. His Manipur Trilogy links myth with reality. In his forward note to the Trilogy, eminent writer Dhirendra Nath Bezbaruah comments;

RatanThiyam's plays present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and the demands that a remorseless technological world makes on all of us. And through his presentation of opposites and conflicts, he puts across the clear message that unless mankind resists war, halts the rat race of frenetic existence and reverses the destruction of the only planet that we have, there is only one doom in store for us. (Bezbaruah, 1)

His plays exhibit local colours, local sense and sentiment, deal with some of the core issues of the region, and at the same time, they have a universal appeal. The ecology, myths and legends, tradition, mysticism s of his rootedness to tradition and culture.

As a playwright Thiyam seems to be very much concerned of the erosion of human values that has also resulted in the degradation of ecology. With a prophetic voice his plays have spiritual yearnings amidst the chaotic socio-political atmosphere of the present world. Apart from being a sensible theatre personality and an artist of high caliber, Thiyam is also an activist who is very much aware of and sensitive to various contemporary issues. Ratan Thiyam explores through the vibrant world of Manipuri tradition and culture. He rediscovers the folklores, myths and legends of Manipur and bestows on them a contemporary meaning. According to Bezbaruah:

The plays of Ratan Thiyam "present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and the demands that a remorseless technological world takes on all of us .And through presentation of opposites and conflicts, he puts across the clear message that unless mankind resists war, halts the rat race of a frenetic existence and reverses the destruction of the only planet that we have, there is only doom in store for us.... His lament of the diverse ways in which we have destroyed or perverted the world of today is heard against the

backdrop of angst presences in the mythical world of Manipuri deities and damsel, of mothers and wise men. In the ultimate analysis, his plays represent the victory of abiding traditional values over the present world of wars, conflicts, violence, greed and inequity” (Bezboruah 2008:1).

The plays in Thiyam’s Manipur Trilogy are Wahoudok (Prologue), Hey Nungshibi Prithivi (My Earth, My Love) and Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama (Nine Hills, One Valley).

5.1 Wahoudok (Prologue) ;The Creation of Universe:

Wahoudok (Prologue) is the first play of Thiyam’s *Manipur Trilogy*. It links myth with reality as it encompasses a wide spectrum of human evolution right from the birth of the universe to the modern times. It is a play with four scenes that tells, the Meitei traditional myths regarding the creation of the universe. In the ‘Prologue’ the rites and rituals performed by the Seven Old Women, the sentinels of Manipuri cultural tradition, shows Thiyam’s use of his native tradition. The ‘Chant’ at the very beginning of the play is reflective of the myths and legends of Manipur. Throughout the play Manipuri folk culture has been intelligently exploited and explored though that makes the play a richly colorful one. The play also echos the ecological degradation as Thiyam has been referring to this crisis in the play time and again.

At the beginning of the creation there was a vacuum full of darkness-the black void of space. Then the Almighty cried “Hoong”. “Hoong” is a term used for invoking gods at the start of incantation; it is also used as an explanatory word meaning ‘No’. As soon as the lord cried ‘Hoong’, suddenly a halo of seven colours appeared and there was light. He went on creating the celestial bodies, animals and plants. *Ojha Sheishakpa* (Master singer) then invokes the Divine Mother by reading out from

ancient manuscript (*Puya*) .The Divine Mother and her seven manifestation spring out of the book and joins the narration .Then following the advice of Mother Goddess, the sons of God created human beings in the image of their Father, the Almighty God and says:

We have prayed a few flitting moments

To the Lord

For something called

‘birth as a human being’.

Bereft of maltreatment

Without torturing

the guiltless ones

Without suppressing

the sentimental thoughts

Like the birds flying in the sky

with gay abandon

Establish an independent society. (Thiyam1. 14)

In the second scene, the Devine Mother blessed the human being and fed him ambrosia. It is an age when humanity and divinity together enjoy the bounties of nature and the earth was a perfect paradise for human beings. In due course of time human population increased that put pressure on food and natural resources. Human beings started fighting one another for a share of the ever-diminishing resources in

order to survive. While the creation of man and the formation of societies have been built into one part of history, the gradual destruction and collapse of civilization forms another, with speculative assessments on how a civilization came to an end. “The reasons might be varied natural calamities, socio-political and economic reasons” Ratan Thiyam said “ to my mind, war has always been a major annihilator of civilizations.”

