

Postcolonial Subalternization in the Plays of Girish Karnad

Dr. Krishna Singh

Associate Professor of English,
Govt. P.G. College Shahdol M.P. (India)

In the postcolonial theory subaltern studies occupy significant place; it derives its force from Marxism and Post-Structuralism. Subaltern studies is primarily concerned with socio-cultural and historical aspects of the society incorporating the entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office, or in any other way. It is the subject position that defines subalternity. Even when it operates in terms of class, age and gender, it is more psychological than physical. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect mark the lives of subaltern, even when they resist and rise up, they feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives or spokesperson in the society they live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings. The subaltern has become, M.H. Abrams has remarked “a standard way to designate the colonial subject that has been constructed by European discourse and internalized by colonial peoples who employ this discourse”(237). Subaltern is a British word for someone of inferior rank, and combines the Latin terms for “under” (*sub*) and “other” (*alter*). A recurrent topic of debate is how, and to what extent a subaltern subject, writing in a European language, can manage to serve as an agent of resistance against, rather than compliance with, the very discourse that has created its subordinate identity.

Antonio Gramsci used the term first to denote subordinate position in terms of class, gender, caste, race and culture. And it was popularized by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak’s essay entitled “Can a Subaltern Speak?” (1985). She has used the term for the colonized / the oppressed subject; working class, blacks and the women whose voice has been silenced. Spivak has, observes B.K. Das, “laid stress on ‘gendered subaltern—that, women, who are doubly oppressed by colonialism and patriarchy in the Third World countries” (143). G.N. Devy considers that the most important issue she has raised is the “Subalternization of Third World literature” (221). “Worldling” of the “Third World” in Spivak, observes Pramod K Nayar, “is the process through which the local population was persuaded to accept the European version of reality for its modes of understanding and structuring its social world” (192). In 1970s Subaltern studies began in England and subsequently English and Indian historians collectively worked on the subject. Oxford University Press, New Delhi brought out *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (in three volumes) edited by Ranjit Guha and 8 volumes were added later. In 1888, *Selected Subaltern Studies* was published by OUP, New York and Oxford edited by Ranjit Guha and Spivak with a forward note by Edward Said. In the early 1980s a group of intellectuals known as Subaltern Studies group successfully attempted to write a historiography that was different from the colonial one. The theories of nationalism, identity and ethnicity come in for

close scrutiny. Asian colonial history owed much to Spivak and Ranjit Guha's energy, Lodge and Wood acknowledge, "in deconstructing imperial accounts of 'native' rebellion and customs to allow other voices freer play" (414). Gyan Prakash explicitly links the subaltern studies project with Postcolonial studies in its combination of Post-Structuralism, Marxism and archival research. The focus is on the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office. It looks at "history from below", that is the history of those common people (tribals, lower classes /castes and women) that have been silenced in accepted histories of the nationalist movements which is elitist –dictated by the dominant groups, foreign as well as indigenous. Leela Gandhi explores the mechanism of the Subaltern Studies group which,

Sketched out its wide- ranging concern both with the visible 'history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity' and with the occluded 'attitudes, ideologies and belief system...Subaltern Studies defined itself as an attempt to allow the people finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of the truly oppressed (1-2).

Time has changed. Both the colonized and the women have now spoken. B.K.Das rightly remarks in this regard: "the subaltern in the colonial era have become intellectuals in the postcolonial period...thanks to the writers of the Third World countries who write in English today. And literatures in English by the Third world writers have gained acceptance among the Anglo-American intellectuals today. It is in this subaltern studies have acquired a new dimension (146-147).

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*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Fire and the Rain* etc. amply exemplify the above notion. Devayani, Sharmishtha and Chitrlekha in *Yayati*, Kapil and Padmini in *Hayavadana*, Rani and Kurudavva in *Naga-Mandala*, lower caste people in *Tale-Danda*, tribals, Nitilai and Vishakha in *The Fire and the Rain* Mahout in *Bali: The Sacrifice*, Chandrawati in *Flowers*, Malini in *Broken Images* and Rahabai in *Wedding Album* 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. The paper endeavours to analyse Karnad's handling of the subaltern issue and remedial measures suggested in his plays.

