'RETELLING' MYTH
A STUDY OF THE 'FRINGE PEOPLE'
IN T.P. KAILASAM'S ENGLISH PLAYS

**A dissertation submitted to the
University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of the degree of**

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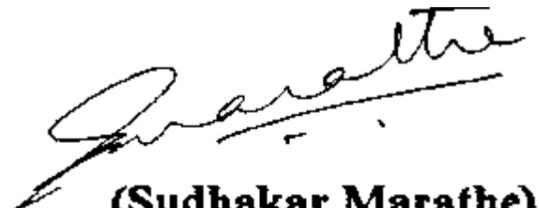IN
ENGLISH*

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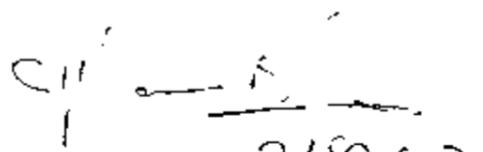UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **Ms. Maithreyi M. R.** *worked under my supervision for the degree of* Master of Philosophy in English. *Her dissertation entitled* 'Retelling' Myth: A study of the 'Fringe People' in **T.P. Kailasam's English Plays** *represents her own independent work at the University of Hyderabad and has not been submitted for a degree or diploma elsewhere.*

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DECLARATION

I *hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation entitled* 'Retelling' Myth: A Study of the 'Fringe People' in T.P. Kailasam's English Plays *submitted for the award of the degree of* Master of Philosophy in English *to the University of Hyderabad is the result of bona fide research carried out by me under the supervision of* Prof. Sudhakar Marathe. It *has not been submitted either in part or in full for any other degree or diploma to this or any other University.*

Place: Hyderabad
Date:

(Maithreyi M.R)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

SETTING THE STAGE

> What is myth? I know very well what it is, provided
> that nobody asks me but if I am asked and try to
> explain I am baffled.
> <div align="right">St. Augustine</div>

> By a myth ... I mean primarily a certain type of
> story in which some of the chief characters are
> gods or other beings larger in power than humanity.
> <div align="right">Northrop Frye</div>

> Myth is a system of communication ... a message ...
> a mode of signification.
> <div align="right">Roland Barthes*</div>

This thesis is a study of what I choose to call the 'fringe people' in T.P. Kailasam's effort to modernize traditional Indian myths for nationalistic purpose. The widely accepted definitional character of the present age, modernity , apparently attempts to distance itself from myth. The term modernity not only connotes a progressive outlook and a receptiveness to new ideas but it also indicates the courage to challenge prominent archetypes of tradition such as myth. Paradoxically, however, both myth and modernity are always permeating each other in the process of evolving an ethos that is modern[1]. For instance, Indian writers of the nationalist period, in their attempt to construct a modern India, have re-deployed the myths of ancient India. What evolved in the process was, indeed, a great

For references to all epigraphs, see endnote 1.

variety of tellings[3] of the ancient myths. The telling varied according to the needs of the present as also according to the personality, background and intention of the teller. Therefore, marginalized characters like Ekalavya, Aswattaman, Meghnad and Kama became the modern alternatives to traditionally accepted heroic figures and thus the models for reshaping society. The need among these writers was to distance themselves from the tradition that was perceived as being barbarous or uncultured by the West, but ironically, the same tradition with its vast stock of myths laid the foundation for the construction of 'acceptable' modern-nationalistic alternatives. Despite the tendency of myth to remain rooted to tradition, it lends itself to diverse tellings.   Therefore, it becomes the most viable tool for restructuring society. Even today, myth continues to be a powerful and widely exploited means of understanding, explaining and criticizing social phenomena. To be preoccupied with myth also reveals a yearning for order in the midst of upheavals. This thesis offers a quick review of the vast and amorphous topic of myth. It scrutinizes myth particularly in its important asso-ciation with literature so as to allow us to examine one set of modern nationalistic works, the English plays of T.P. Kailasam.

These plays have unfortunately been seldom considered even by critics of Indian writing in English. This disregard is also puzzling because Kailasam wrote during the late phase of the nationalist period of India. This period, covering the years between 1885 and 1946, is characterized by an anxiety to con-struct the 'identity' of the Indian people. In his own way Kaila-

sam also participated in this anxiety. The anxiety arose, partly in response to perceptions of Indians and India by the British rulers. While they generally perceived India as a barbarous nation, a few of them, like other westerners also, "acknowledged the presence of a great Indian civilization which had deteriorated over the ages" (Nandy 1983, 14). However, both these perceptions seem to be formed despite a western conviction that "colonialism was a necessary stage of maturation for some societies" (Nandy 1983, 14). This conviction, perhaps only to be expected from the British, burdened English-educated Indians with two different but mutually related tasks. The first task was to prove that India had, in fact, a glorious past and the other was to restructure that past in order to serve the purposes of the present. To many, these tasks seemed possible only through a revival of the past. Not only was this idea of revival highly questionable in the light of their visions of modern India, but there was, according to some perceptive Indian thinkers, another crucial question—which past?

Orientalists like Max Mueller had already perceived the "recovery of the Vedas as bringing to Hindus the truth of their ancient tradition" (Chakravarti 1989, 39). The Vedas and the Puranas still had considerable currency even in the twentieth century, at least in attenuated or distorted forms. This may be gathered from the fact that many English-educated Indians like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, and Bankim Chandra Chaterjee went back to the dominant and presumably reliable tradition of the Vedic past. These early scriptures contained a rich stock of myths which provided important and culturally relevant

reference points to many Indian intellectuals of this period.

The myths provided by this tradition became important not only because of their cultural valency but also because they were constructed as repositories of the collective experience of the Indian people. Besides, in literary or aesthetic spheres, myths positively encouraged embellishment and ideological exploitation. Presumably these features of myth enabled English-educated Indian writers to construct, in their own ways, what could be termed the versions of 'Indian identity[1] which they sought. The present thesis studies the ways in which T.P. Kailasam in particular resorted to Indian myths in order to re-define Indian identity.

As a necessary stage of understanding this process, the first section of **Chapter 1** attempts to bring together various theories of myth postulated by scholars from different disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy and psychology. The list of scholars includes Max Mueller, James Frazer, Jane Harrison, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. The second section briefly considers the way in which myth has been interpreted by literary critics like T.S. Eliot, Northrop Frye and Norman Holland. The third section highlights the innate potential of myth to be constantly created and recreated (or told and retold). With a few examples extending over a wide span of time, the section investigates the possible reasons which lead to the varying retellings of myths. The fourth section focuses on the primary area of concern of this thesis, that is, the use of myth during the nationalist period in India. As examples the section briefly refers to the work of a few nationalist writers like Raja

Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Toru Dutt and Aurobindo Ghosh. It is hoped that this survey will facilitate the study of the works of T.P. Kailasam who has been little known and seldom discussed in the criticism of Indian writing in English.

