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Introduction to Modern Indian Drama

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Good morning. Let us now sum up our discussion on Girish Karnad's plays. So here are the slides before you. Introduction Girish Karnad born 1938 born in Matheran, Bombay Presidency, belongs to the first generation of post independence playwrights, along with Badal Sircar, Vijaya Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, to name a few who had to negotiate with the legacy of colonial era

drama and draw from local folk and performance traditions to produce an articulation of a new form of post colonial Indian drama.

Karnad's plays that he wrote in both Kannada and English were translated by the directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B.V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Satyadev Dubey and so on. He also acted in regional cinemas and Hindi cinema. Many of his plays are including Yayati and Tughlaq, draw from puranic materials as well as historical figures and imagine them as allegories of individual moral dilemmas, existentialist unease, and disillusionment with the post-colonial state and corruption. Tughlaq was first performed in Kannada in 1965 and then in various other languages including Urdu, Marathi, English, Bengali and Gujarati. It closely follows an historical life of Muhammad-bin Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi who was known to be an intelligent and acute ruler but ultimately a failure as an idealistic administrator. There are many sides to Tughlaqs' character. He initially wants to be perceived as a secular humanist who wants to ensure Hindu Muslim unity by lifting the jiziya tax that is levied upon non-muslims and shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, a Hindu majoritarian city. The move ends in a nightmare of starvation, illness, disease and death for the people. Aziz a lowly Muslim washerman is the one who benefits from and subverts Tughlaq's attempts to create a utopian state where there are no social differences. The move from Delhi to Daulatabad alienates the Muslim nobles in Tughlaq's court who planned to assassinate him when he is praying just as the way Tughlaq assassinated his own father and brother during prayer all for the sake of an ideal that he says, to his stepmother.

Tughlaq is constantly trying to retain his power against his incestuous stepmother, his nobles, the court historians, Ziauddin Barani whose historiographical account of the Delhi Sultanate forms a structure of the play. And of course the Shaikh Imam Ud Din who's is his staunchest critic and also resembles him a very interesting aspect of the play. It is this resemblance that suggests the uneasy intimacy between religion and politics. The Sheikh is finally killed in the battle between the Sultan and Ain-ul-mulk, the Sultan's governor who seeks to avenge himself against the Sultan for being transferred from Agra to the Deccan and of course before the war even begins the Sheikh is killed and because he resembles the Sultan so he's mistaken for Sultan and he is killed in battle and of course then after that the war is ended and the Sultan's governor Ain-ul-mulk is reinstated as the governor of Agra. But the real double of Tughlaq is Aziz who manages subvert every one of his plans to create a secular and wealthy State. Aziz impersonates the Brahma Vishnu Prasad whose lands the Sultan seizes and returns and on whom the tax is lifted and is promised an official position of the court. Aziz also buys the Brahmin Visual Prasad's land in a backdated contract and takes advantage of the subsidies that the court gives to farmers. He also robs the poor people as they are relocating from Delhi to Daulatabad. He called defeats the copper currency. The Sultan decides to produce as Imperial currency and then finally he murders and disguises himself as Ghiyas-ud-din the Baghdadi calif that Sultan invites to bless and purify his new capital. Finally the Sultana is so impressed by Aziz's cleverness and his ambition to want more than he possesses more than he could possibly have at his own social class that it's which the quality sees in himself that he confers him a position in court.

Although Tughlaq tries to separate religion from politics in the hope of creating an egalitarian ideal, he subjects including the Sheikh and his Muslim nobles remain divided by communism

and hatred. Tughlaq is in fact only interested in being an exemplary ruler to his Hindu majority and not every community.

Tughlaq's character has resonances with the post-colonial situation India where one sees a secular humanism of Gandhi, the idealism of Nehru, and the brutal authoritarianism of someone like Indira Gandhi or more recently even Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim fundamentalist all rolled into the figure of Tughlaq.