Yayati, the first play of Karnad which is based on the myth of Yayati in the Mahabharata is highly 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 masculinist 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. Devayani, the Queen has to endure every sort of

humiliation and becomes insane; Swarnlata is tortured by her husband's unfounded doubts of infidelity, insults and finally deserted; Sharmishtha is an easy prey of Yayati's filthy sexual gratification. Though Chitrlekha also faces similar conditions, 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” (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” (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. Sharmishtha precisely explains the condition of women, “A woman dead (Chitrlekha), another gone mad (Devayani), and a third in danger of her life (Sharmishtha)” (68). Jealously and racial conflict also weakens their lot. The play reinforces the centrality of women. 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” (Introduction: *Collected Plays, vol. One*, xvii).

Padmini and Kapila define subalternity in *Hayavadana*. Padmini is unlike of Rani of *Naga-Mandala*. She belongs to a family of leading merchant of Pavana Veethi of Dharampura. Though, in the play she enjoys commanding position, she is close to the spirit of Cleopatra of Shakespeare, succumbs to Dionysian tendency and indulges into cuckoldry. She camouflages love of Devadatta, his poetry gets new charm and vitality. She is so fascinating that Devadatta finds her “beyond my wildest dreams” (14) and swears “if I ever get her as my wife, I will sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra...”(14). Even Kapila finds “Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati—all rolled into one” (16) and warns Devadatta, “She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel” (19). While talking to Padmini Kapila rightly says: “I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapil's strong body”(38). The fact is soon discovered—her temptation to Kapila's muscular body; she is real Padmini of Vatasayana:

PADMINI: [*Watching him, to herself*]. How he climbs—like an ape. Before I could even say ‘yes’, he had taken off his shirt, pulled his *dhoti* up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back—like an ocean with muscles rippling across it—and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless.... He is like a Celestial Being reborn as a hunter.... How his body sways, his limbs curve—it's dance almost.... No woman could resist him. (25-26)

Devadatta senses her leaning towards Kapila but he feels helpless. Devadatta and Kapila represent Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies respectively hence Padmini's hunger for Kapila

is very outcome of her own nature. But in the temple of Kali, after Devadatta and Kapila's sacrifice, she is so much embarrassed to see the melodramatic scene and frightened to sense the sarcasm of people, anticipating people would blame her for both deaths. She instantly decides to kill herself. Transposition, no doubt, was a very frightening experience to her, yet she felt she had the best of both the man: "My Devadatta comes like a bridegroom with the ornament of a new body.... It's my duty to go with Devadatta. But, remember I'm going with your [Kapil's] body"(41), "fabulous body—fabulous brain" (43) and "male smell" (43) express her nymphomaniac ecstasy and lust for sexual gratification. Even Doll I and Doll II comment on her psychic reactions—dreams, phantasies and reveries in which Kapila figures "climbing a tree!", "dived into a river" (50) symbolically let loose Padmini's suppressed sexual desire and hunger for Kapila. Soon she is disillusioned and finds herself, like Devadatta, Kapila and Hayavadana a victim of "mad dance of incompleteness" (57). Even after marriage, she can't resist herself and goes to the forest with her son and enjoys extramarital sexual relation with Kapila cuckolding her husband for four or five days. In a duel Devadatta and Kapila exchange forgiveness and kill each other. Subsequently, Padmini finds herself nowhere. She suffers from alienation and perplexing situation erupts. She is abetted to perform *sati*—for the sake of the glory of her son or she couldn't live without Devadatta and Kapila: "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 lives to come. You haven't left me even that little consolation" (63). Padmini's practice of *sati*, comments Bhagavatta, "it would not be an exaggeration to say that no *pativrata* went the way Padmini did" (63). Female Chorus justifies Padmini's misdemeanor: "Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?.... I have neither regret nor shame" (64). Karnad attempts to give due space to women in human society where she is marginalized since time immemorial. Her plays present evolution of women and quest for better position in the world.

Kapila, the son of the iron-smith Lohita, is "dark and plain to look at, yet in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing, in strength and in physical skills he has no equals" (92). His physical features and traits of the personality mark-off his social identity and inferior position in the society contrasted with Devadatta's "comely appearance, fair colour, unrivalled in intelligence.... Only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidhysagara...felled the mightiest pundits of the kingdom in debates on logic and love, having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit...apple of every eye in Dharampura" (2). Devadatta and Kapila represent two opposite extremes—one soul another body. Their friendship is exceptional, "One mind, one heart" (2). Despite his closeness with Devadatta, there is always a deep-rooted feeling in Kapila's mind that he belongs to lower caste. He doesn't dare to sit on chair with Devadatta rather sits down on the ground happily. Even Devadatta satires his profession: "What do you know of poetry and literature? Go back to your smithy—that's where you belong," (13) reminds subalternity of Kapila. He is an easy target of Padmini's lust. His arguments in favour of body, after exchange of heads, are declined instantly in *Vrihadkathasaritasagara*, but Karnad doesn't

accept solution offered by Vikram rather ridicules such an easy answer to a serious problem. Kapila's arguments too get place in the play. Here, the playwright has shifted subalterns to the central position. The passing reference of Hayavadana's mother and Hayavadana's anxiety enlarges the subaltern world.