The seven *Maichous* (the seven wise men) predict a bleak future for mankind in the third scene as they utter their lament:

1st *Maichou*: Wrong pens have started scribing on

departmental scrolls forcibly; the purses of

the dignitaries looking after the departments

have started bulging.

4th *Maichou*: Fire breathing from the mouths of the

rich nations with sufficient arms and military

power has started burning the weaker

nations.

2nd *Maichou*: Killing and wanton murder,

arresting and kidnapping would happen more

frequently, news of wars and devastations

would reverberate in all the four directions

and eight corners. (37-38)

The rapidly suffusing violence has disrupted and paralyzed normal life of the present day Manipur which is evident in the play. Infact, when one talks about the corruption in Manipur the expression largely refers to misappropriation of public funds by those in power, the people who hold official positions in the administrations and public offices and their cohorts. The land has also been plagued by problems like unchecked militancy, insurgency, ethnic riots and killings etc. which the people are still battling with. However when we think about the violence and corruption, the whole world is still grappling with it, and there is no solution.

Thiyam says : In my history of perception as it stands today , I cannot wish away the sinister clouds of nuclear warfare and a suicidal ecological degradation that loom over us. He remarked, in this globalized world of ours technical progress has reached new heights in every field of knowledge. Yet mankind reels under pain and suffering. There lies irony.

Just as the *Maichous* have predicted, we see that Scientific and technological development failed miserably in liberating human beings from such a disaster. This war for survival eventually brought political and economic crisis that led to a crisis in tradition and culture. The earth was no more a paradise; rather, it became an entity under constant threat of extinction. Through his portrayal of sufferings Thiyam wished to educate the people about the stark reality of the society and help them counter suffering, which he believes is at the core of everything. The problem of the society has thus been revealed through the conversation of the narrator and the *Maichous*, as the narrator says:

common people have to spend their lives,

sandwiched between a group of people
 who consider traditions as outdated and
 another group who mix traditions with
 religion and politics for their personal gain.(40)

The Maichous laments over the problems of the new generation and provides their advice in the play by saying:

1st *Maichou*: without past there is no present

2nd *Maichou*: without present there is no future.

3rd *Maichou*: Seeds sown in the past should be made to
 flower beautifully and its fragrance should
 be left for posterity

4th *Maichou*: The stream of thought, tradition and ethics
 built up by men of the bygone era during the
 last thousands of years is a flood of knowledge.(40-41)

People started introspecting. They went back to the history of human civilization for a solution in order to face these challenges before them. The worried, helpless people called upon their forbears, the seven wise men and the seven nymphs who had helped in creating human being and who were lost in oblivion by that time. They prayed their forbears to save them from this disastrous condition. This is the story in brief in *Wahoudok* told in four episodes: The birth of the Universe, the creation of living beings, the outset of human civilization and the modern times. The

play tries to justify the need of practicing traditional values as it is tradition, culture and age-old values that enable human beings to fight against the hazards of so-called modernization. Speaking on the importance of tradition, Thiyam says in an interview with Kavita Nagpal and Geeti Sen,: it is by the use of tradition that you try to drive away the evil factors.

5.2 *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love):

The second play in Thiyam's trilogy is *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love). The play addresses a very important global issue like terrorism and shows how it can lead to environmental degradation. It has also references to Manipur suggesting Thiyam's sense of belonging to his native land. The play unfolds the dark pages of the history of human kind. Human history has been a witness of a number of horrendous events. It has witnessed hundreds and thousands of people who died in the concentration camps during the Nazi regime in Germany and the revenge of the Russians when they raped fifty thousand German women, the Japanese attack of the Pearl Harbour and the American retaliation by atomic bombarding in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the genocide during the Khmer Rouge regime in Kampuchea, the terrorist attack and devastation of the twin towers of World Trade Centre in Ground Zero. Besides all these, human history has also witnessed the devastation of Manipur by the Burmese.

In the play seven sisters,(celestial nymphs)weave a cloth, the traditional symbol of love, peace and honour, in a loom for offering to the Almighty with a prayer to stop to war and bring peace to the earth. History is personified as an old man. The nymphs assuming the shapes of birds and human incarnates fly around the world especially to see the demolished 'Ottoman bridge on the Nertva river built by Sulyman, the sultan

of Mostar. The image of colossal Buddha at Bamiyan, and appearance of mother Teresa to accept the discarded baby are symbolic of man's awareness of ecological humanism, which has sustained the religion and life in this world.