Coming to the dreams of Tipu Sultan. The play is about how history is written and what counts as official history. The play frames a life and dreams of Tipu Sultan with the conversation between Colin Mackenzie a colonial scholar and the court historian Hussain Ali Kirmani. While Mackenzie wants to produce an objective history of Tipu Sultan that is devoid of emotion, the court historian Kirmani was close to the Sultan and uses his personal memories to write his history of the Sultan's life for the British who betrayed him. For him the book of dreams was personal and secret but for McKenzie it is just another native, authentic source to analyze Sultan as a strategic ruler. The Sultan's dreams are literary and religious allusions to his absolute power and victory over the British and of his father Haider Ali who berates him for sending his sons as hostages to Lord Cornwallis. His power was a function of his ability to seek and sustain alliances with the French who are known for the superior military warfare, the Ottoman Empire, China and so on.

Even though his official histories portray him as an intolerant Islamic ruler who imposed Islam as the official religion of his kingdom there are many accounts of his life and suggest he was an ambiguous figure. On the one hand he was known for his generous grants given to various Hindu religious institutions especially the Sringeri Mutt land grants to Brahmins and for protecting religious minorities in his kingdom but on the other hand he may have used Islam to forcibly convert those who resisted his power. He also left the jiziya tax from non-Muslims and had people like Poornaiya his Hindu prime minister as his trusted aide.

Tipu Sultan anticipates the might and threat of the British posed to the various Indian princely states and he realizes that the British want to divide them to impose their supreme rule. He is unable to settle the territorial differences between his own kingdom and the neighboring ones, the Maratha Empire whose southern extremities had been conquered and seized by Haider Ali and in his arm state of Hyderabad. They are thus unwilling to join forces against the British who exploit the strategic and economic differences between Tipu Sultan and his neighbors. Unlike his father who was more keen to modernize their warfare technology and centralized sovereign authority Tipu Sultan gave equal importance to trade and commerce. Tipu Sultan admires the unity and spirit of the young British soldiers and claims to have learned how to fight wars from the British. He realizes the basis for the power of the European colonial model of sovereignty especially the British had to do with their firm control of trade and commerce. Tipu imports silkworms and eggs from China to found his own silk industry. He's abreast with the recent technological innovations in Europe and wishes to train his own artisans and workers who draw from European technology. He also realizes the significance of the sea for trade routes and military reinforcements which is why he seeks to extend his kingdom to Kodagu and Malabar.

Tipu Sultan is finally betrayed by his own officers for a bribe to enable the entry of Lord Cornwallis and his forces with the support of the Marathas. Tipu's attempt to seek Napoleon's support in the war fails and finally Tipu has no choice but to offer his sons as hostages until he fulfills the conditions of the treaty between him and Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General of India which includes returning the territory that belongs to the Marathas and paying six crores of rupees as war indemnity. While the other princely states are richly rewarded when India gains independence, the Wodeyars are reinstated by the British in Mysore. While Tipu Sultan's descendants are exiled to Calcutta where they lead impoverished lives.

Coming to Hayavadana Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana is another rendition of the tale of the transposed heads in the Katha Sarit Sagara and is closely related to Thomas Mann's own version of the tale in his novel Transposed Heads. The play describes the dominance of the mind over the body in the main plot of the play which is a love affair between Padmini, the daughter of a merchant and two men Devadutta, a talented Brahmin and his close friend Kapila, the strong and athletic son of a blacksmith. The outer frame of the play is about Hayavadana the hybrid son of a mortal woman and stallion. He has the head of a horse but the body of a man and longs to be completely transformed into a horse. The play is about the human desire for completion and perfection which is symbolized through Hayavadana's desire to have the body and mind of the horse and Padmini who longs for an ideal man who is the perfect combination of a sensitive and aesthetic mind and an athletic body. Even Ganesha to whom the initial invocatory verse is dedicated has the head of an elephant and the body of a man. He is the God who removes obstacles and ensures completion of a task and yet seems incomplete with his broken tusk. Hayavadana finally loses his human voice as he turns into a horse with Kali's blessings but before he loses his voice he is condemned to sing the national anthem where his voice already seems to have been suppressed. He stands for the hybridity of or maybe the ambiguous position of the postcolonial subject who is divided between colonial legacies of thought and being and nationalist fervour.