Karnad's *Naga Mandala* is a sociological study of Indian women ; richly textured dramatic transmutation of two folk tales of Karnataka usually narrated by women while feeding children in the kitchen. It not only exposes the ugliness of a society where woman is considered "second sex", "other", "subject", "non-man"---women are taught in the process of being socialized, to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology—e.g. male superiority; and so conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination. Patriarchal dominance has prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibility. The play also suggests remedial measures and slaps the orthodox society by an act of reconciliation between Rani and Naga.

Karnad was well acquainted with feminist ideologies and the havoc wrought by patriarchal ideologies in Indian society. *Naga-Mandala* appears to be a battleground where ideological conflicts, power relations, and the struggle for identity have been dramatized effectively. In *Naga-Mandala* Rani—the female protagonist, and Kurudavva—the other female character, both are generic, represent the extreme physical torture and mental trauma, struggle for their identity as a woman, as a wife, and as a mother. Four Flames, Story, and the Man also reflect the sufferings and exploitations of women. Rani is treated in a slavish manner, imprisoned like a caged bird, neither she is allowed to talk to outsider nor outsider is allowed to do the same. Despite her chastity and fidelity, she is forced to face the Naga Ordeal. Appanna (Rani's husband), Naga (Cobra), Dog, Mongoose, Three Village Elders and the orthodox society have been used as the forces of subjection. Karnad has treated 'eternal—triangle' unlike of G.B.Shaw. Shaw in *Candida* gave a different twist to 'eternal—triangle' where *Candida* is a New Woman and finale brings the impression that conjugal love must be fostered and glorified whereas Karnad exposes the hollowness of male- chauvinism. Rani's acceptance of Naga as her own is a curt reply to the question of extra-marital relation in which only males are allowed to go freely, even after getting married, to concubine (as Appanna does) whereas the yardstick of morality is imposed upon women. J.D.Soni judiciously comments that Karnad in the play tries to "fuse artistically dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity" (76). Prologue introduces Four Flames, which are animated, symbolic representations employed to report the sufferings of women.

The tragic sufferings of women are extended to other female character—e.g. Kurudavva, who is an example of wisdom and philanthropy. Nobody in the society has eyes to see Rani's laceration at the hands of her philandering husband, but blind Kurudavva alone can see the truth. She extends motherly love and care to Appanna as well as to Rani. She is also the victim of orthodox society where the role of a woman is subservient and marginalized. Except her son Kappanna, there is none to look after her. Even the Village Elders treat her cruelly and unsympathetically while she has lost her only son. *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad commented, express:

A distinctly woman's understanding of the reality around her, a lived counter point to the patriarchal structure of classical texts and institutions. The position of Rani in the story of *Naga-Mandala*, for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles—as a stranger during the day and as lover at night. Inevitably, the pattern of relationships she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be something of a fiction. The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into. (Introduction to *Three Plays: Naga Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq*. 17)

Krishnamayi attempted to redefine the insurgent female psyche in an androgenic milieu and concluded: “Gender equality still remains a myth...the discussion of the relationship between man and woman have been prescribed by man not by woman. Man who is ruled by the mastery-motive has imposed her limits on her. She accepts it because of biosocial reasons.” (64-65)