My Earth, My Love can also be studied from an Eco-feminist viewpoint. Here women and nature are presented as synonymous. The wars and other man-made devastations in the history of human civilization have totally a negative impact on the ecology of the planet. Nature has been polluted and exploited by these devastations. Likewise, women are also made to suffer. In fact, they are the worst sufferers. One of the women characters speak of this pathetic condition of women throughout the long history of human civilization, which is dominantly patriarchal. The character's speech can also be seen as the voice of Nature:

First Woman: War, you have made us prostitutes.

War, you have made us prisoners.

War, you have made us bonded slaves.

Never-ending story of revenge and invasion

in the fight for supremacy,

women and children

are fed to war, the Demon.

The epic of the Earth and voluminous

Chapters of thousands of pages would not be

sufficient to describe the woes and sufferings

of women alone.”

How I, a weak and helpless woman,

Had to bear the deep internal anguish

with my mouth shut tight

when enemy’s murky blood forced its way

and started flowing in the stream of pure and

uncontaminated blood flowing in my body! (73).

The very process of creation is under threat. The future of civilization is bleak as both women and nature, that sustain life, are polluted:

“Oh! I’m at a loss.

Submerged in my blood,

Growing in my womb

It’s a leftover of some inhuman and

Characterless one. ” (74).

Women are the victims of circumstances. Men are so inflicted by the thought of power and dominance that in the process of acquiring their needs they keep women as secondary in all levels in which case, in anything they do the worst sufferers are women. Women are the worse victims of war and crisis, they not only suffer physically but in their anguish they are also not allowed to raise their voice. For ages Women become victims of the patriarchal order. These women see themselves as unworthy to rebel against male domination. She understands the hypocrisy of the

male dominated tradition. She is sometimes looked down upon only as a bed-partner and an object of enjoyment or merely as a slave.

5.3 *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley):

The last play in Thiyam's trilogy entitled *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley) expresses a mystical valley is encircled by ranges of hills, which is supposed to be once paradise. But during the passage of time this valley has been robbed of its glory and tradition due to unfortunate turn of events. Genocide, political instability, unemployment, extortion, corruption--- all these have become day- to- day affair in this land that is posing a great crisis before it. The common people are at a loss whose tradition and rich cultural heritage are at stake. The play evokes war, peace and social justice, it is about the violence and loss of cultural identity currently gripping Manipur, the state surrounded by nine hills. Through the play Ratan Thiyam intends to send a message to restore the lost glory of his native land. About the play Ratan says, "it is a poem by birth, a collage of many thoughts and a presentation of contemporary ideas without a conventional plot-a document of a restless society and its political turmoil where the sufferers are only poor people." (Gardner 111).

By reading this play one can also sense that it operate from the margins: the narrative discourse round marginalized events and marginalized people whether in terms of the under-represented or non-represented. This is in consonance of what Louis Gates has propounded. For him, a playwright / speaker is a "cultural impersonator". If read against the historical perspective of Manipur, it is based on the physical culture although it echos the global issues. His use of space eulogizes complicated networks of " models" or " maps". Space unleashes an array of contradictory messages. Each space alludes to a narrative, method, story or data in

unconventional ways. Thiyam's concept of space gives birth to a malleable responsibility to create, to invent, to produce some fluctuating tendencies. In the play, the woven reed mats that represent the nine hills surrounding Imphal create a strong sense of geography. For 40 years, the hill-state of Manipur has been embroiled in bitter strife between its various ethnic communities, and between Indian military forces and separatist insurgent factions.

In the play the *Maichous*, a mythical group of wise men who retreated from the world after perfecting its creation, are awakened from a long sleep to find all is not in order. One of the *Maichou* describes his dream where "...Peepul tree was on fire; dead bodies were floating in a row in the river;..."(87).

