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**Foregrounding the Background: Re-Historicising
the Fall of Vijayanagara Empire and Girish Karnad's
*Crossing to Talikota***

Saurabh Kumar Singh & Ashutosh Singh

The dramatic acumen of Girish Karnad is well established and widely acclaimed as he has been the one appointed as the World Theater ambassador of the International theatre Institute, Paris. In the scenario of modern Indian theatre Girish Karnad belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the 1960s and 1970s, and collectively endeavored to reshape Indian theatre as a major national institution. Though Girish Karnad exemplifies the transformative practices of his generation, but at the same time he has created a distinctive place for himself with respect to subject matter, dramatic style and technique, and authorial identity. It can well be justified when we look at the creative corpus of him. His plays can be grouped /categorized as the plays based on myth like *Yayati*, *The Fire and the Rain*, and *Bali: the Sacrifice*; plays based on folktales like *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Flowers: A Monologue*; plays employing contemporary settings like *Anju Mallige* (literally, 'Frightened Jasmine'), *Broken Images*, *Wedding Album* and *Boiled Beans on Toast*, and history plays like *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, and the last one (as Karnad died on June 10th 2019) *Crossing to Talikota*.

The myth, history and folk based plays of Karnad are designed to enkindle an ancient and pre-modern world that vibrates in contemporary contexts because of his contemporary consciousness which remakes the past in the image of the present. In his mammoth attempt to forge a theatre of our own, Karnad has discovered and re-invented the diverse patterns of Indian and world theatre by not only drawing on myths,

histories, and folktales, but also on the plays having contemporary settings and thus have rejuvenated, expanded and energized the poetics of contemporary Indian drama. Apart from being a celebrated dramatist he also has been a noted film maker and actor. He has been honored with the Padma Bhushan and was conferred prestigious Jnanpith Award for his literary contributions.

The last play of Karnad *Crossing to Talikota* focuses on his continuous engagements with the history of the Deccan. He in the preface to this play categorically states:

When one looks at the history of the Deccan during the last millennium, three events stand out, not only for their importance for the region, but for the impact they have had on the political and cultural map of the whole of India: the revolution created by the Lingayat- poet philosophers under Basavanna and the Vacanakaras in the twelfth century, the spectacular achievements of Vijayanagara Empire for centuries later, and the reign of Tipu Sultan, which was the last assertion of national pride against colonial onslaught. All three ended catastrophically but left legacies that continue to shape national life and thought even today. (ix)

We all know that Karnad has already written plays on Basavanna in *Tale-Danda* (in the wake of Mandal Commission) (1990), and on Tipu Sultan in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) which was commissioned by British Broadcasting Corporation to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Indian independence from British rule. Karnad could write his dream project/play *Crossing to Talikota* on the fall of Vijayanagara empire only in 2019 before his death. The play depicts the fall of this empire following the fierce battle at Talikota in the year 1565.

Here Karnad recreates this history while focusing on important different Royal households of Deccan Sultanates such as Ali Adil Shah, Sultan of Bijapur; Hussain Nizam Shah, Sultan of Ahmadnagar; Ali Barid Shah, Sultan of Bidar; Ibrahim Qutb Shah, Sultan of Golconda; and their relationships with 'Aliya' Rama Raya, the ruler of Vijayanagara. The dramatist rewrites the political history of this empire with utmost clarity of conscience. Being a dramatist Karnad has shown his dramatic excellence