Chapter 2 comprises **a** discussion on Kailasam's Kannada plays as **a** necessary step to understand his English plays. It also attempts to locate Kailasam in the context of nationalist texts discussed in **Chapter 1.** In doing so, **Chapter 2** identifies in particular the emergence of a new consciousness in Kannada theatre, evinced by new themes such as the evils of prostitution, dowry and caste system. These are also the themes which appear in Kailasam's social plays written in Kannada. Further, this chapter attempts to highlight the similarities and differences between Kailasam's Kannada plays and his English plays in terms of themes, target audience, the language used and its theatrical qualities.

Chapter 3 analyses in some detail the English plays of Kailasam, namely The Burden (1933), Fulfilment (1933), The Purpose (1944), Keechaka (1949) and The Brahmin's Curse (1946), (the latter two were reconstructed by Kailasam's friends only after his death). While the analysis pays close attention to Kailasam's retelling of some ancient Indian myths, it also takes note of the influence of Greek classical tragedies on Kailasam.

The **Conclusion,** finally, attempts to bring together the various 'purposes' involved—the purposes of the protagonists in the five mythological plays, Kailasam's purpose in constructing these plays and our own purpose in examining them contextually.

NOTES

1 a. Quoted in K.K. Ruthven, <u>Myth</u>. (London: Methuen & Co.
   Ltd., 1976) 1.

   b. Northrop Frye, <u>Fables of Identity</u>. (New York:
   Harcourt, Brace & World Inc, 1963) 30.

   c. Roland Barthes, <u>Mythologies</u>. Trans. Annette
   Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1972) 109.

2   The term "modernity" in this chapter conveys two mean-
ings: the advancement of scientific and rational thought or
ideas which gained currency especially after the Industrial
Revolution, and a construct which opposes conventional,
established society. The second meaning implies that modern-
ity is not a question of chronological classification but of
outlook.

3   The word "tellings" is a deliberate choice which derives
its source from A.K. Ramanujan's essay "Three Hundred Ramaya-
nas".   In the essay, with reference to the question of
'authority' of the <u>Ramayana</u>. Ramanujan declares that he has
"come to prefer the word tellings to the usual terms versions
or variants because the latter terms can and typically imply
that there is an invariant, an original or Ur-text—usually
Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana" (Ramanujan 1992, 36).

Chapter 1

MYTH: DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS

Various thinkers, especially during the past century or so, have attempted to postulate theories of myth. Hence a number of viewpoints regarding myth are available to us. One of the earliest theories proposes the allegorical nature of myth in which gods are equated with heavenly bodies like stars and planets. This theory, which was initiated as early as sixth century B.C. (Ruthven 1976, 12), continued to be pursued through the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century, especially by Max Mueller.

In <u>Myth, Ritual and Shakespeare</u> (1990), Rajiva Verma observes that the solar mythology postulated by Max Mueller in the nineteenth century carries forward the tradition of the allegorical theory of myth. Max Mueller interpreted myth as "a plurality of names for a single object" and "a single name for a plurality of objects" (quoted in Verma 1990, 7). To him, all myth was an allegory of the sun. A similar reduction to Max Mueller's may be seen in <u>The Golden Bough</u> (1911) by Sir James Frazer. Frazer explains that in the primitive societies of Greece a custom was observed in which the divine king was sacrificed so that his power should not be weakened by age. The ritual of sacrificing a human victim was also apparently followed in several other civilizations, purportedly to rid society of all evils. Later on, the two rituals were combined into a symbolic form which eschewed actual human sacrifice. Hence the

'divine king' became the 'divine scapegoat'. The life of the 'divine king' was seen as an allegory of the progress of the earth and of humanity as paralleled by the progress of the seasons of the year, of sowing and harvesting, of winter and spring. In effect the year (or one turn-over of the seasons) itself was an allegory for periodic universal decay and rejuvena- tion. Frazer further inquires into the growth of this myth into ritual via principles of magic and the evolution of the ritual of succession to the priesthood at Nemi (which is just one of his many examples). He sees ritual as mainly arising from magic, which eventually lost its place of importance to religion. Besides, it came to be believed that "gods themselves are adepts in magic, guarding their persons by talismans and working their will by spells and incantations" (Frazer 1976, 240).

Myth was, thus, in part a fiction which had been created to explain hoary, old customs. Thus it was, in fact, a later form of earlier custom or customary belief. The ritualistic interpretation of the nature of myth by Frazer was further elabo- rated by Jane Harrison. In her essay "From Ritual to Art" (1913), Harrison suggests that myth and drama arose from ritual related to a daimon of whom Dionysus is considered to be a mani- festation. According to her, "ritual does not always develop into art, though in all probability drama as art has always to go through the stage of ritual" (Harrison 1973, 323). Both myth and drama were explanatory, and not infrequently also justificatory elaborations of rituals.

While these anthropologists applied their theories in relating myth to literature, philosophers like Ernst Cassirer

related myth to metaphysics. To Cassirer, myth was not an explanation of primitive man's thoughts and beliefs, but an interpretation of his state of feeling. In <u>An Essay on Man</u> (1944), Cassirer says "the real substratum of myth is not a substratum of thought but of feeling" (Cassirer 1944, 81). Myth arises from certain feelings like fear of death. In either case, this much should be clear, that pervasive and powerful yet more or less ineffable phenomena or their felt experience tended to become myths.

The interpretation of myth as an expression of feelings or the inner state of the people who participated in creation and perception of myth led to the psychological study of myth. In <u>The Cambridge Companion to Freud</u> (1992), Neu Jerome observes that Sigmund Freud looked upon myth as projection of the unconscious, which was the repository of sexual fantasies. Myth was, according to Freud, analogous to dreams. Freud illustrated his point through Sophocles[1] rendering of the Oedipus myth. To Freud, the myth was not a mere manifestation of the psychology of Sophocles or an exclusive, specifically individual character called Oedipus. He suggested that the rendering intended

> rather to show how the play serves as a collection, publicly constituted fantasy that corresponds to the incestuous and rivalrous fantasies harboured by each member of the audience as repressed residues of childhood. (quoted in Jerome 1992, 268)

Thus, being essentially projections of the personal unconscious, the myth prompted each member of the audience to read into or superimpose upon Sophocles' projections his or her own inner complexes. The Sophoclean 'telling' was, of course, only one

among many tellings of this pattern. Such projections eventually consolidated into a 'collection' or commonly held myth.

Carl Jung accepted Freud's theory of myth as a projection of the unconscious but refused to attribute the origin or location of myth solely to hidden sexual desires or of sexual repression. In order to explain his understanding of myth, Jung put forward the idea of the collective unconscious, which he believed was a stratum of the unconscious that was deeper than the personal unconscious. This collective unconscious, according to Jung, is a universal, and specifically human phenomenon. Its contents are almost the same everywhere, in all human societies, among all individuals. The common patterns among these are called arche-types. Myth and fairy tale are only the more well-known expres-sions of these archetypes. They express the deepest unconscious feelings of the human race. Myths, especially, are

> fundamental expressions of human nature. When a myth is formed and expressed in words, conscious-ness, it is true, has shaped it, but the spirit of the myth—the creative urge it represents, the feelings it expresses and evokes, and even in larger part its subject matter—come from the collective unconscious, (quoted in Fordham 1953, 27)

To me personally, Jung's theory that myth is an expression of the collective unconscious seems in some way more acceptable than Freud's attribution of it solely to hidden sexual desires. For it may validate the proposition better, being based on a wider spectrum of basic elements of human nature as evidenced in age after age and culture after culture in human history. But what is it that makes myth such an integral part of the collec-

tive unconscious? It is probably the crises, choices, dilemmas and moral struggles that it depicts which hold good for most societies in all ages. For instance, the moral struggle which arises from the sexual relationship between mother and son in Oedipus Rex seems to be basic to most societies.