The other *Maichou* says:

The sound I hear is that of a mournful voice,

Children were swimming in the river of blood,

with no one to save them they were calling

for their mothers before being drowned.(88)

The *Maichous* in unison says:

Ah! Much adored oval-shaped land

Where golden rice plants sway forming

undulating waves,

a land encircled by nine ranges of hills

like a necklace studded with gems,

O beloved golden motherland,

the best of all. (94)

wise Men! There is chaos in the land. Before

the land is completely devastated, we have

to save it by following the prophecy of the

Almighty. (94)

The Seven Wise Men, who have been lost in oblivion so far and who are supposed to save the people and the land from this present crisis, call upon the celestial nymphs, the mothers, to help them write a new book of wisdom that may help the people to go back to their roots in order to rediscover themselves. After completing the book that contains the wisdom of freedom, peace, religion, politics, human rights, traditional culture etc. The Seven Wise Men disappear leaving behind this book to the younger generation.

The play advocates a revival of traditional values, cultural heritage and ancient wisdom in order to resist the evil forces. This quest of the people in search of their roots will enable them to rediscover themselves in a chaotic situation where people are facing an identity crisis. In the words of Bezbaruah:

Identity crisis, a sense of alienation are some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. Racial autonomy, cultural and linguistic conflicts, the problem of insurgency have been ravaging the region.

There is a conscious urge, in their works, of going back to their roots and it is used as a means of asserting an identity of their own. (Bezbaruah 1)

This is what is reflected in this play by Ratan Thiyam. The playwright is also concerned of the incidents of terror and war in the global scenario those have been leaving a devastating effect on human civilization. The play has references to a number of such terrorist incidents happened in different parts of the globe such as Dar-es-salam, the United States, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba, Tunisia, Karachi, Indonesia, Russia, Morocco, Spain, Istanbul, Saudi Arabia, London, etc. All these violent events have a long lasting devastating effect that has ravaged human civilization as well as has destroyed the ecological equilibrium of the globe. In the same interview with Kavita Nagpal and Geeti Sen Thiyam says that even sitting in Manipur he thinks about Indo-Pak relationship, about the Gaza Strip, about Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan or about a bomb blast in Bali. (Sen 2006:230) This concern, both local and global, of Thiyam as a playwright, heightens the effect of his plays. He is voicing the sentiment of the common people and seeks for a peaceful coexistence by saying:

With prayer to the Almighty

let's make a beautiful new ideal world,

manured with goodness and love,

where gentleness and peace prevail. (103)

In order to create such a world human beings must develop an ethic of living together with each and every objects of nature with complete harmony. They have to realize the mysteries of nature. The playwright recreates the mystical world of nature with the help of some touching images:

Dusk has fallen, the crimson sun

has set behind the hills.

Look, manifesting as the history of many eons,

the peace of many ages,

the hilltops are standing.

Night dew has turned into tears

Of bamboos and trees.(106)

An understanding of this mystical world of nature would make human beings feel empathy towards it and would inspire them to live in a perfectly ecological way by letting “the dwellers of hills and valley co-exist.” (107).

This ecomystical fervour is also dominant throughout this play. Towards the end of the play mothers sing lullabies to their children stating the glorious history of the land and all these past happening. The play ends with lamps lightened on the hill tops and in the valley to enlighten and remind the people of their glorious past. The burning lamps also enlighten the people with a desire to bring back those peaceful days once again.

The play may also be studied from an eco-feminist standpoint. Throughout the play women and the environment have been treated synonymously. They both are the innocent victims of terrorism and war waged by the patriarchal society all around the globe. In order to recreate a world of peace and harmony nature as well as women, are to be restored. And in the play finally it is the women, the mothers, the sentinels of tradition who play a pivotal role in restoring an order in the society. This is also

suggestive of human civilization's journey towards nature to restore an ecological equilibrium.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

‘Myth’ and ‘Mythical’ have long been commonly used in contexts opposing them to ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ a situation that is now considerably altered, in literary criticism at least, for one of two reasons: either because the truth content of the insight of myth is valued, or because the status of words like ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ is considered problematic. Myths are not just tales about gods and goddesses. They portray a culture, its abiding values, moral and philosophy and acts as a means of transmission across generations. According to Lilian feder, “...The mythical hero’s whole career is devoted to action which raises questions about life and indicates possible answers to those issues we usually avoid: death, our relation to time, destiny, freedom of will. For these answers he pays a price most men do not have the strength or courage to pay. The mythical figure’s conflict and actions are usually related to some social problem or issues, yet, a result of behavior that offends his society, or because of some deep suffering, he often becomes an outcast...” (11) In short, it appears that man created myths for quite a few reasons. These reasons include explaining the unknown, natural events and forces, to show the duality and pureness of human nature and the human mind, and to help societies maintain order and remain stable. To Bronislaw Malinowski “myth is a narrative resurrection of primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submission, assertions, even practical requirements.” (6) Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam uses myths and folktales to reveal the social realities. Both the playwrights have used themes related to the present social scenario to bring about social change and to make people aware of the need to

renovate the present social structure and usher in a renewed and better social system. . Both of them took an immense initiative in going back to the past in order to gain one's voice from the current blatant systems and also to allow the people to understand the misconceptions or misinterpretations of the past which is still prevalent in today's present context and that which has been a major concern of inequalities, injustice, leading to unending problems.