Padmini first desires and marries Devadatta because he is Brahmin and because of his fine poetic mind. Later when the two men behead themselves, first Devadatta when he discovers to his jealousy that Padmini desires Kapila and next, Kapila when he sees his friend dead and fears he will be accused of desiring his friend's wife, Padmini accidentally exchanges the heads. So it seems like as if Padmini has accidentally exchanged head perhaps suggestive of her own desire for Kapila. When Kali brings the men back to life they have each other's heads and Padmini chooses the man with Devadutta's head and Kapila's body. But over the years, the mind dominates over the body; Devadatta loses his athletic physique while Kapila has grown strong and sturdy. The question of who is the father to Padmini's son also becomes a debate between the mind and the body. So was the child fathered by Devdatta's body or was it fathered by Kapila's head.

Padmini finds herself losing interest in Devadatta and again being drawn to Kapila. Her inner desires are dramatized through the dolls. Kapila is unable to erase his bodily memories of Padmini's touch.

So if you remember the dolls have used to actually dramatize Padmini's illicit desire for Kapila which comes from because when Devdatta touches the dolls they immediately register the fact that his hands are not rough. They are soft and it becomes soft again. They don't have the

masculine roughness of Kapila's hands. And you also notice how the illicit desires of Padmini can never be vocalized by her. It will always be vocalized by dolls or it is the Bhagwata the narrator of the play who in very often stands in for and steps in to speak for Padmini and some ways also legitimizes her desire for Kapila or rationalizes it.

The men are unable to live with each other sharing a part of the other's body and they end up killing each other in a duel, while Padmini commits sati for both of them, thus undermining the wifely chastity that is associated with sati.

So the fact that she commits sati for both men undermines the cultural equation between sati and wifely chastity.

In the fire and the rain. The Fire and the Rain is a modern adaptation of the story of Yavakri from the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. In the Mahabharata, Yavakri, the son of the sage Bharadwaja acquires knowledge of the Vedas after years of penance and uses his knowledge to molest the daughter-in-law of the Sage Raibhya whom he resents. Raibhya creates a Brahma Rakshas, a demon and a spirit in the form of his daughter-in-law to kill Yavakri and after Yavakri's death, Bharadwaja curses Raibhya that he will die at the hands of his own son. Parvasu who mistakes his father who is wearing deer skin for a deer, fatally shoots him with an arrow. Parvasu falsely accuses Aravasu of patricide for which Aravasu has to perform penitentiary rites. Aravasu prays to the Sun God and when he is granted a boon, asks that Yavakri, Bharadwaja and Raibhya be brought back to life.

In Karnad's adaptation of this tale, Yavakri and Vishakha, Raibhya's daughter-in-law, have an affair that begins before and continues after her marriage to Parvasu. Parvasu has abandoned her after a year of sexual gratification to preside over the fire sacrifice. In his absence, she meets Yavakri, who has not overcome his desires after years of penance, and their meeting rekindles their love and desire for each other. When Raibhya sends the Brahma Rakshas to kill Yavakri, Yavakri is initially unfazed as the magical water in his jug has the power to immobilize the demon. But Vishakha empties the jug desperate to save him and entreats him to rush to his father's hermitage, which is the only place where he will be safe from the Rakshas. But before he can enter the hermitage, he is intercepted by Andhaka, the blind shudra man who raised him but is ironically unable to recognize his footsteps. Yavakri is impaled by the Rakshas.

Parvasu kills his father intentionally out of hatred and finally chooses death to expiate his patricide in the end when Aravasu destroys the sacrificial altar in a frenzy of revenge. There is the parallel story of the love between Aravasu and Nittilai, a tribal woman. Aravasu is on the verge of getting married to her and is willing to renounce his caste community for her love. But on the day of his marriage he gets late as he has to perform the funeral rites for Yavakri. Nittilai is married to a tribal man from her community.