Joseph Campbell reduces Jung's theory of archetypes to a single archetype, the hero, who is "the perfect microcosmic mirror of the macrocosm" (Campbell 1949, 347). This hero is "the man who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms" (emphasis added, Campbell 1949, 20). In the course of his life the hero may attain the status of a demi-god who sets an example to every human being to whom that particular myth has become familiar. Such an aura is created around his life, or to hark back to our discussion of ritual, the mythologized version of his life becomes so strictly and inviolably ritualized, that questioning any particular incident or instance in the complex shape of the myth becomes taboo to society. Even if the hero happens to make a choice which is particularly unacceptable or even reprehensible to the society at some stage of its subsequent history, forceful moralizing arguments tend to quickly justify it.

For instance, consider the 'agnipariksha' of Sita in the Ramayana. After Rama rescues Sita she is asked to enter the fire to prove her purity. Although Rama did do what many of us, at least today, will consider a reprehensible thing, it has been always and immediately justified by the explanation that Rama's situation (his role and responsibility as king) forced him to do

so. In this manner, to appropriate Campbell's words, the entire Ramayana attempts to show how Rama is the "perfect microcosmic mirror of the macrocosm" (Campbell 1949, 347).

To return to Campbell, incidentally, he also accepts the Freudian idea of similarity between myth and dream. He believes that like dream, myth is a "spontaneous production of the psyche" (Campbell 1949, 4). Thus Campbell seems to arrive at an understanding of myth through both Jung and Freud and consequently he provides us with a wider base for the consideration of the history of a myth in its initial stages as well as during its transmission in subsequent ages. Campbell's comprehensive approach allows us to look at myth in a more flexible way than most of the individual theories we have surveyed so far.

II

Until now we have briefly looked into theories of the origin and consolidation of myth as postulated by scholars and thinkers from various disciplines like anthropology, philosophy and psychology. Similarly, let us consider the way myth has been interpreted by some literary writers and critics. This will bring us closer to our need to study some basic considerations regarding the relationship between myth and literature. Let us begin with Eliot's review, "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923) which is a defense of the mythical method adopted by James Joyce in his novel Ulysses (1922). In the review, Eliot wholeheartedly supports Joyce by emphasizing that, in "using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and

antiquity" Joyce "is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him" (Eliot 1975, 177). Eliot's defense of Joyce's mythical method arises from the realization that myth is "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot 1975, 177).

One may say that Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) seems to have, in principle and implicitly, anticipated this kind of demand for a mythical method. In that essay, Eliot indicates firmly that whenever one praises a writer, *one* should praise him for those aspects of his work in which he least resembles his predecessors. And for a writer to be praised thus, he must have a historical sense which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (Eliot 1975, 38). It is this historical sense which makes a writer "traditional" (Eliot 1975, 38). Eliot may not speak explicitly of myth but his discourse on the past and the present and his views of Joyce's mythical method seem suitable to our discussion of myth and its various interpretations. Myth, it would then appear, is in fact one kind of manifestation of the past. And, according to Eliot, the past "should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Eliot 1975, 39). Eliot entrusts the responsibility of such alteration to tradition, to writers who are aware that "the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way" (Eliot 1975, 39), and who also attempt to procure and develop this consciousness throughout their literary career.

Eliot mentions that the creative and informing power operating on the writer is tradition but he does not in this essay identify the factors of tradition which make possible the creation of new works of literature out of older ones. The task of identifying the factors of tradition have been performed in the essay "The Social Context of Literary Criticism" (1970) by Northrop Frye, who says that a society does not simply produce plays or poems but develops an entire literature. Writers draw their themes, genres and technical skills specifically from this body of literature and not only generally from their life. And the chief factor that constitutes this literature is myth which "recounts something that is [or at least has been perceived as] centrally important for a society's history, religion or social structure" (Frye 1973, 148). However, Frye points out that the function of myth in literature is different from its function in society:

> Myths . . . enable members of a society to hold together, to accept authority, to be loyal to each other and courageous against attack. Such myths are verbal constructions designed for specific purposes. In literature, myths are disinterested: they are simply forms of human creativity and as such they communicate the joy that brings to pure creation. (Frye 1973, 156-157)

But one has to admit that there is more to myth in literature than this "joy" and one needs to advance Frye's notion maintained in examination of specific cases. Through an examination of T.P. Kailasam's plays in the present thesis, it is hoped that we shall see that in literature myth has more roles to perform than providing "joy" to writers and entertainment to readers.

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To return to Frye's understanding of the function of myth, we may note that Frye alludes to the primary meaning of myth as "a certain type of story" (Frye 1963, 30). And as a type of story myth forms the

> matrix of literature, and major poetry [among other forms of literature] keeps returning to it. In every age poets who are thinkers ... and are deeply concerned with the origin or destiny or desires of mankind—with anything that belongs to the larger outlines of what literature can express —can hardly find a literary theme that does not coincide with myth. (Frye 1963, 33)

This paradigm proposed by Frye brings out for us in bold strokes the continuity and inevitability of the use of myth in literature. Not only is it inevitable that literature will use myth thus in every age in one way or the other but also that readers will need this means to sustain them amidst doubts, complexities, perplexities and in the face of existential cruxes like death.

Norman Holland, another critic who speaks along the lines of Frye, maintains in the <u>Dynamics of Literary Response</u> (1975) that literature "offers us the chance to merge the plot, character and ourselves into a larger sustaining matrix—the myth" (Holland 1975, 260). But he also makes an important additional query regarding whether all myths in literature equally evoke our deepest responses. Holland refuses to accept the major belief among myth critics that "myths in literature make us resonate without our being consciously aware of them" (Holland 1975, 246). Instead he feels: "I am resonating, not simply because there is myth in the work, but there is myth and I know that there is myth" (Holland 1975, 246-247). This much should be clear to

anybody at least where myths which are current are concerned: no one In India need ask, for instance, who Rama is or who Draupadi is. Therefore, in his view, the reader responds not only to the way a myth resonates within a work but also to the way in which it resonates within a reader's own consciousness. This assumes that at least in certain cases readers are aware of the myth in question.

