

ARTICLES

1

Girish Karnad's *Flowers*: The Artistic Self and Dharma

ABHINANDAN MALAS

ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad's *Flowers*, like *Broken Images*, is also a monologue that leads us deep into the human unconscious and presents before us the conflict between the inner artistic self and the Dharma or religion. Karnad very clearly presents the flow of human thoughts that reveals the psychic discourse of a person who is deeply rooted in Indian Dharma and who is torn between his inner self and his devotion to religion, God, and family. In this play, instead of delineating the female sexual desire like *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad focuses on the male desire for carnal love. The Priest obtains great satisfaction in displaying his art while decorating the linga. The linga not only provides the basis for religious devotion to him but also gives him opportunity to realise his artistic freedom. In *Flowers* the phallic symbol Shiva Linga becomes a medium for attaining salvation. Its benignity and benevolence drive him to the complete renunciation of the worldly desires and strive for attaining Moksha or the Mukti. Total submission to God comes after the arousal of the sense of guilt within the psyche of the individual. The Priest is more burdened with the unexpected and impartial benevolence of God ushered on him than with the sin of adultery and sacrilege. He cannot think himself going unpunished by God. He also cannot exist without realising the freedom of his artistic self. The state of passivity and the sense of guilt compels him to denounce the world and look for the answers to his question in total identification with God.

Keywords: Human Unconscious, Male Desire, Artistic Freedom, Dharma, Moksha and Mukti, Shiva Linga, *Flowers*.

Flowers: A Dramatic Monologue is an important instance of Karnad's use of Indian myth and folktales as a backdrop for the development of the human character and portrayal of the human unconscious. *Flowers*, like *Broken Images*, is also a monologue that leads us deep into the human unconscious and presents before us the conflict between the inner artistic self and the Dharma or religion. Karnad very clearly presents the flow of human thoughts that reveals the psychic discourse of a person who is deeply rooted in Indian Dharma and who is torn between his inner self and his devotion to religion, God, and family. The monologue, of which the Priest is the only speaker, may be termed as a dramatic one. This is because the monologue reveals various incidents and aspects of the speaker's psyche that are quite striking and often shocking and unexpected.

In this play, instead of delineating the female sexual desire like *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad focuses on the male desire for carnal love. In *Flowers* Karnad returns back to the world of myth and folktales after exploring the human unconscious through the use of modern technologies and equipment's in *Broken Images*. While making an observation on *Flowers* in comparison to *Broken Images* Aparna Dharwadker writes,

Flowers, in contrast, returns to the world of folklore, and is the first work in this genre to focus on male rather than female desire, thus registering a small but important shift in Karnad's dramaturgy. The legend of Veeranna on which the play is based belongs to the Chitradurga region, and became widely known when the Kannada writer T. R. Subbanna (known as TaRaSu) included it in his 1952 novel, *Hamsageethe* (Swan Song). (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: xxxi)

In *Hamsageethe* the protagonist is a singer called Venkatasubbayya, and early in the narrative Subbanna briefly inserts him into the tale of Veeranna, 'archaka' of the Hidambeshwara temple. Dharwadker gives us a brief outline of the story of Priest Veeranna on which the plot of *Flowers* is based. The outline is as follows,

The married priest has been passionately in love with a mistress to whom he takes the offerings from the temple after the evening prayers. One day the *palegar* (chieftain) discovers a hair in the *prasada* and demands an explanation from Veeranna, who claims that the hair belongs to god. Challenged by the chieftain to prove the truth of his claim, the priest in turn challenges god to display hair or accept his head in punishment, and enters a meditative trance to the accompaniment of Venkatasubbayya's song. When the chieftain arrives the next day to expose Veeranna's lie, the *Shivalinga* has indeed sprouted long silken hair, and when (urged by the singer) he pulls out a tuft to test its authenticity, blood begins to ooze from the crown of the *lingam*. Overwhelmed by a sense of sin at having injured his deity, Veeranna beheads himself in the sanctum. (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: xxxi)

In *Flowers* Karnad has presented a triangular confrontation between a Priest and two women. Though the play *Flowers* is based on Subbanna's *Hamsageethe*, Karnad makes a thematic variation to bring out the issues of triangular relationship between the Priest, Chandravati (the Courtesan) and the Priest's wife, and the working of the human unconscious. From Dharwadker's narration it is clear that there is a deep influence of Subbanna's play on Karnad's story of *Flowers*. While making an observation on the difference between the two plays Dharwadker says,