In the first chapter an effort has been made to discuss broadly the presence and the transition of theatre in India and Manipur and based on invaluable primary research, the chapter takes an in-depth look at the work of the two playwrights namely Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam and what made them to take interest in the field of dramaturgy. We see that both these two playwrights came from an age where the Indian theatre was suffering from acute identity crisis being torn between its ancient cultural past and its more colonial legacy, which gave birth to hybrid dramatic forms. Thus, both of them seeks to create a new Indian theatre by deriving inspiration from traditional roots and started to look for divergent ways of returning to the roots i.e. Indian myth, history, literature, social, political etc. and juxtaposing it to the contemporary issues. Time and again we see that in both of their plays they made an attempt to go back to their roots for quest of identity.

In the second chapter Girish karnad has highlighted a number of issues, but above all, he seeks for a Man's Search for Completeness in the play *Hayavadana* and this is best explained in terms of Existentialist theory. In Thomas Mann's version and the sub-plot of *Hayavadana* we see that completeness is impossible to achieve, because a man's identity or 'Self' is not characterized by the parts of the body. The union of both body and mind is essential to know who the person is or what the person wants. *Hayavadana* achieves completeness in a more comical way by

becoming a complete animal. Through the play Karnad examines the human predicament and laid great stress in the lack of stability and permanence in human personality. In the play we find how Padmini struggles because of being unstable in her choice. She is continually pre-occupied with deeper questions of life and existence, innocence and experience, good and evil morals and ethics. Her conscience pricked her now and then, making her to want more than what she has. This notion of alienation can be seen in Padmini's character not only in her conscious state but also in her unconsciousness which is expressed via the representation of dolls in the play *Hayavadana*. Not only Padmini suffered but we see that neither Padmini nor Devadatta or Kapila was free from the plethora of problems. Though the moral problem of identity crisis is solved, the psychological problem remains. They suffered continually because of the choice they made. Karnad also examines the psychological and sociological identity of the characters and when it comes to a matter of destiny for women, their destiny is pre-decided by the calculative norms of patriarchy. Without raising a voice of their own women are made to accept that imposed destiny. Karnad through the play tries to bring an awareness of rationality and humanity in contemporary society by letting go off the patriarchal shackles. Karnad also urge the people to be rational even in terms of their emotions and believes and customs.

The third chapter attempts to explain Ratan Thiyam's 'Manipur Trilogy' a collection of three plays namely *Wahoudok* (Prologue), *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley) and *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love) In these three plays Thiyam has tried not to narrate the history of the story but have tried to communicate the history or the tradition with a lot of the contemporary world, linking it in a different way. His thematic content in all of these three plays are mostly War, Violence or Terrorism, oppression and exploitation, anxiety and crisis of identity

etc. War has no end and he questions about what war has given us? He says that war is not always about guns and missiles. He is of the opinion that the main problem of the modern people is that we have become so individualistic selfish and subjective. The chapter attempts to throw a light on Existential theory. The theme of responsibility is discussed in the play 'Manipur Trilogy'. In *wahoudok* (Prologue), Basing on the creation of human being as innocent, and the Responsibility vested upon them by the deities, human beings were given the Responsibility to find meaning of their own life. It was each one's duty to choose their Actions which in the end may give freedom and peace or chain them with tensions and miseries. In order to know and understand one's predicament which is leading to an ever existential struggle one has to find the roots of the problems. One also has to realize the factors leading to such problems. Human beings were born free, free of choice and decisions but human beings failed to understand the deep meaning of living but man has to seek wisdom and knowledge from the past for which without past, the present is meaningless and without the present there is no future. 'Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama' (Nine Hills, One Valley), A tale of seven old women seeking a better future for their sons and daughters, the play ponders over the future of a mystical land of Manipur in which traditional, cultural values and history have been marginalized. The consciousness of these marginalized people has given them a new outlook towards their 'Selves'. This awareness created an identity crisis in their mind. The broad racial differences between India and Manipur and tenuous geographical link contributed to a sense of alienation, a feeling of 'Otherness' that subsequently gave rise to a political culture of violent separatism. The challenges faced by Manipur are both Internal and External, Internal challenges are those which we inherit from the primordial past. External challenges are born out of political, socio- economic and environmental