Aravasu has to perform his father's funeral rites and do penance for his brother's act of killing their father.

So note the irony here because Aravasu is willing to actually give up renounces his Brahminical equal status. He is also stigmatized ostracized from the sacrificial altar and the community because of his desire to to be until become an actor and here he is actually performing the Brahminical funeral rights for his cousin Yavakri.

So Aravasu has to perform his and also his father.

Aravasu has to perform his father's funeral rites and do penance for his brother's act of killing their father. When Paravasu falsely accuses him of patricide, he is beaten up and exiled by the other Brahmins but he is rescued by Nittilai who chooses him over her husband.

Although Aravasu seeks revenge, Nittilai prevents him from furthering violence. Arvasu acts in a play, for which he loses his caste purity, that alludes to the fatal rivalries between Raibhya, Paravasu and Yavakri. Arvasu wears a mask and plays Vritra, Brahma's son with demoness. The Actor Manager plays Indra and warns Arvasu that the mask could come to life and control him.

In the inner play, Indra is jealous of Vishwarupa, who is Brahma's son with a mortal woman, for his virtuous and wise reputation. Vritra always accompanies Vishwarupa to protect from Indra's plans to kill him. But Indra tricks him and kills him while he is pouring oblations in the sacrificial fire. Paravasu reacts to the scene, as Arvasu desecrates the sacrificial area along with the tribals completely possessed by the demonic spirit of the mask.

Nittilai manages to take the mask off but she is soon killed by her husband and brother who have been waiting for her to make an appearance. The Brahma Rakshas pleads to Arvasu asking him to request the gods to free him from the bondage of life and death, which Arvasu does, at the cost of sacrificing Nittilai and his happiness with her. Indra is pleased with the performance and tells him either Raibhya, Paravasu and Yavakri can be brought to life or Nittilai. Arvasu chooses the former, and Nittilai becomes a scapegoat for the redemption of the Brahmin community, and Vishakha is chastised for her transgression.

So while Brahmins are equated with ambition and greed for power and violence Shudras are equated with those who are kind and compassionate and form the basis for the collective community perhaps free of cost.

Coming to the last play by Girish Karnad Broken Images.

Broken Images takes the form of a monologue between Manjula and her virtual onscreen image. The play focuses on the politics of choosing to write and publish in English as opposed to regional vernaculars like Kannada.

While Manjula is an established Kannada writer who teaches English in a college, her disabled sister Malini is an English writer, whose novel Manjula plagiarizes and publishes under her own name.

Manjula openly confesses to the interrogations of the image, which is a symptom of her repressed unconscious, that she is not ashamed of writing and publishing in English, which has won her fame and money. There is a distinction between the image that reveals Manjula's unconscious desire for fame and power, the way Manjula presents herself as someone who is innocent and the transformation in our perception of her through the image's interrogations of Manjula.

Manjula represents the insecurity of non-English language writers and readerships who are threatened by the growing power and popularity and wealth of English language books. Manjula remembers feeling neglected by her parents who focused all their attention on her sister who led a life of disability. She is also jealous and suspicious of Malini's intellectual relationship with her husband Pramod.

The image finally declares it is Malini, and says Manjula was decimated the moment she read Malini's novel. The play is also about the mediated relationship between the author, the text and the reader. Manjula identifies herself with one the cousin's in the autobiographical novel, where she sees herself reflected as a shallow and petty woman. The text takes on the life of the author, and gains meaning through the figure of the reader, who is not a biographical figure but a signified just like the author, and is incorporated into the text. The relationship between languages, author and text is mediated by power.

These are the references that were used for this section on Karnad.

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Next we will continue with our discussion of another playwright who was very important again belonging to the first generation of playwrights Mahesh Elkunchwar.

Thank you.