In Subbanna's version of the legend the priest's wife and mistress are mentioned only in passing at the beginning. The heart of the narrative is the triangulated contest between the priest, the temple singer, and the chieftain, and the contrast between the Brahmin's moral certainty and the insecurity of the shudra king. Karnad preserves the core event of the *shivalinga* sprouting hair, but recasts the legend as a conflict between religious devotion and erotic love, undergirded by the priest's guilt at his daily betrayal of his wife. The monologue is a swan song of another kind, a recounting of the nameless priest's experience as he prepares to drown himself in the temple tank. (Karnad, *Collected Plays* Vol. 2: xxxi-xxxii)

I

Karnad's *Flowers* begins with the Priest (nameless in the play) making a retrospective analysis of the past events. He is sitting within the temple narrating his thoughts. In the beginning the word 'I' occurs several times that emphasizes his power and control. He has spent all his life worshipping the Shivalinga and discouraged any kind of foreign intrusion. He has always loved the isolation and has enjoyed in accepting the challenge to decorate the linga with flowers, which is not an easy task because the linga has got a slippery surface. He says,

So making the flowers stay on it is not easy and I have often lost track of the hours devising new ways of covering it with flowers. 'The *linga* is my step-wife,' grumbles my wife.

But she is also proud of the fact that my obsession has brought me recognition. The Chieftain of this region, who lives in the fort up on that hill, is an energetic young man. He is deeply devout and is a great admirer of my floral efforts.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 244)

The Priest obtains great satisfaction in displaying his art while decorating the linga. The linga not only provides the basis for religious devotion to him but also gives him opportunity to realise his artistic freedom. Sudhir Kakar very beautifully interprets the concept of artistic creation in his book *The Inner World*, where he says,

Artistic creation is traditionally viewed as a product of the artist's *sadhana*, similar to the yogi's meditation. Thus the ancient treatises on sculpture and painting enjoined the artist not to be distracted by the world around him, by the transience of external 'reality', but first to journey inward, to know and make vivid the inner landscape before turning his observing eye to the outside. The subjects of the outside world are then to be transformed into artistic creation through creative appreciation rather than through literal reproduction of 'clinical' reality.

(Kakar, *Inner World* 31)

The Priest's intense devotion to God and the seclusion that he maintains to worship a *linga* is a meditation or *sadhana* that he performs. He is an artist and he shows his art in devising various ways in decorating his god.

His wife is not the only admirer of his art. The Chieftain of that region is always charmed by the Priest's creative art. Every day, at sunset, the sound of the canon declares the coming of the Chieftain. With the sound of the cannon the Priest gets ready for the worshipping rituals. That gives him a full hour to get ready for the pooja. His wife attends to the basic ritual requirements such as jawsticks and camphor and the placement of wicks in different silver plates for the *aarati*. After taking a bath in the tank, in the wet *dhoti*, he sits down in the sanctum surrounded by baskets of flowers. He says, "Everything else then recedes into hazy, scarcely-felt distance and for an hour there is only the *linga* and me." (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 244) It is an everyday ritual. The Chieftain arrives in time and watches the pooja. He appreciates the artistry of the Priest in laying out the flowers in a particular innovative pattern. After taking God's *prasada* the Chieftain and his people leave. After they have left the Priest carefully picks the flowers from the *linga*, tie them in a bundle in his thin muslin shoulder-cloth and makes his way to Chandravati's house. Chandravati is a courtesan whom the Priest refers as, "...the only breach in the invisible defences I have built around my private domain.) (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 245)

The introduction of the courtesan is a dramatic turn in the narration of the monologue. The Priest himself calls it a "breach in the invisible defences" he has built around his private space. It is hard to belief that a Priest who is so devoted in his work and art of worship can commit the sin of sacrilege by betraying his God and family and indulge in carnal love with a courtesan. The Priest gives an account of how the courtesan came to his life. He says,

She came into my life during the Shivaratri celebrations...The inhabitants of the courtesan's quarters are the last to be admitted, so I knew she was one of them...I wanted her. I had never lusted for a woman before and so felt emasculated by this sudden weakness.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 245)

Everyday he looked at her and she smiled. Once she did not come for a couple of months. The Priest could not resist his sexual impulse and left for her house in the darkness. At her house the Priest was highly impressed by the physical beauty of Chandravati. She said,

I had heard of your great skill in flower decoration. I have seen it now for myself and am overwhelmed. I can't step into the inner sanctum and you cannot be seen in my company in public. So would you kindly spare an evening for me, just one evening, come here and show me how you do it?