changes that have been experienced in the recent past. Both of these challenges thereby made the people precarious. Through this surrealistic play, Thiyam probes the sickness that ails his land and looks for a solution in the soul rather than in politics. In *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love) Ratan Thiyam Talks about conflict of war and violence, women have had the battlefield played out on their bodies for centuries around the world. As for the saying goes “ Rape is as old as war itself.” This conflict of sexual violence lead to devastating physical and psychological ramifications for survivors. Women and children are in fact, the worst sufferers during war. Ratan Thiyam thus voices all the concerns about society—political instability, terrorism, communal hatred and looks for solution in the most aesthetic possible way. Ratan thiyam projects to the human society that the solution to the problem of modern man does not lay in war and violence but in re-capturing love and innocence of the natural self. He insists that a solution can be found in a harmonious co existence of subjective Self / Being to that of the other beings. He wanted to project that without any vision a civilization is bound to perish .On careful analysis, we find that Thiyam is more concerned with understanding the gap between the public and the private conscience. He believes that the hope of man lies in the resting point between his Private and Social Selves. While understanding his plays we realize that there are two ways to deal with Society, one by reforming the structure of the society and the other, by revolutionizing the consciousness of man.

The fourth chapter “Human Identity in a World of Tangled Relationship” discusses on the theme of Identity in Post Colonial context. The colonized subject tries to reclaim their cultural identity as a sign of resistance to the colonial and imperial oppression. Identity however becomes the fulcrum upon which the postcolonial character revolves. Each character in the plays that is created suffers

from a certain lack of direction in their lives. They all seem to “suffer a crisis of identity in the absence of a strong traditional culture”. Colonialism operated differently for women and men, as women had to go through double colonization, which refers to two orders of reality: women are victims of colonial representations and they are equally oppressed by patriarchal norm. The play *Hayavadana* talks about the age-old discussion of self at one level and on another level it depicts the nation's effort to break away from the mark of cultural dominion obligated by the colonial past. The horse head creature embodies the postcolonial subject struggling to attest his identity engulfed in the midst of cultural identity and colonial influence: Hayavadana comes from two different worlds, but does not feel at home either. He represents the divided self of the post-colonial subject- a character attempting to decolonize his own mind. It also investigates the nature of humans and how they constantly desire for more and are drawn towards imperfection devoid of being thoughtful of what they actually own. In *Yayati* Karnad goes back to the ancient Indian culture, and explores the experiences and plight of women living in Phallocentric society as embedded in *Yayati*. The women in the plays are portrayed as the victims of phallocentric society who strives to revolt against the male dominated society and traditional concepts imposed upon them since Indian culture and traditions are male dominated, hardly giving any scope for women to exercise their freedom for fulfillment of desires and development of identity. The play reveals that the status of women whether belonging to past or present, educated or uneducated, high caste or low caste their condition is no better. It highlights various hidden and oppressive aspects of man-woman relationship. Through the play Girish Karnad envisages profound changes in traditional, socio, psycho cultural status of a woman and tries to establish the identity of a woman. Pooru the son of Yayati and the husband of Chitraleka battles with