The play *Tale-Danda* endeavours to highlight the subjection, role, upsurge, and revolution of subalterns (i.e. lower caste). Under Basavanna, a social reformer of the 12th century assembled a congregation of poets, mystics and social revolutionaries and philosophers formed the *Lingayat* faith, giving impetus to courageous questioning and social commitment. The abolition of caste, equality of sexes, rejection of idol worship, repudiation of Brahminism, and of Sanskrit in favour of the mother tongue i.e. Kannad; were the main tenets of subaltern revolution. The resentment reaches its climax when Madhuvarsa, a Brahmin gives his daughter Kalavati in a marriage to an untouchable—Sheelvanta. This last act opposing caste hierarchy, not just in theory but in practice also, brought down upon the wrath of orthodox; the movement ended in terror and bloodshed. The playwright wants to suggest whenever such important issues are not considered seriously and solutions offered by these thinkers go unheeded, disastrous results would follow again. *Tale-Danda* draws its story from the life of Kannada saint Basavanna who resisted ideologically against the prevailing evils of caste hierarchy. Explosive situations after the official endorsement of Mandal Commission Report and Mandir issue in 1989, motivated Karnad to concentrate on subaltern issue. And the historical context, deeply implanted in his mind, which proved catalyst to the plays of Karnad was predominated with, Karnad himself explains: “...tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of the political freedom was achieved” (Introduction to *Three Plays: Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq*.1). Drawing our attention to the genesis of the present, the play illuminates the endemic affliction of the caste and class politics infecting our body politic in the medieval period of history. It was the strong sense of history, which has nurtured in Karnad a dominant will for social justice, a sincere compassion for the socially oppressed and subaltern. Karnad's astute transformation of the metaphysical into the contemporary dimensions and history into trans-historical perspective is, not linked to the Western philosophical matrix, but, Vanashree Tripathi comments, “playwright's understanding of a long tradition of humanism in India...since the earliest periods” (25).

The play reveals, in the name of Varnashrama Dharma, lower caste people are socialized to internalize the reigning superiority of upper caste. Mallibomma though adopts *Lingayat* faith, can't think to enter Jagdeva, a Brahmin's house. King Bijjala tried to ascend to higher Varna from barber to Kshatriya but failed:

For ten generations my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight. Bribed generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so they could have the caste of Kshatriya branded on their foreheads. And yet you ask the most innocent child...what is Bijjala?...instant reply will be barber. One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again; a barber – a shepherd. (14-15)

Among subalterns tribals, shepherds, cowherds and low caste untouchables figure. Resistance has two forms: ideological and physical. It was *Lingayat* faith (Shaivistic) in sharp opposition to Brahminical faith; (better known as Sanatan Dharma) founded on humanitarian grounds, open to all groups, austerity in living, trying to crumble the wall of untouchability, exposing rigidity and discrimination in traditional faith. They rejected anything “static in favour of the principle of movement and progress in human enterprise” (Preface to *Tale-Danda*). They tried to come out of caste venom and religious fanaticism. The devotee of the faith was called *Sharana*. Mallibomma (a tanner by birth), Kakkaya (skinner), Haralayya (cobbler), Kalayani (Haralayya's wife), Sheelvanta and King Bijjala are *Sharanas* from lower caste. Jagdeva, Basavanna, Madhuvarsa and Gundamma are *Sharanas* from higher castes. This ideological resistance touches climax when Sheelavanta, a cobbler is married to Kalavati, a Brahmin; and immediately violent reaction starts. Antagonistic forces are *vis-à-vis* to gain power – hence hegemonic war begins. Physical resistance of *Sharanas* comes to dismal end. It was a conflict between deep-rooted orthodoxy and new, and innovative ideas. The movement was not matured enough. Even Basavanna doubts the success of the marriage—i.e. hypergamous (*Pratilom*); it (movement) went into young hands of Jagadeva- a violent revolutionary who kills King Bijjala and finally commits suicide. *Sharanas* lost their drive, mutual differences and in-fights, prompt reaction from orthodox Brahmins against *Sharanas* led by young Sovideva; Basavanna's resignation from the movement and power politics brings failure to the subalterns' resistance.

The violent reaction of Brahmins suggests even now subalterns are no match to defy the exploitation and discriminating behaviour of the orthodox Hindu society. Basavanna also anticipates:

Until now it was only a matter of theoretical speculation. But this – this is real. The orthodox will see this mingling of castes as a blow at the very roots of varnashrama dharma. Bigotry has not faced such a challenge into two thousand years. I need hardly describe what venom will gush out, what hatred will erupt once the news spreads. (38)

He adds further: “we have a long way to go” (39) “we are not ready for the kind of revolution this wedding is. We haven't worked long enough or hard enough”(44). Damodara Bahatta, Queen's priest and Manchanna Karmita, a Brahmin adviser to the King represent Hindu

fanaticism and strongly plead for conformity with Vedic tradition—a measure to suppress subaltern revolution:

Civilization has been made possible because our Vedic tradition controls and directs that self-destructive energy. How large-hearted is our dharma! To each person it says you don't have to be anyone but yourself. One's caste is like one's home – meant for one's self and one's family. It is shaped to one's needs, one's comforts, and one's traditions. And that is why the Vedic tradition can absorb and accommodate all differences, from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari. And even those said to be its victims have embraced its logic of inequality. (56)

Sovideva, the Prince wins the game of power politics exploiting the Hindu Braminical sentiments; but subtly used to perpetuate Vedic traditions. With the coronation of Sovideva the triumph of the oppressor rings loud. Sanskrit chanting from ancient scriptures denotes the re-stabilization of caste order at least for the time being till another revolution.