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 247)

After this the Priest started paying regular visits to Chandravati. It was not just the sexual drive, in terms of Freud, that led him to Chandravati's house. Chandravati provided him with a greater scope to realise and show his artistic work in decorating a female body.

It is this artistic self of the Priest that activates the sexual drive or the libido of the unconscious. It also releases the Priest from the humdrum daily routine of worshipping the Shiva Linga and returning to the unattractive wife. The surface of the Shiva Linga is plain that does not hold the flowers easily thus reducing the scope for the Priest to bring variety in his creative artistry. But a female body has curvatures and contours that provide the artist with the scope to realise his creativity. It is the artistic self that motivates the ego of the Priest to seek for pleasure. It also relieves him from the confinements of Dharma and family bonding.

The Priest obtains pleasure but the reality continues to intrude into his ego. His concern for the Shiva Linga, Dharma

and family continues to visit his consciousness during his pleasure games and artistic innovations. While decorating the courtesan the Priest realises,

And even as a whole new world of patterns was opening up to me, thoughts of the *linga* kept passing through my mind. I pitied it, felt exasperated at its unimaginative contours. Why did its shape have to be so bland and unindented that one had to balance garlands precariously on it and improvise superfluous knots to hide some ungainly strings? Why didn't the Lord offer a form which inflamed inventions like Chandra did?

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 250)

It is evident from the above words of the Priest that with Chandra's body he gets a larger opportunity to realise his artistic freedom. It also provides his ego and unconscious with greater pleasure. But is also aware of the unholy nature of his way of artistic realisation. He wished the Linga could have provided him with a better scope than Chandravati to realise his artistic freedom. It also becomes clear that sexual pleasure and the satisfaction of the sexual drive are not the main reasons for his attraction towards Chandravati. It is the better opportunity for realising his artistic freedom and satisfaction of his artistic self that drives him towards the opposite direction.

The pleasure that he obtains is mixed with pain. Every time he pays his visit to the courtesan he is aware of the sin and injustice he does towards his wife and his family. His wife, whom he considers as unattractive and monotonous, is devoted to him as he is devoted to his God. It is not that his wife has not noticed the increase in the varieties of flowers that he uses in his worship. She is obedient and never utters a word. The Priest relates his distress to think about his wife,

It had taken only a couple of days for the news to spread through the surrounding villages. I knew the main reaction would be of amazement that a beautiful and obviously wealthy courtesan should take up with such an impecunious lover. Eyebrows would be raised at my good fortune and virility. All this mattered little to me. But I was

distressed at the pain I was causing my wife. I loved her. I knew I had made her a target of vicious gossip. I sensed her anger, her humiliation and felt ashamed of myself. Conversation in the house was reduced to fragments and we stopped even looking at each other. But there was nothing I could do.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 251)

The Priest obtains pleasure from satisfying the libido and also from the realisation of his artistic freedom. His engagement with the Courtesan and the consequent activities of decoration leads to wish-fulfilment for the Priest. As a result of that his unconscious fails to realise the reality.

One evening the Chieftain did not arrive in his usual time. The Priest and his wife waited for him and he did not come. The Priest was torn between his unconscious desires and his duty. The anxiety was growing. The Priest asked his wife to go and feed the children and she acted accordingly. After she was gone he went into the inner sanctum of the temple and sat in front of the Shiva Linga. The Priest was temporarily relieved from the anxiety in the company of his God. He says,

I sat here, right here, on the top step of the temple tank and waited. After a while the prolonged inactivity and the increasing apprehension began to play upon my nerves. It was unlike the Chieftain to be so late. I had to do something. So I went to the inner sanctum and started to tie the garlands on the *linga*. I felt better. It brought back the warm security of being in the company of an old friend. I was talking to the *linga*, wondering what could be detaining the Chieftain, when my wife arrived.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 252)

It was nearly midnight and the Priest could not wait anymore. "...Chandravati would be anxious, leaning against her front door exactly as my wife was doing in the temple courtyard at the moment." (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 252) He performed the pooja and other rituals and after sending his wife back home he left for the courtesan. But, things did not go according to his anticipation and the firing of the cannon

shattered the tranquillity of the night. He was in Chandravati's company in the latter's house. Chandravati was asleep but the priest could recognise it. It was an alarm for him. The Priest narrates, "It was barely more than a distant thud and it didn't even raise a ripple in her sleep. But, I had spent years training my ears to catch its faintest reverberation and responded to its peremptory summons instantly." (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 255). He hurriedly collected the flowers from Chandravati's hairs and her body and rushed towards the temple. The Chieftain was arriving at any moment. His anxiety is evident from his words,