Here perhaps one can also include the factor of "telling", the circumstances under which a reader has acquired knowledge about the myth, and which, therefore determine his personal, individual response to myth. This point becomes particularly important to the present thesis because of its essential concern about the way in which myth lends itself to various tellings. Therefore, let us briefly look into the phenomenon of the telling and retelling of myth and the circumstances that lead to these various tellings. For convenience, and also because no product of Sanskrit literature enjoys a greater popularity down to the present than the Ramayana. we shall use only an example of myth from the Ramayana as our point of reference.

III

While our study relates to the presence of myth in litera-ture, we should remember that the role of myth is not restricted to literary people only. Irrespective of one's literary back-ground or absence thereof, every individual encounters myth in his/her life. No matter when a myth has originated for a particu-lar individual, by and large his acquaintance with myth arises

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from the modes of telling available in the social and familial contexts of a person. The story of a myth may be narrated in the form of tales by an elder, probably a grandmother. In later life, the versions imbibed from these tales continue to influence a person. In addition, revivals of contact by means of books, various parts of the process of education like history lessons, mass-media including traditional country theatre and ritual, political propaganda and so on, continue a person's exposure to mythology. To those who somehow come to question the validity of the function or authority of myth in society, it may not be obvious that by and large myths are simply accepted by many people. Ultimately, for someone who does not question but merely accepts a myth, it may represent a dominant version (among others) of the reality of the past of his/her culture or society. To those who question such representative values (such as some of the Indian nationalist writers like our subject here, T.P. Kailasam), myth may appear as anything but inviolable.

In any case, in addition to the apparently unquestioned beliefs of many, what really makes myth fascinating is that no matter how consolidated, no matter how elevated to sacred status, it still and inevitably undergoes change. In fact, the survival of ancient myth even to the present day is marked by its elastic response to change. They adapt themselves according to the purpose and the situation in which the narrator and the narratee find themselves in the process of narration. The diverse tellings may be influenced, for example, "by the beliefs of individual communities, the literary conventions of regional culture and the specific configurations of social reforms" (Richman 1992, 8).

A study of such tellings leads us not only to oral and written literatures but also to other forms of art besides literature, all of which manifest themselves as probably the most intelligible, enjoyable and enduring links between myth and society.

In many societies, myth originally began in oral or Pre-literate culture and was then continued by written culture which grew parallel with it. In the oral tradition, myth manifests itself in various tellings which are preserved and transmitted through human memory in various forms (e.g., in South India, harikathas, puppet theatre, music recitals, and traditional, sacred and secular dramas). Hence the modifications myth undergoes are numerous. Such tellings, moreover, often become local and personal experiences, being confined to a particular group or a place. Moreover, as Wendy Doniger says in "Fluid and Fixed Texts in India", within the same group or place "the same event happens over and over again, but it may not happen exactly in the same way each time, and [yet] each happening is true" (Doniger 1991, 35). That is, the way it comes to mean something to the reader is variable even as some 'essential' form of the myth is taken for granted by almost everyone. Indeed at such times of narration, variation may take quite unexpected forms. For example, in his essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five examples and three thoughts on translation", Ramanujan mentions a telling of the <u>Ramayana</u> in Kannada sung by some traditional bards. In that telling, Sita is believed to be the daughter of Ravana (here called Ravulu). Ravana is supposed to have himself delivered Sita through his nose (Ramanujan 1992, 36). Obviously,

such a detail is at variance with the 'received' versions of Ramayana.

With the growing dominance of written culture over the oral tradition in India, the diverse tellings of the Rama story came to be recorded and preserved in the written form which began to appropriate to itself the status of authoritative version. This happened even as these feelings retained their characteristic of being a local experience for the individual reader or member of the audience. For instance, in the essay "Ramayana in Oriya literature and oral tradition", Nilamani Mishra mentions a text called Jagamohan Ramayan by Balarama Das, which has become a "Bible in each and every Oriya home" (Mishra 1980, 624). This text provides "a very vivid picture of Orissa's culture, customs and manners, food-habits, fairs and festivals" (Mishra 1980, 624), which simply could not have been found in any of the 'received' versions of Ramayana.

Ramanujan's essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas" attempts to show that not merely the social location but also the ideology of a particular place or group affects the telling of any myth. Ramanujan provides revealing examples from the Jaina tellings of the Rama myth like Vimalasuri's Ramayana in which "the Rama story no longer carries Hindu values" (Ramanujan 1992, 33). The sympathies of these tellings are clearly with Ravana who is assumed to have been "maligned" (Ramanujan 1992, 33) by the brahmins who certainly seemed to have privileged platforms for telling the story.

How a myth is affected not merely by factors in individual lives but also by social, religious and political change in the structures of a whole society can also be understood with reference to historical events like the arrival of Muslims in India during the later years of the eighth century. Concerned about consequent changes that were rapidly taking place in the society then, many Hindu spiritual reformers like Namdev (1270-1350), Ramananda (fourteenth century) and Surdas (1482-1560) sought to integrate Hindu society more strongly by evolving their own tellings of the traditional Rama story. Until then, the Rama story had predominantly figured in the classical Sanskrit texts, understood only by a few. But now, these writers deliberately rendered their tellings into the vernacular, a language or dialect understood by the common masses. Thus the vernacular, instead of Sanskrit, became the tool for the propagation of the Rama story among the people in many regions of India and this change also wrought changes in the shapes of myths.

The examples elaborated here are only a few, but even from these the fact emphatically emerges that "not only do diverse Ramayanas exist, [but] each Ramayana text [also] reflects the social location and ideology of those who appropriate it" (Richman 1992, 4). Undoubtedly, a methodical and detailed enquiry into such diverse tellings is called for. Since such a study is beyond the interest and scope of the present thesis, we shall leave the subject of "tellings" here. In the next section of the present chapter, we shall concentrate specifically on some instances of the use of myth during the Indian nationalist period.

The nationalist period of modern India arose out of a pressing need to answer the colonizers who had by then established themselves in India as agents of 'progress'. To at least a few Britishers at the helm of colonial affairs India was a barbaric society which needed to be civilized. The "indological texts" were rooted in the conviction that "traditional and non-western societies . . . have not evolved as far and as fast as the modern west" (Inden 1986, 415). Hinduism, the leading religion in India, was to them "pagan" and "idolatrous". Against this pagan religion stood Christianity which was an organized and apparently rational religion. Since the British envisaged themselves as belonging to a progressive and superior civilization with a missionary zeal, they "naturally" assumed that it was in their hands to civilize the weak and defective Indian society. On the other hand were the Orientalists like Max Mueller, who did not perceive Indians in a similar manner. They acknowledged that India was indeed a civilized land with a glorious past; only that this glorious civilization had now deteriorated. However, examining the growth and development of colonial ideology in British India, Ashis Nandy says:

> there was an almost complete consensus among the sensitive European intellectuals that colonialism was an evil, albeit a necessary one.... Not only the arch-conservatives and the apologists of colonialism were convinced that one day their cultural mission would be complete and the barbarians would become civilized; even the radical critics of western society were convinced that colonialism was

a necessary stage of maturation for some societies.
(Nandy 1983, 15)

