

PREFACE

Indian drama in English and translation saw in the 1950s two playwrights shooting to fame and making a departure from the beaten track. They were Vijay Tendulkar (1928 – 2008) and Girish Karnad (1938 –). They took it upon themselves to revive Indian drama by going beyond the Arabian romances and Hindu myths staged by the Parsi theatre and the plays of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and T.P. Kailasam mostly leaning on the Western realistic plays of Shaw, Galsworthy and Ibsen. They succeeded in setting up an indigenous tradition of playwriting that sought to capture the contemporary Indian reality in conjunction with our cultural past and visions of a projected future.

The socio-cultural ferment of the country, in tandem with the global crises during the 1930s and 40s, called for changes in the aesthetic considerations of the playwrights of the time. Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), founded in 1943, advanced the initiative of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), formed in 1935, to create a "cultural awakening of the masses of India" (Dalmia 161). Reinterpreting our own cultural heritage became the way to go to the masses. After Independence, began the movement known as the 'theatre of roots' that tried to revive or adapt the Sanskrit and folk performance conventions for the modern stage. Girish Karnad stands out as the most powerful spokesperson for this new idiom of drama. There were other distinguished styles of playwriting that did not rely on 'indigenouness' and explored Western dramaturgy to relate to the local audience. Their 'anti-root' stand, however, did not ever undermine their outstanding contribution to the formation of a new Indian dramatic tradition. In fact, the co-existence of these two strands (or so to say, multiple strands) helped to enrich Indian drama after Independence in a great way. Among a host of luminaries in realistic and naturalistic genres, Vijay Tendulkar stands supreme for his sharp dialogue with reality.

While preparing a thesis on Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, what strikes the mind foremost is their ability to negotiate the realities of the new-born nation-state and its society at multiple levels. In this respect, they prove more bold, scrutinising and insightful

than most of their contemporaries. Dramaturgically, they have nothing or little in common. Thematically as well, they independently perceive social realities. But what brings them together is their penchant for and skill of critiquing society and dispassionately exposing what is safely hidden there under norms and tradition. They seem to be relentless in their enterprise, without ever getting monotonous and didactic. Either in close-to-reality manner or in folk-mythological style, their plays draw eager reception and render the stage a space for self-examination of the urban audience. They are popular and at the same time highly thought-provoking. They smoothly talk to the audience over critical issues.

The plays of Tendulkar and Karnad seem to be sceptical of the given 'growth story' of the new-born nation. They scrutinise realities that are acknowledged and reveal that are not. The present study endeavours to examine their dramatic works in this perspective. It seeks to understand how they negotiate social realities with a view to offering an alternative/plural version of 'truth'. Critical works on Tendulkar and Karnad are on the rise, mostly in the form of essays in edited volumes or in scholarly journals. Surprisingly, the number of book-length studies on either of them is too insignificant. From the literature available on them, it can be argued that a sustained, full-length and comparative study of Karnad and Tendulkar is still awaited, even in thesis form. More importantly, not much attention has been paid to the enormous possibilities of re/reading their plays in their proper socio-historical contexts. Few scholars have adequately probed the machinations of power informing the works of Karnad and Tendulkar; or critics have barely touched upon the social, political, and cultural issues as addressed by the plays. Tendulkar's and Karnad's plays probe deep into the politics of meaning-making at multiple social and cultural levels. This probe renders their plays contextually and sub-textually significant. Therefore a critical reading of their plays is not possible without looking into the underlying dynamics of discourse, power and resistance. It would help reveal the alternative versions of realities hidden by dominant discourses and power. Further, it should reveal how their theatre is born of the society they live/d in and how it also critiques and influences that society. Hence the humble attempt.

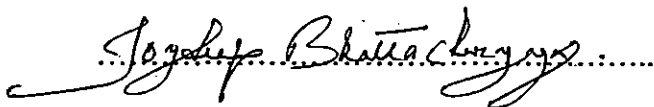
Tendulkar and Karnad, each has written more than a dozen plays. My study, however, examines nine plays of Tendulkar and eight of Karnad, which are available in English translation or written originally in English and have a direct bearing upon the objective of my study. Moreover, I would not follow the chronology of publications for

the sake of an analysis based on thematic categorization. As regards documentation, I abide by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Seventh Edition).

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