Introduction:

India has the longest and the richest tradition in drama. The origin of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic Period. As a manifestation of our national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of things and was popularly known as the “Fifth Veda.”

During the age of the Vedic Aryans, drama was performed in a simple way. Different episodes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad-Gita were enacted out in front of people. Such type of performance is still very popular in India during the time of ‘dussehra.’ Bharata’s Natyashastra in Sanskrit is the most pioneering work on Indian dance and drama. It discusses deftly all major aspects of drama, namely stage-setting, music, plot construction, characterization, dialogue and acting.

Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the fifteenth century but thereafter Indian drama activity almost came to an end due to certain invasion on India. When Britishers came in India, the crippled Indian drama regained its strength. Thus, the western impact awakened Indian drama.

Indian English drama saw the first light of the day when Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote The Persecuted in 1813. However, the journey of Indian English drama began with Michel Madhusudhan Dutt’s Is this called Civilization which appeared on the literary horizon in 1871. The pre-independence era saw some stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore, Shri Aurobindo who contributed substantially to the development of Indian English drama.

Girish Karnad, recipient of Janpith award is a living legend in the arena of contemporary Indian-English drama. His journey from Yayati to The Fire and The Rain holds a mirror to the very evolution of Indian theatre during nearly four
decades. A highly innovative playwright, Girish Karnad has written twelve plays till date and has scripted and directed many feature films and television serials.

Girish Karnad believes that the theatre is a living art-form and therefore undergoes change continuously. However, quest for completeness of person is fundamental element of the drama. In this respect, Girish Karnad portrays his women characters as bold, aggressive and highly energetic. They always try to oppose that situation in the play wherein Karnad shows them submissive, shy and attempt to create their dominance over their male counterparts.

In 1920, a new drama in almost all the Indian languages came to the fore. It was a drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, symbolism, and sur-realism for certain reasons and difficulties the growth of Indian English drama has not been able to keep pace with that of poetry and fiction. Many literary giants like Ravindernath Tagore, Shri Aurbindo, and Bharathi Sarabhai tried to overcome these difficulties and opened up new vistas in the genre. These dramatists of the pre-independence period, despite the poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical competence and symbolic and moral significance of their works, did not give enough weightage to the acceptability and ‘stage- worthiness’ of their plays.

Indian drama got a new footing when Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akadmi was started in January 1953, National school of drama set up Sangeet Natak Akadmi in 1959, was another development. In the 1960s by suitable mixing of various styles and techniques from Sanskrit western theatre, the modern Indian theatre was given a new, versatile, and broader approach at every level of creativity; the year 1972, was a landmark year for Indian theatre. Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad have contributed to the modernization of the face of the Indian theatre, these play wrights have made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosities. They used legends, folklores,
myths, history with splendid results. They broke the barrier of regional works at national level languages and produced many good works at national level. They do, however, represent Indian drama at national level for they dramatized universal aspects of human life in India.

Girish Karnad is one of the dramatists among the Indian dramatists writing in English, who has fully explored, exploited and re-employed the rich reservoir of the Indian cultural heritage. The negligence of this rich wealth of the past was the key factor for distancing Indian English drama from the people. Regional dramatists have extensively used the native folk forms popular among the masses. The eminent among these are *dashavatar* in Vijay Tendular’s Marathi play *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Bhavai in Dina.Gandhi’s Gujrati play *Mene Gujrati*.Nautanki in Habib Tanveer’s Hindi play *The Little Clay Cart*.

Karnad’s use of the Indian culture and dramatic tradition is conscious. After studying the European drama, he turned towards his background and significantly enriched it. Not only his themes but also the dramatic models (forms) are Indian, which endeared his plays to the people. This character of his plays makes him outstanding among all his contemporary dramatists and his predecessors.

Karnad has preferred the distant setting of myth and folk tales to modern setting and the modern times. His strong and sound acquaintance with the folk tales in his plays benefits him many ways. These tales allowed him liberty to make some changes and use them as a kind of anesthesia to discuss the present socio-cultural issues, not only of the Indian society but also of the whole world because they have elements of relevance to modern times. He has discussed these issues more openly in the framework of the folktales, which would not have possibly so effective with the modern setting. He makes changes in the folktales in order to use them as a starting point. He starts contemplating where the folktales or myths end and there begins his free but purposive play of imagination. Critic G.H. Nayak also
has commended this feature of Karnad’s plays and considers it his great contribution to tradition of Indian drama.