Nandy's analysis of the colonial ideology foregrounds the politics behind the ideology. The Europeans perceived themselves as "adults" capable of helping the "childish" and "childlike", (Nandy 1983, 15) Indians to grow into "mature" adults. The European ideology of 'adulthood' was exported to all the colonies. But with India, there was, in fact, a serious problem. The Europeans had already discovered and sometimes venerated the Indian civilization. They had discovered "a well-developed literate tradition ... and alternate traditions of philosophy, art and science which often attracted the best minds of Europe" (Nandy 1983, 17). Therefore, they felt an acute need to look for, even construct, other reasons to justify their project to civilize India. Nandy shows how colonial ideology handled this complicated problem in two "mutually inconsistent ways":

> Firstly, it postulated a clear disjunction between India's past and its present. The civilised India was in the bygone past; now it was dead and 'museumised'.... Secondly and paradoxically, the colonial culture postulated that India's later degradation was not due to colonial rule—which, if anything, had improved Indian culture by fighting against its irrational, oppressive, retrogressive elements— but due to aspects of the traditional Indian culture which in spite of some good points carried the seeds of India's later cultural downfall. (Nandy 1983, 7-18)

This kind of criticism of Indian culture prompted many English-educated Indians themselves to revalue traditional Indian culture. They realized that in assessing or evaluating the present condition of India they could not ignore its past.

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Indeed, it was the history of India that seemed to hold out a promise of a possible way out of British colonial oppression. Therefore, they made conscious efforts at a speedy reconstruction of the past. This search for a past led them back to the Vedas and the Puranas. These texts, according to Sudhir Chandra,

> came to be seen as more than repositories of the community's myths, wisdom and traditions; they were seen as containing a history and meaning relevant in providing the raw materials for reconstructing India's past. They were histories.
>   (Chandra 1992, 57)

Furthermore, these texts provided alternative ways of reshaping Indian society. They were ironically "histories[11] to be abstracted from the bygone past and re-organized for the present purposes of the English-educated Indians. The works of a few nationalist writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Toru Dutt and Aurobindo Ghosh illustrate this point to some extent.

Raja Rammohan Roy, known as the "father of modern India", was one of the earliest nationalists who attempted to reconstruct the Indian past. In "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?", Uma Chakravarti writes:

> Roy's search for an alternative to superstitious and ritualised Hinduism in its present degenerate form . . . led him to search for . . . the glorious past which could be highlighted as providing an indigenous alternative to degenerate Hinduism in the form of Vedanta. (Chakravarti 1989, 33-34)

Not only was this an alternative to the degenerate civilization but, more importantly, also to the colonialists' project. Roy identified the Vedas and Upanishads as the core of Hindu tradition. In Sources of Indian Tradition (1958), Stephen Hay men-

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tions that Roy translated into English the Kena, Isa, Katha and Mundaka Upanishads, along with other Vedantic texts, "so wording them as to emphasize the unity and power of God—a monotheistic emphasis quite different from the monism in the original Sanskrit texts" (Hay 1958, 16).

Roy's preference for monotheism seems to have been influenced by his admiration for the New Testament. For, the English-educated Indian was exposed to many powerful cultural forces from the West. Roy believed that the New Testament elevates one to "liberal notions of one GOD" who, as he says in "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness", makes no distinction among human beings in terms of caste, rank or wealth while subjecting them to "change, disappointment, pain and death" (Roy 1958, 25). In his study of Roy's contribution to the national movement Nandy explains that Roy had "introduced into the culture of India's expanding urban middle classes ... the ideas of organized religion, a sacred text, monotheism and above all a patriarchal godhead" (emphasis added, Nandy 1983, 21).

Another nationalist who in the course of his search for alternatives to reshape Indian history attempted to revive the Vedas, was Dayanand Saraswati (1834-1883). He maintained that a regeneration of Hindu society was possible only through the Vedas which were against 'evils' that had led to the degeneration of the Hindu society like idol-worship, untouchability, child-marriage and subjection of women to unequal status with men. Uma Chakravarthi writes that like Roy, Saraswati believed that the Vedas had to be "actually recreated rather than merely remem-

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bered" (Chakravarti 1989, 54). Chakravarti feels that subsequently this process of recreation also led Saraswati to monotheism, which replaced "idolatry, caste, child marriage, Brahminical claims of superiority and the vast bulk of popular Hindu religious practices" (Chakravarti 1989, 54).

Thus the Vedas became an anchor for the reconstruction of India undertaken by many Indian nationalists who realized that to reform a nation's character, a critically and carefully studied reconstruction of its history was as essential as it was inevitable. And in doing so, mythological figures from the Puranas like Savitri and Maitreyi automatically became models for India's progress.

Here we shall very briefly study, for our purpose of understanding the use of myth in Indian nationalist literature, two such treatments of Savitri, whose strength of character and purpose was celebrated during the nationalist period. The two texts are Toru Dutt's long poem "Savitri" (1882) and Aurobindo Ghosh's epic Savitri (1970).

"Savitri" figures in Toru Dutt's Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882) which retells some of the ancient tales from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Though titled "ballads" and "legends", the retellings treat the ancient texts as histories with potential to provide alternatives for reshaping Indian society. The idea is explicit in the poem "Savitri" where Dutt says —

> In those far-off primeval days
> Fair India's daughters were not pent
> In closed Zenanas. On her ways
> Savitri at her pleasure went

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Whither she chose, and hour by hour
                    With young companions of her age
                    She roamed the woods for fruit or flower
                                    ("Savitri", 25-31)

Commenting on the discourse of the poem in her essay "Tracing

Savitri's Pedigree", Susie Tharu says that

          the writer's main anxiety is indeed to project
          Savitri as a free woman, she has a boyish freedom
          to wander, to choose her friends, and even, under a
          Calvinistic God's personal guidance, the freedom to
          choose her own husband. This, the poem insists,
          was true of all Indian women in an uncorrupted past
          where there were no zenanas.... The effort, ob-
          viously, is to rebutt the negative image the Brit-
          ish projected and redeem, if not the present, at
          least the past. (Chakravarti 1989, 2 60)

    Similar celebrations of freedom, power and confidence are

seen in Aurobindo Ghosh's epic <u>Savitri</u> (1970) in which he de-

clares:

          But not to submit and suffer was she born
          To lead, to deliver was her glorious part
                          (Ghosh 1970, 17)

And in accomplishing "her glorious part" Aurobindo's Savitri

assumes the status of a superhuman being with a will to fight

'Death', the final arbiter himself. In Book Nine, Savitri re-

plies "to the dread voice":

          o Death, who reasonest, I reason not ...
          I am, I love, I see, I act, I will
                          (Ghosh 1970, 594)

Metaphorically, in this Indian "Song of Myself", Ghosh's Savitri

seems to represent India herself who, being "free, one and indi-

visible, is the divine realisation to which we move, emancipation

our aim" (Ghosh(e) [sic] 1958, 151). But how does one achieve emancipation? Ghosh's answer to this question is 'nationalism' or "Sanatan Dhanna" (Ghoshe 1958, 154).