Frantic, I started pulling out the flowers from her hair and piling them on my shoulder cloth... 'He is coming,' I said without wasting any time on looking at her. 'I must rush.' Every moment was precious. I rapidly calculated in my mind that I would have half an hour to set things right once I reached the temple and hoped my wife had not slept through the cannon shot.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 255-256)

He started decorating the linga. Everything was revealed to his wife. In his narration the Priest says, "we had already performed a pooja with these flowers. They were now the leavings, polluted discards. What further use they had been put to in Chandravati's house she didn't need to try too hard to imagine. To place them on the *linga* again was a desecration." (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 256).

The Chieftain arrived and apologised for being late. The Priest again performed the pooja. The Chieftain was not tired and watched everything with devotion, respect and a smile on his face. Suddenly the Chieftain was serious. He had discovered a long hair among the flowers. He asked for an explanation. The conversation is stated below. The Chieftain said,

'I did not know God had long hair,' he repeated.

I gave the only reply possible under the circumstances.

'If we believe that God has long hair,' I said, 'He will have long hair'.

There was a pause and then he said, 'Prove it.'

‘I will,’ I said, ‘Would your majesty allow me grace till the next new moon?’

‘Done,’ he replied, ‘I shall be back at the cowdust hour on that day.’ He then placed the flower back in the plate and left.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 257)

The Priests pleasure hunt had stopped. Dharma intruded into his consciousness and threatened his psychic stability in the form of the Chieftain. Chieftain became the instrument through which the reality principle worked.

It is interesting to see that while the reality threatens his unconscious and his ego, Chandravati, the source for all his pleasure and artistic inspiration, does not provide any relief to the Priest. The Priest has to return to his “old friend”, the Shiva Linga. Dharma, in the symbolic form of the Linga, returns to the Priest as the only source of relief. But, what happens at the end is God’s benevolence.

After the Chieftain had left that night the Priest kept himself confined within the temple for twelve days and did not allow anyone, not even his wife, to disturb him. He, “locked up the door of the sanctum and sat down, cross-legged, in front of it and prayed.” (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 257). The Chieftain arrived along with his men on the desired date and the Priest led them into the inner sanctum where the Shiva Linga was established. To everyone’s astonishment it was found that the Shiva Linga had sprouted hairs and, “...waves and waves of jet black hair came billowing out, their tips gently eddying and swirling in the evening breeze.” (Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 258). Someone plucked a hair to check its authenticity and blood started oozing out. Everything happened very rapidly. The Chieftain and his people accepted the Priest’s divinity and asked for his blessings, Chandravati disappeared. After narrating this the Priest now returns to his present state from where he started narrating the whole thing.

The Priest has attained sainthood and has achieved God's blessings. But, he can no more exercise his artistic power to create new patterns of flowers, neither on the female body nor on the *linga*. He has realised that the courtesan was a source of threat to him. He used to remain anxious with the thoughts of Chandravati due to the sense of guilt that parallelly developed along with his act of pleasure hunt. The *linga* was not a source of threat to him and he realised it as his good "old friend". But, now he has lost both of them. Chandravati has left the place and he has already desecrated the *linga* by decorating it with the "polluted flowers". He has also lost his wife's faith and respect. The world may think it differently but he knows that nothing is beyond her knowledge. God has not punished him. But he needs to do atonement or "prayaschitta". He cannot bear the burden of God's benevolence anymore. In her paper "*Flowers: A Dramatic Monologue: Patriarchal Power and the Nature of Sacrifice*" Jasbir Jain describes the actual situation the Priest is in. She writes,

How does sainthood sit on him, in the final instance? Not easily. No longer is he happy to be where he is as he was at the beginning...Instead, he begins to resent his sainthood. He confesses his guilt – his desecration of sacred space, his cruelty towards the two women he has loved – but he is not willing to accept any condescension even from God...

(Mukherjee 356).

It is true and quite evident from the Priest's words,

The Chieftain was right to question me, to humiliate me publicly if he so decided. I am guilty of gross dereliction, of sacrilege. Guilty of cruelty to the two women I loved. Why then should God cast His vote on my behalf? Because I loved him? Has God the right to mock justice in favour of love for Him? Or does he have a different logic? If He does, it's not fair that He should expect me to abide by it, not demanding to know what that logic is. Such Grace is condescension even it comes from God. Why am I worthy of this burden He has placed on my shoulders? I refuse to bear it. God must understand I simply cannot live on his terms.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: 260).