M.K.Nayak has criticized the play because, he considers, “It fails to offer solution to the problem” (45). Pranav Joshipura has also expressed the similar view: “...instead of deliberating on how to abolish the Varna system, Karnad presents it in a startling manner without any solution...to treat an age-old problem without suggesting any solution raises serious doubts about the capacity of a writer” (69). Karnad who extends the tradition of Henrik Ibsen and G.B. Shaw obviously leaves it to the audience to decide; yet he gives remedial suggestions through Basavanna's speeches. Basavanna's doubts, concerns and embarrassment regarding subaltern revolution clearly reflect playwright's concerns. Vanashree Tripathi judiciously comments:

Tale-Danda highlights the neglected portion of history that has immense bearing on the history and politics of contemporary times. Focusing on the class, caste, and gender configurations in A.D.1166, the play proves the subterranean and insidious motivations driving the diverse caste groups in complex power equation” (28).

[She further observes *Tale-Danda*] a thesis play that intends to revive upon the Indian stage the age old debate on the virtues and vices of casteism ...an endeavour to do justice to history—a stark reminder of our past, of the struggles and movements that bestowed upon us the freedom to think and question. The play is an invitation to look at ourselves—our empty present and our futurelessness. (91-92)

Sharanas lived a life of contradiction because of their mixed identity. They had taken on their new sharana identity without shedding off their old one completely, so that the ones from the upper castes still looked down upon those from the lower castes and those from the lower castes could not forget that they were untouchables and detestable. Rupalee Burke finds Karnad a playwright with a difference whose motive behind playwriting is to catch the

Pulse of the socio-cultural-historical-political facets of India and Indian life...his plays have always aimed at providing message in the contemporary context....In *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda* Karnad employs history to comment on the pathetic and corroded state of Indian modern day politics, and through which he engages in an intellectual debate of our time. (105-107)

Basvanna's vision of egalitarian society and spiritualized politics was the vision of Karnad himself, expressed by Bijjala:

Basvanna wants to eradicate the caste structure. Annihilate the varna system. What a vision! And what prodigious courage! And he has the ability. Look at those he has gathered around him: poets, mystics, and visionaries. And nothing airy-fairy about them, mind you. All hard-working people from the common stock. They sit together, indifferent to caste, birth of station. (15)

"*Tale-Danda*", Karnad acknowledged in an interview, "is not necessarily an attack on caste. It is a question of 'Why', why is it that some of our problems seem perennial"(138). He raises many questions and few oblique suggestions provides but more are left to the audience to think and get them resolved. He is rightly called the 'cultural administrator'. Y. Somalata's observation of *Tale- Danda* is remarkable:

In this play, Karnad discovers the vital relationship between contemporary society and literature...adept in choosing the dialectical opposites such as tradition and modernity; conservative and reformist; spiritual and physical; ideal and pragmatic; constancy and flux for unfolding a logical sequence in poetic terms...centrifugal and centripetal forces of change and resistance are directed against caste order in Hindu society. (137-138)

Vishakha and Nittilai belong to two different socio-cultural backgrounds in *The Fire and the Rain*. Vishakha is the wife of Parvasu, a Brahmin, and daughter-in-law of Raibhya, a learned ascetic whereas Nittilai hails from a tribal community. Despite cultural polarities, both experience similar socio-psychological taboos and restrictions and feel bounded. For Nittilai, subjection is more intense—apart from patriarchy her inferior position in social hierarchy deteriorates her standing in the society. Though the play is based on C. Rajgopalachari's prose retelling of the *Mahabharata* especially the myth of Yavakri in Vana Parva, Karnad constructs a story of passion, loss, and sacrifice in the contexts of Vedic rituals, spiritual discipline, social and ethical differences between human agents, and interrelated forms of performance still close to their moments of origin, yet the treatment of feminine world, images of women, their subjection and changing status is not less remarkable. Vishakha, an archetypal character and Nittilai, Karnad's invention symbolize the subalternity of women that has been highlighted by the playwright exposing the ugliness in our society restricting their place and creativity in human society.