If Savitri can be presumed to be the "motherland" or India herself in Ghosh's epic, then King Ashwapathy, the father of Savitri, becomes the preserver of "Sanathan Dharma", thereby a role model for the nationalists whose aim is to emancipate India from colonial oppression. What one needs to observe is that, like most nationalist texts, Savitri also strives to address itself both to

> 'the people' [the term 'people', of course, refers only to the English-educated Indians] who were said to constitute the nation and to the colonial masters whose claim to rule, nationalism questioned. To both, nationalism sought to demonstrate the falsity of the colonial claim that the backward peoples were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the condition of the modern world.
> (Chatterjee 1986, 30)

This interpretation becomes important for our concern, that is, a study of the use of myth in Kannada literature during the nationalist period. Our specific concern with Kailasam's work arises from the realization that so far, no substantial study has been made on Kailasam's use of myth in relation to its nationalist context. Kannada Sahityadalli Puranapraine [The Consciousness of Myth in Kannada Literature] (1987) by K.L. Gopalakrishniah does attempt to trace the use of myth in Kannada literature during the "Navodaya" or the modern period but it does not relate the use of myth to its social, political and religious contexts.

The present thesis attempts to construct such a relationship by studying the texts of the Kannada playwright T.P. Kailasam

(1884-1946) who has written five mythological dramas in English. The particular interest in Kailasam arises from the fact that he was even otherwise one of the key figures responsible for the change in the structure of Kannada theatre during the nationalist period. In his book Kailasam avara smarane. A.N. Krishna Rao observes that Kailasam wrote social dramas in Kannada which "revolutionised the Kannada theatre" (Rao 1971, 67). The plays clearly reflect the chief purpose of Indian nationalism, that is, the resurrection of the identity of India and its peoples. Along with the social dramas in Kannada, Kailasam wrote mythological dramas in English. The purpose of this thesis is to show how these mythological plays, as far as they go, reflect the nationalist ideology. In other words, in the next chapter we shall look at T.P. Kailasam's texts as one case of a particularly nationalist reconstruction of some key mythological figures from the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha.

Chapter 2

CONTEXTUALIZING KAILASAM'S PLAYS

This chapter attempts to contextualize Kailasam's work within the parameters of his home, his community, his contemporary Kannada theatre and also the Indian nationalist movement. On the basis of our discussion on the subject of myth in general and its use during the nationalist period in particular, we shall hereby look at some of the plays of T.P. Kailasam. The study presupposes that, to a great extent, contexts shape the lives of people, and their works. Kailasam hailed from an orthodox, well-to-do brahmin family, whose ancestors came from Tanjore. His father, Justice Paramashiva Iyer, was a strict disciplinarian and a very loyal citizen of the Mysore state. V.G. Krishna-murthy, a Kannada literary critic, tells us:

> It was a common practice to see him every evening, dressed in white clothes, a white Gandhian cap, white stockings, white canvas shoes, and also a white walking stick, taking a walk through the park in front of Kannada Sahitya Parishat, which lay close to his white house in Bangalore.
> (trans. Krishnamurthy 1988, 8)

As long as he lived in the "white house", Kailasam no doubt had to lead a correspondingly disciplined life. However, he soon rebelled against the conservatism of his family. To put it in his own words, he eventually became the "Black spot in the

All references indicating "trans" suggest that the translation is mine.

White House" (trans, quoted in Krishnamurthy 1988, 34). He no longer lived in the white house but in the out-house in the same yard. That is to say, Kailasam distanced himself from his conservative background without leaving it completely. It was a small room which K.V. Iyer, a friend of Kailasam, describes vividly:

> God knows why the room was so dirty. The only window was shut tightly. The ventilator above it was covered with a cardboard. No light was allowed inside the room. On the floor was a torn mat with a black hole, probably caused by carelessly thrown cigarette butts. Stretched on it was an old thin mattress. The pillow was soaked in [hair] oil and dirt and had become 'pucca-waterproof'. It felt dirty even to brush it with one's hands. In one corner was a broom, a pair of shoes and a single slipper.... Another corner had a hockey stick and a thick woolen overcoat. Cigarette ash was strewn all over the room. It seemed ages since the room had been swept. (trans. Iyer 1985, 55-56)

In flouting all the basic criteria of good, clean living which his family and community had taken for granted, the "room" became the first symbol of Kailasam's rebellion against his orthodox background. Kailasam had his own reason for living so. Not only does he explain this, but he also provides, in his own peculiar phrasing, a significant justification of his right to live in that manner:

> One must become a gutter-snipe. Then alone he can sit there and gaze at the sky, and the sun, and the world around him. This room has the right atmosphere and I can write things from here. (trans, quoted in Iyer 1985, 94)

Perhaps he was right to dream of becoming a "gutter-snipe". For

the "things" he was to write in this room were to bring about a revolution in the then existing Kannada theatre by questioning the presumption of purity and sanctity in all that his class and caste did. In order to comprehend this revolution, it is necessary to understand the state of Kannada theatre just before and during Kailasam's time.

In his book T.P.Kailasam (1984), L.S. Sheshgiri Rao traces the period and situation when Kailasam came into Kannada theatre in the twentieth century. The Kannada theatre at that time was dominated everywhere by professional troupes who drew their material, the stories they dramatized, from traditional mythology. The plays they staged were also didactic in tone and purpose. The main intention behind these performances (besides providing entertainment), was to convey or confirm the traditional values of life. These performances were, towards the end, considerably influenced by Parsi theatre groups which toured all over India during the nineteenth century, and which created appreciable demand for spectacle and music. Sheshagiri Rao mentions how a particular theatre group presented "real horses and elephants on stage" (Rao 1984, 25). Apparently, the intention of such presentation was to make the stage realistic. However, such elaborate stage settings, animals, and conventional melodrama besides a "failure to recognize the role of the spectator's imagination in the dramatic experience" (Rao 1984, 25) led to the downfall of this theatre. Rao traces the birth of 'elitist' Kannada theatre to this juncture in its history.

The birth of the elitist theatre (around 1925) was due to B.M. Srikantia or Shri, popularly known as the father of the

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Renaissance in Kannada literature. Influenced by English litera-
ture, he consciously sought to modernize Kannada literature.

His translation of some of the English poems of the Romantic
period into Kannada marked the beginnings of the modern period
in Kannada poetry. Romantic poems seem to have held a special
attraction because of the ideology they represented in terms of
the experiences of the common man, the fierce defense it made for
freedom and individualism, and the advocacy it gave for the use
of common speech.   Shri's dramas also sought to change the
structure of Kannada theatre. Like his predecessors, Shri too
went back to mythology but with a different purpose. Until then,
Indian literature had no tradition of tragedy such as we are
familiar with in western terms.   While discussing the psychology
of colonialism in his book The Intimate Enemy. Ashis Nandy ex-
plains what tragedy meant in traditional Indian literature:

> Tragedy in the Puranas did not center around a
> grand final defeat or death of the hero, or around
> the final victory of the ungodly. Tragedy lay in
> the majestic sweep of time and in the unavoidable
> decline or decay that informed the mightiest and
> the humblest, the epochal and the trivial, and the
> permanent and the transient. (Nandy 1983, 21)

But now with the influence of western education (as in the
case of Srikantia), the concept of tragedy also changed for the
western-educated Indians. Nandy's analysis of Michael Madhusudan
Dutt's Meahnadvadh Kavya illustrates this change in a retelling
of Valmiki's Ramayana. The play upholds Ravana's son Meghnad as
the hero, against the "weak-kneed, passive-aggressive", and
"traditionally sacred figures" of Rama and Lakshmana (Nandy

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1983, 19). Nandy explains that the retelling directly responds to the colonial situation.