The conflict between artistic pleasure and dharma is displayed through the whole action of this dramatic monologue. God's grace has made him realise that while his pleasure hunt through the realisation of his artistic freedom will lead him towards a threat, his returning back to dharma and God will lead him to a passive existence where there will be no fulfilment of artistic desire. The Priest has entered into a realm of total passivity. He only wants to find out the answers to his questions that he has placed to himself in the above quoted speech.

II

Karnad very skilfully uses the Hindu myth and religious ceremonies to bring out the erotic desires of the unconscious. In this regard Jasbir Jain in her paper "*Flowers: A Dramatic Monologue: Patriarchal Power and the Nature of Sacrifice*" observes,

Hindu myths have always juxtaposed eroticism and asceticism, especially in the worship of Siva, who embodies within himself both creation and destruction...Hindu myths of creation are based primarily on the sexual act and the body – incest, dismemberment and separation. Seduction and surrender to seduction also form a major undercurrent in the Hindu mythology with the meditation of sages being interrupted by beautiful *apsaras* (heavenly female dancers) and goddesses. This places the female in the contrary force – a force which lures the male and which has to be conquered or dismissed before as full realisation can take place of the male principle.

(Mukherjee 346-347)

The above evaluation of Hindu myths finds a true dramatic expression in Karnad's *Flowers*. The phallus or the Shiva Linga worship leads to total devotion and asceticism. The Priest initially leads a life of total seclusion. But, the desire to realise the artistic freedom and the consequent pleasure in creativity leads to the fulfilment of erotic desire. God's benevolence makes the Priest realise his guilt. But, it also destroys his artistic self and transfers his ego into a state of passivity. This gives rise to

another psychological conflict. The Priest comes into conflict with God and His way of doing justice. This conflict gives rise to anxiety in him that motivates him to seek the answers of his question in death. This leads to his self-sacrifice by drowning into the water. Dharwadker writes,

As in Karnad's earlier folk-based plays, the relationships in *Flowers* form a pattern of triangulated desire, this time between a man and two women. The drama highlights the spiritual and aesthetic intensity with which the priest has devoted himself to the task of worshipping and beautifying the *lingam* – an intensity that is transferred to the body of the courtesan-mistress. This mingling of the spiritual and the carnal is short-lived, however. The miracle of the Shivalinga confirms the power of the Priest's worship and marks him as one of the chosen, but it also ends his life.

(Karnad, *Collected Plays*. vol. 2: xxxii).

Like *Naga-Mandala* folktale plays a very significant role in presenting the working of the unconscious that becomes the main driving motive behind most of the major actions and happenings in the play *Flowers*. In the play the Priest appears to be in a trance in which he replaces the Linga, his God, with the Courtesan named Chandravati, and finds a fulfilment of his artistic as well as carnal desires in her. The flowers that he offers to the Shiva Linga during his daily worship, become the medium for expressing his love for the courtesan at night. The flowers also provide him with the opportunity to realise the freedom of his artistic self. Chandravati can be considered as a representative of the *apsara*-image, as stated by Jain, who intrudes into the deep meditative seclusion of the Priest and disturbs his quest for God. But, she also stands as a desired substitute for his unattractive wife. Chandravati is also the source of artistic inspiration for the Priest who finds great joy in making a display of his innovative patterns of floral designs while decorating her.

The silhouetted atmosphere, like that in *Naga-Mandala*, provides the protagonist with an opportunity to realise his

fanciful desires. Dharma or religion is a matter of great importance for the Priest. Not only does he worship the Shiva Linga but, he also finds in it a friend with whom he is safe. His relationship with the Courtesan is a source of pleasure for him, but at the same time it also provides him with a sense of guilt and also poses a threat to his conscience. The Linga is a symbol of Dharma that provides him with security from any kind of threat. Dharma and fantasy (the erotic pleasure and artistic fulfilment) come into conflict in the Priest.

This play exclusively focuses on the male sexual desire and the dilemma that occurs to a man when he is torn between his Dharma on the one side and his carnal desire on the other. In spite of committing sacrilege God has forgiven the Priest. The sense of guilt intensifies within him and he denies to continue with life that is burdened with the sin of adultery and sacrilege. He submerges his head into the water to find out the answer to his questions. The playwright does not specify about his death or self-sacrifice but hints at the impending self-annihilation that is craved by the priest for Moksha and Mukti.