personal as well as social identity. On one hand he want to seek for his own personal solace in finding his own self and on the other he is oppressed by the weight of dynastic tradition and the social identity of being an Aryan prince which he himself finds difficult to associate with. His choice has been suppressed by the strong patriarchal force. Even though he does not desire to be identified by his father's lineage yet as a son he was responsible to take up his father's place. Pooru's identity crisis can be noticed when he gave away his youth to his father Yayati. Karnad doesn't adhere to traditional glorification of the son's 'self sacrifice' rather raises question against this. The women characters, Devayani, Sharmishtha, Swarnlata and Chitrlekha are generic; represent the subalternity of woman in masculinist society where she is identified as "other", "non-man", or "second sex" despite her high position in the society. Karnad, by introducing the character of Chitrlekha and deviating from the original myth endeavors to expose the 'root-cause' of women's oppression, which is based strongly on patriarchal power politics. Even an educated woman still faces the predicament like all other women. She is still expected to do her duty and understand, or have patience. Her education is also used against her. Chitrlekha in Yayati, rebels against the unjust and gender-biased norms and structures of the Indian patriarchal society. In the play Naga-Mandala, the protagonist Rani lives according to the societal expectation by being submissive to her husband as her mind has been chained by the rigid socio-cultural customs and practices. Rani's docile nature reveals that women have lost their individualities and live a life as constructed by society. Indian society is not an individualistic society, and especially in case of a woman her claim to individuality is out of question. The emphasis is more on duty than on individuality, and resultant effect is repression of individuality. Rani is bound to live a mechanical life without questioning. She has no right or self

expression. Her identity and voice as a woman is suppressed, the voice of the “subaltern” in Spivak’s terms is silenced by male oppression, which gives no opportunity for the voices to speak from ‘the other side’. The play is not only the story of gender oppression but also of cultural dominance. In this sense, women in colonial contexts are doubly oppressed as they are subordinated not only because they are female but also because they are colonial objects. She is double-marginalized in the gaze of the ‘Other’ by the society. Not only is her identity of being a woman suppressed but she was forced to prove her chastity as well.

In *Chakravyuha* Ratan Thiyam shifts his focus from the mature anti-heroes to a young scapegoat/ martyr. Through the play, *Chakravyuha* he then interrogates the system, the state machinery, the power structures embedded in the society and finally the position of an individual in a society. In the play, Abhimanyu stands for the younger generations who have been induced to suicidal acts in the name of patriotism and heroism by the political leaders, the ‘power grabbers’. Through the story of Abhimanyu, Thiyam questions the notion of false heroism which drives the younger generation to sacrifice their lives and ultimately become a victim. Ratan Thiyam uses an episode from the Mahabharata to relate with contemporary issues of humankind and mark his protest against social injustice. His concern for the youth and its continuous betrayal by the older generation is predominant in the depiction of Abhimanyu. Thiyam wanted the readers/ audience to understand the character of Abhimanyu and to relate him with the present situations which the younger generation have been facing. He wanted Abhimanyu to represent society. The behaviour of the two Pandava brothers towards Abhimanyu symbolizes the war mongering leader, who out of his own interest compels his entire army and countrymen towards apocalypse. Further he opines that they even symbolize the corrupt political leaders who spin the

web of false promises and grip the general public before elections to attain authoritative power. We can find Abhimanyu's contemporaneity with the youths of today who are at some point of time manipulated by those in power and in the false notion of nationalism/patriotism are used as tools to meet their demands. We can say that Chakravyuha let us question the universally accepted notions about truth/dharma. What is truth/dharma? Duryodhana's search for truth/dharma is indicated through his "floor sweeping gestures. Also Abhimanyu's in his final speech says "the search for truth will remain unfulfilled"

Fifth chapter "Myth as Negotiation of the Present" discusses on Girish Karnad and Ratan Thiyam's usage of myths and folktales to reveal the social realities. Karnad's deep-rooted humanism allowed him to give voice to the silenced majority through his plays. His plays abound with subalterns especially women and lower caste people subjected since ancient time by patriarchy or upper hierarchy of the society. Karnad has not only exposed their subalternity but also fused energy in their lives so that they can speak; shifted their position from "*margin*" to "*centre*". In *Yayati*, Karnad has endeavoured to paint the character of Chitrlekha not as a meek and timid person who accepts masculine authority but like an enlightened women who has the ability to revolt against masculine authority. She does not passively submit to the male hegemonic behavior of her father-in-law, who tried to mould her according to his will. She is indeed a woman who displays critical and analytical faculty. The play articulates woman's sense and sensibility in an effective and impressive manner. The play indirectly speaks of gender discrimination due to which women have undergone untold suffering and unequal social life for centuries. Feminist interpretation could very well be seen in the strong characterization of Sharmishtha and Chitrlekha. Whenever Chitrlekha raises her point of view it seems to be the revolt of an