As mentioned in **Chapter 1,** the British colonizers perceived themselves as adults and masculine, capable of working towards "the upliftment of the underprivileged of the world" (Nandy 1983, 14). And among the educated Indians there was **a** need to reject the underprivileged status attributed to them in this paradigm. Therefore, in making Ravana and Meghnad the heroes., writers like Dutt

> underwrote the emerging ideology of modernity as well as compatible concepts of masculinity and adulthood in [their own] community's world view. What was recessive and in fetters in traditional Indian masculinity was now made salient with the help of existing cultural imagery and myths.
> (Nandy 1983, 21)

Like Dutt, Shri also sought to change some mythological "villains" and marginalized characters into tragic heroes. For instance, Shri's plays Gadayuddha (1926) and Aswattaman (1929) explicitly show that Shri's sympathies lie with 'not so good' or marginalized characters. Gadayuddha presents Duryodana as the lead character. The play evokes sympathy for the tragic hero Duryodana, who is killed by Bheema in the mace fight. Aswatta-man is about the tragic death of Aswattaman, the son of Guru Drona. The play is a trans-creation of Sophocles' Ajax. Commenting on this aspect of the play in his essay "A New Look at Aswattaman", G.S. Amur says that "Srikantia's intention was obviously to induct the Sophoclean model into the 'Kannada literary experience" (Amur n.d., 139). Such a purpose reveals itself

in the fact that Shri made a series of substitutions like Aswat-
taman for Ajax, Rudra for Athene, Krishna for Odysseus and so on.
Such parallels between western and eastern characters seem to
have been inevitable for the purpose of retrieving the Aryan past
and subverting the underprivileged status attributed to Indians
by the British. Most apparent in these works are the standards
that the western-educated Indians set for themselves because
of the influence of western education. Re-structuring the old
texts (like the Puranas) or re-reading episodes from them as
containing tragedy and re-interpreting them to the extent of
reversing the roles of the characters like Rama and Ravana or
Bheema and Duryodana became a deliberate endeavour. This, there-
fore, marked a significant change from the tradition of Kannada
theatre.

Yet another distinct change was brought about in Kannada
theatre, this time, by T.P. Kailasam, a contemporary of Shri.
During that time, the predominant subject used on stage was
mythology. He broke this monotony and near monopoly by intro-
ducing social plays into Kannada drama, where themes and charac-
ters no longer derived from mythology. Plays now addressed
themes of current social relevance, dealing with contemporary
problems like dowry, and the caste-system. The plays addressed
themselves, moreover, mainly to the brahmin society from which
Kailasam himself hailed. We do not have to look too hard to
notice that most of his plays are a critique of the conven-
tions and prejudices of brahminical society prevailing during his
time. Eventually, after extraordinary success in social theatre,
he too turned to mythology, for he shared the purpose of others

working towards reformation of their own society in the changed modern, colonial conditions. However, to understand Kailasam's interest in mythology, we need to first appreciate how according to him, the roots of everything contemporary needed to be examined. For this purpose let us briefly look at some of his social plays.

Kailasam's first play was Tollu-gatti (1923). Commenting on the play, A.N. Krishna Rao says, "just as Doll's House brought about a change in the western theatre, Tollu-gatti revolutionized the Kannada theatre" (trans. Rao 1971, 69). The play is a critique of the hollow education system then in place in India, which did nothing to mould the character of a person. Puttu and Madhu are the sons of a brahmin, Hiriyanna. Puttu, the elder son, has passed the matriculation examination with a first class, while Madhu has failed. The father, Hiriyanna, automatically adores Puttu for his presumed education and is contemptuous of Madhu. But we soon realize that Madhu is better educated than Puttu in other important ways. For instance, he has really imbibed the principle which his mother has taught him that "the only way to pay our rent to god for living on this earth is by being useful to other people around us" (trans. Kailasam 1987, 19). The play tests the character of these two youths when one day their house catches fire. As the fire engulfs the house, Puttu walks out with his books but Madhu risks his life in his attempt to save the other members of his family. Finally, it is Madhu who receives our appreciation and not Puttu, who is selfish and educated in the narrowest sense of the term.

As in Tollu-gatti. most characters in Kailasam's social plays are middle class men and women. For instance, the trilogy comprising Patu-thourmane **(1941),** Satu-thourmane **(1941),** and Yodhruvani (1941) reflects the pretensions, dilemmas and anxieties of the middle class. In his "Adhyaksha Bhashana" (Presidential speech, 1945) delivered at the Kannada Sahitya Sammelan at Madras, Kailasam makes his intention clear: "I began writing plays not from a desire to write them! But to reflect the society" (trans. Kailasam 1987, 598). Further, as a writer, Kailasam justifies the basis of criticism of society:

> It is natural to me for I have a peculiar vision. ... In society, one may observe the pretensions of the rich and humility of the poor. One may also see a defect in that which is accepted as faultless. To my eyes it is so. Society does not have my peculiar vision. My vision sees a flaw in that which is accepted as faultless. And sees goodness in that which is normally accepted as wrong. (trans. Kailasam 1987, 599)

The keen sense of criticism which emerges in plays like Nam Brahmanke ("Our Brahminism") (1929), Bahishkara ("Ostracization") (1929), Poli-kitti ("Naughty Kitti") (1923) and others is proof of this 'peculiar vision'. Bahishkara. for instance, deals with a poor brahmin family which is unable to get their daughter married at the age conventionally appropriate, and hence faces ostracization. It is a tragic play in which the girl, unable to bear the misery of her parents, commits suicide. The root cause of all this misery is dowry'. At the end of the play, the anguished father asks, "who is to blame for all this?" (trans. Kailasam 1987, 104). Clearly, identifying evils in our

society and asking this sort of fundamental question constituted the essence of all reform movements in colonial India.

Naturally, Kailasam's **plays did not give a** ready-made **solution to** such questions **but left it to the** audience **to** tackle them. **For** the plays mainly hoped **to** make **the** audience aware **of** the problems that plagued their society. As mentioned earlier, Kailasam specifically tried **to** reform brahmin society, against which he had rebelled. For instance, <u>Nam Brahmanke</u> is a critique of modern brahminism which follows customs meaninglessly. The play expresses disgust over the degeneration of priesthood. It takes place in an atypical brahmin setting, a lawyer's house where preparations are being made for the shradda of his deceased wife. Contrary to our expectations of a brahmin family, the lawyer, his son Kittu and daughter Saroja, are not hide bound by conventions. They are, in fact, hardly involved in the rituals of the ceremony. The lawyer is busy entertaining his friends, while Kittu, Saroja and her Christian friend Vaidoorya are chatting with each other.