Vishakha loves Yavakri but his decision to get knowledge directly from gods initiates him into ten years' penance leaves Vishakha helpless, alienated—"sick of silence" (141) and deeply frustrated. Subsequently, she is married to Parvasu who offers up Vishakha's life, first to his sensual appetite and then to his lust for fame:

VISHAKHA: The night of the wedding, my husband said to me: 'I know you didn't want to marry me. But don't worry. I'll make you happy for a year.' And he did. Exactly for one year.... Then on the first day of the second year of our marriage, he said: 'Enough of that. We now start on our search' He used my body, and his own body, like an experimenter, an explorer. As instruments in a search. Search for what? I never knew. To be the Chief

Priest of the fire sacrifice... in all seven years he hasn't come back... I have become dry like tinder. Ready to burst into flames at a breath. (123)

The meeting of Vishakha with her former lover Yavakri infuriates Raibhya who grabs her by her hair and start beating and kicking her. She is condemned as “whore” (127) and “bitch” (138) thereafter left to be handled by her husband. She is an easy prey to Raibhya's anger over his rejection as the Chief Priest by the king. He creates *Brahma Raksha* to kill Yavakri. Vishakha is bold and acknowledges her meeting with Yavakri before her husband candidly. Nittilai, a tribal girl of 14 loves Arvasu, a Brammin of 18. Both work in a troupe. She is exposed to face the world and know how cruel and ruthless it can be. Only Andhak appreciates their love; the elders of Nittilai's tribe are anxious to interrogate Arvasu. Hers is a romantic love, a world of teenage phantasies ignorant from caste and cultural distinctions. On the contrary, Raibhya condemns her as “savage” (126). When Arvasu fails to appear before Council of tribal Elders; they decreed, “Nittilai will marry another boy—of our own tribe” (135). She is handed over to a tribal boy and married against her wishes. She has no say. Her protest touches climax when she runs away from her husband, family and everything for the sake of love. But, as an Indian married woman, she doesn't want to cuckold her husband. She transcends from petty sexual gratification and romantic love and develops pious relationship with Arvasu:

NITTILAI: Arvasu, when I say we should go together—I don't mean we have to live together—like lovers, or like husband and wife. I have been vicious enough to my husband. I don't want to disgrace him further. Let's be together like brother and sister. You marry any girl you like. Only please, Arvasu—spare a corner for me. (153)

Nittilai's brother and husband chase her like hounds. She is frightened of their evil designs. She is offered a ghastly death despite her innocence: “the husband pulls out a knife, grabs Nittilai by her hair and slashes her throat in one swift motion. He then lets her drop.... She lies there, her eyes open, bleeding, dying like a sacrificial animal” (172). The killing of Nittilai endorses still today patriarchy and long established social conventions are strong enough to crush women's liberty or any kind of adventurism. But the quest of the woman for emancipation has started. The play also presents sudras and tribals as subalterns in Varna hierarchy.

In *Bali: The Sacrifice* Mayhout, a low-caste, elephant keeper of the King is always haunted by his inferior birth and ugly looks hence feels alienated in the world. His reaction is a natural outcome of his long subjugation and humiliation: “People mock at Mahouts. Call us ‘low-bor. But where would all your princes and kings be without us, I want to know. What would happen to their elephants? No elephants. No army. No pomp and splendor. No processions. No kings! Ha!” (80). He, like Kapil is dark-complexioned but muscular that tempts women to have mating with him. He is a good singer. He had plenty of women to seduce. Even Queen succumbs to this temptation and cuckolds her husband King. *Flowers* exposes the social mentality against womenfolk—the body of the woman is always a target of man's hungry, lustful eyes; plots to exploit her sexually and make her an easy prey. Even the holy Priest, unnamed in the play cockets his wife and feasts his eyes and indulges in filthy sensual gratification with Chandrawati, a courtesan. The Priest's wife knows everything, but she has to tolerate passively. Malini of

Broken Images brings home the idea that subalternity emanates at home when Manjula Nayak, the only character of the play who writes stories in Kannada, but for the sake “fame, publicity, glamour...power” (265) prefers writing novel in English. She indulges into plagiarism and secretly publishes a novel out of Malini’s fragments. Radhabai of *Wedding Album* represents subalternity of the maid.

Karnad has great concern for the caste or gendered subalterns in his plays and he has brought them from margin to centre through his plays. His plays are the medium where through he raises socio-political and cultural problems prevalent in Indian society and calls upon us to discuss and evolve a common consensus rather than provide a ready made answer to the problem.

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