oppressed woman against tyranny and man's disregard for woman's sentiments. Even the delineation of Devayani and Swarnalata presents a strong base to consider Yayati as one of the modern classics to effectively bat for women's rights and privileges. The four women in the play strive hard to prove their point of understanding in relation to love, parental duty, caste and class struggle. That they rise against Yayati's hegemony over the state of affairs and his unbridled lust for power and women is itself an indication of woman's victory over man's (Yayati's) unjust use of power. The play *Hayavadana* reveals the essential ambiguity of human personality which is apparently shaped or shattered by the human environment. Fundamentally incomplete and imperfect, human beings search and yearn for attaining the unattainable ideal of completeness and perfection. They usually tend to seek the support of some supernatural beings or the other to succeed in their endeavor. However these external agencies, in their effort to help, seem to cause and complicate the identity crisis of the seekers further. It leads the seekers to tragic or comic ends. In the play, Karnad also mocks at the religious beliefs and practices. He boldly questions all the outdated practices and traditional mindset. This is best conveyed in Hayavadana's visits to different religious places to achieve perfection. Through ironic presentation of Hayavadana's endeavours to be a complete man, Karnad criticizes the Hindu concept of gods and goddesses. Socio-Cultural practices like Sati, Varna and the Patriarchal moral codes are portrayed with remarkable clarity and precision by the playwright. The play *Naga-Mandala* is not only about the male difficulty to trust and love women, it seems to be about the socialization process of both men and women, particularly in the Indian society, where marriages is more often than not the first experience of sex and love for most people. In the main plot of the play, Karnad subtly acknowledges that gender is one of the reasons that prevent women from

achieving identity and freedom in patriarchy. To eradicate these socio-cultural evils, he very dexterously makes use of myth and folktales. He endeavors to show through the story of Rani that the family in patriarchy is a hindrance in the way of woman's realization of her identity. In India woman can endure almost any injustice while serving her husband or family. Karnad in the play expresses his concern and pre-occupation with the distress of women in patriarchal society in which a man enjoys privileges while a woman has to be content with only a few. The women are the worse sufferers because, more often than not, it is the husband who torments and deserts his wife for another woman. Karnad's powerful depiction of the agony and anguish experienced by Rani stands as a paradox for the predicament of a young girl trapped in the net of patriarchy.

In Manipur Trilogy by Ratan Thiyam, the Manipuri folk culture has been intelligently exploited and explored. The play also echoes the ecological degradation as Thiyam has been referring to this crisis in the play time and again. In *Wahoudok* (The Prologue) Just as the *Maichous* have predicted, we see that Scientific and technological development failed miserably in liberating human beings from such a disaster. This war for survival eventually brought political and economic crisis that led to a crisis in tradition and culture. The earth was no more a paradise; rather, it became an entity under constant threat of extinction. Through his portrayal of sufferings Thiyam wished to educate the people about the stark reality of the society and help them counter suffering, which he believes is at the core of everything. The play tries to justify the need of practicing traditional values as it is tradition, culture and age-old values that enable human beings to fight against the hazards of so-called modernization. *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love) can also be studied from an eco-feminist viewpoint. Here women and nature are presented as synonymous. The

wars and other man-made devastations in the history of human civilization have totally a negative impact on the ecology of the planet. Nature has been polluted and exploited by these devastations. Likewise, women are also made to suffer. In fact, they are the worst sufferers. One of the women characters speak of this pathetic condition of women throughout the long history of human civilization, which is dominantly patriarchal. The play *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley) evokes war, peace and social justice, it is about the violence and loss of cultural identity currently gripping Manipur, the state surrounded by nine hills. Through the play Ratan Thiyam intends to send a message to restore the lost glory of his native land. By reading this play one can also sense that it operate from the margins: the narrative discourse round marginalized events and marginalized people whether in terms of the under-represented or non-represented. This is in consonance of what Louis Gates has propounded. For him, a playwright / speaker is a “ cultural impersonator”. If read against the historical perspective of Manipur, it is based on the physical culture although it echos the global issues. The play advocates a revival of traditional values, cultural heritage and ancient wisdom in order to resist the evil forces. The play may also be studied from an eco-feminist standpoint. Throughout the play woman and the environment have been treated synonymously. They both are the innocent victims of terrorism and war waged by the patriarchal society all around the globe. In order to recreate a world of peace and harmony nature as well as women, are to be restored. And in the play finally it is the women, the mothers, the sentinels of tradition who play a pivotal role in restoring an order in the society. This is also suggestive of human civilization’s journey towards nature to restore an ecological equilibrium.

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