In *Flowers* the phallic symbol Shiva Linga becomes a medium for attaining salvation. Its benignity and benevolence drive the Priest to the complete renunciation of the worldly desires and strive for attaining Moksha or the Mukti. Total submission to God comes after the arousal of the sense of guilt within the psyche of the protagonist. This guilt is a result of the conflict between the artistic self and Dharma. Dharma intrudes into the process of pleasure-hunt performed by the artistic self and makes the ego realise the guilt. The ego brings into play the reality-principle which comes into conflict with the pleasure hunt exercised by the unconscious of the Priest. His illegal relationship with the courtesan is an outcome of the unchecked drive of the id that aims at the release of the libido at any cost. The family, religious sanctity and love for God give rise to the

sense of guilt within the conscience of the priest. He experiences pleasure mixed with pain and threat of separation. God's kindness and His reward of absolution intensify the guilt in him and also the anxiety and trauma that result from the guilt. This leads him to self-sacrifice. The question of self-sacrifice gives rise to another bigger issue, i.e., desire for Mukti. The Priest is unable to bear the burden of God's condescension. The Priest's devotion to God and the desire for Mukti help him to stop from committing further abominable acts and motivate the conscious mind to flow into a different path that is more controlled and guided by the reality. His self-sacrifice indicates his total submission to God and his release from all sorts of earthly bonding which is the prime condition for Mukti.

The quest for pleasure through artistic freedom and innovation comes to an end and the trauma of separation from God and religion further compels the ego to realise the 'unpleasure' of reality and commit the self-sacrifice for achieving Mukti. This cannot be equated with Freud's instinct of self-destruction. In case of the Priest it is a total submission to God and the complete abandonment of latent desires and instincts of the unconscious. The concept of Moksha and Mukti or emancipation cannot be easily understood by a person who does not have a first-hand knowledge of the Indian society, myth, culture and the Hindu religion and philosophy. Moksha and Mukti are related to the *Purushartha* or the meaning of man and his life. Vanashree Tripathi, while talking about the use of *Mahabharata* myths in Karnad's plays, refers to the concept of *Dharma*, *Purushartha*, and *Moksha*. She says,

In *dharma*, *artha*, *Kama*, *moksha*, the *Mahabharata*, the epic, sees the teleology of human life – the harmony of the first three may be seen as a means to realising the fourth. One may perceive in Karnad's pronounced note on "Drama and *Purusharthas*" in *The Fire and the Rain*, an unequivocal interest in the doctrine of *Purusharthas* towards which a work of art should draw mankind. Citing Abhinavagupta's principal

belief that drama should direct one's mind towards the realisation of the *purusharthas*, Karnad elucidates the concept to his contemporary audience/readers.

(Tripathi, *Three Plays of Girish Karnad* 20-21)

While talking about his play *The Fire and the Rain* in his book *Collected Plays: Volume 2* Karnad says,

The *Purusharthas* are the four ethical goals of human existence: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Very roughly, *dharma* relates to the spiritual sphere, *artha* to the realm of political and economic power, and *kama* to that of sexual and aesthetic gratification. In these cases, what a person understands as his or her *purushartha* could vary according to his or her background, stage of and station in life, sex etc., as well as the nature of the crisis he or she is facing. The fourth goal, *moksha*, is release from the cycle of births and deaths and hence final liberation from human bondage. This is the supreme goal, the achievement of which relates the human being to the Absolute. The concept therefore belongs to a realm beyond where the first three are relevant. Thus the harmony of the first three may be seen as a means to realising the fourth. (299-300)

The self-sacrifice brings Mukti to the Priest. Freudian concept of the pleasure-unpleasure principle and the Lacanian concept of trauma and anxiety cannot fully explain the reason behind the self-sacrifice. It cannot be termed as a suicide, which is an act of aggression made by the unconscious against the ego and which brings back the reality along with the unpleasure trauma. Rather it is a desire to get complete freedom or Mukti from the material world and to get united with God. The Priest is more burdened with the unexpected and impartial benevolence of God ushered on him than with the sin of adultery and sacrilege. He cannot think himself going unpunished by God. He also cannot exist without realising the freedom of his artistic self. The state of passivity and the sense of guilt compel him to denounce the world and look for the answers to his question in total identification with God.

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