Their collective reaction to the ceremony depicts a renewed outlook to brahminism. In the first scene, Kittu reminds Shastri, the priest conducting the ritual, that rituals and mantras are far from the layman's reality. For they are narrated in a language incomprehensible to the ordinary folk. The criticism comes even more strongly through Saroja. She tells Vaidoorya that the priesthood is "mostly ritual and leastly [sic, deliberate choice by Kailasam] spiritualoo" (Kailasam 1987, 485). For her, priesthood represents nothing more than greed. And her assessment of orthodoxy comes to us in an echo of Shakespeare—"Greed!

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thy name is 'Orthodoxy'" (Kailasam 1987, 486). It is at this point, primed with these criticisms, that the scene of the actual ceremony is presented before the audience. As Saroja sums up in a peculiarly phrased description, the ceremony amounts in fact to a scathing representation of the degeneration of contemporary brahminism. She says that the ceremony is a representative of

> 20th century A.D. Brahminic activities. Ella [all] a childish pantomimic re-hash of the genuine rituals of Gods-inspired Hinduism which took its genesis long before 20th century B.C.!!; But alas! ... now expounded and exploited by greed-obsessed professional priests with no faith in their own preachings which they do NOT practice! (Kailasam 1987, 490)

It might be interesting to observe here that the reference, although from a Kannada play, has been rendered mainly in English with only a few words in Kannada. Embedded in this dialogue is not merely a need to prove how ancient Hinduism or Hindu civilization was, but also to emphasize the fact that the rituals may have been genuinely meaningful at one time but they have now become degenerate. As we saw in Chapter 1, this frame of thought had been the reason for many nationalists' desire to reconstruct the past. They perceived that Hinduism had been great, but had eventually degenerated because of evils like the rigid and opportunistic caste-system. Of course, sacred scriptures such as the Bhagvad Gita proclaimed that caste was God's own creation, but the purpose of its creation was (according to apologists of the caste-system) misunderstood and grossly mutilated by certain sections of Hindus over the ages. Therefore, in Nam Brahmanke.

when Saroja's Christian friend Vaidoorya points out that it is India's caste system which has made Hinduism degenerate, Saroja retorts with "God made...Universal caste organization" but "Man made local, communal, provincial, Insular Peninsular systems" (Kailasam 1987, 491). But really, "NO PARTICULAR CASTE IS SUPERI-OR TO ANY OTHER CASTE" (Kailasam 1987, 492). However for genera-tions now, priesthood,

> turning into priest-craftoo [sic, Kailasam delib-
> erately pronounces certain words with a Kannada
> accent] has dominated the 92 percent of illiterate
> Indiansoo to the extent of giving the lie to Lord
> Krishna's organisation by making the small detail
> of Location of Birth in society to determine one's
> caste, while the LORD KRISHNA, HIMSELF A NON-
> BRAHMIN BY BIRTH, INSTITUTED FOR ALL TIME THE TRUE
> CRITERION FOR REAL CASTE; NOT THE INTEGRANT INDI-
> VIDUAL'S LOCATION OF BIRTH IN SOCIETY! BUT HIS
> PARTICULAR VOCATION'S WORTH FOR SOCIETY! NOT ACCI-
> DENTAL BIRTH, BUT INTRINSIC WORTH [sic]!! (Kailasam
> 1987, 492)

Then why perform the hollow rituals of shradda at all? To which the lawyer's answer is:

> ceremonies in commemoration of the departing of our
> dearly beloved forebears ... is not so much in the
> ritual as the spiritual, begot of love ruled not by
> brain or reason but by beat of heart, which binds
> Mussalman—a Christian—or a Hindu! (Kailasam 1987,
> 502)

So ceremonies like shradda may be important, but not in the ritualistic sense. They matter for the sentiments they uphold.

From this analysis, we can perhaps safely conclude that Kailasam was also participating in the nationalist assumption of a glorious past that had degenerated over the years, as an explanation of the condition of contemporary India. That past

held important links with the present in the form of ceremonies like shradda. But the ritual accompanying these ceremonies had not only become rigid, fixed, merely conventional; it had also become meaningless for the general population in the hands of the opportunistic priests down the long road of Indian history.

Kailasam not only presents his critique of brahmin society boldly but he also employs a new dramatic method to do so, which we identified earlier as the second major change from realistic, or stylized conventional Kannada drama. His method was 'farce'. In the Presidential speech he maintains explicitly:

> At this juncture, where we have to reconstruct our nation, some feel that veera rasa is necessary. Some others feel that beebatsa and karuna rasas are necessary. Sringara rasa always has followers to it. As for me, I feel that the mask of humour is most essential.... Humour is like lightning. It cannot be used as a light. But it enlightens [even] the blindfolded in a matter of a second, (trans. emphasis added, Kailasam 1987, 599-600)

Plays like Patu-thourmane, Satu-Thourmane, and others are predominantly humorous. At the same time they reveal the serious dilemmas, anxieties, frustrations and rigid, discriminating conventionalities of Kailasam's society.

Humour does not remain only a part of the action of Kailasam's Kannada drama. It surfaces especially through the language spoken by the characters in his plays. The language, popularly known as Kannadanglo, is a compact (even obviously forced) mixture of English and Kannada. For instance, let us consider Nam Kampini ("Our Company", 1944), which parodies the stylized performances of the theatre groups during Kailasam's time. Here is a company staging a play called Shoorphanakakulavilasa. It is

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about a childless King, who is a descendant of Shoorphanaka, sister of Ravana in the _Ramayana_, Besides parodying the frivolousness of the contemporary plays Kailasam also exposes the various odds against which the companies and actors had to fight for survival. But our intention at this point is not to interpret these odds but to comment on the dramatic speech employed in the drama. In Act II, scene I, the Queen strolls into the garden with her maids, all belonging to different regions around Karnataka. One among them is an "Up-to-date saki" (as Kailasam chooses to call her) who joins the other sakis that is, companions, in appreciating the scenic beauty around them. Her song goes like this:

> Eni garden u bahala silly
> Nodalu not a rose or lilly!
> waste of time in walking illi
> Rotten garden suraly
> Follow me maiden galella flowering viaitige!
> Frost and snow and cold a thadayade fogualli shi
> veruva.
> (Kailasam 1987, 449)

Although there are many English words in this song, most of them are pronounced with a Kannada accent. For example, "suraly" is meant to be "surely". Kailasam does not employ this mixed vocabulary only because it mimics the 'dialect' spoken frequently by the educated classes. (One should remember that during Kailasam's time English had acquired a considerably prestigious status in urban Kannada society). Since Kailasam was writing about his society as "he had seen and heard" it (Kailasam 1987, 654), he surely also found it apt to use the then prevailing language in the urban English-educated classes as a device to

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break up both the possibility of conventional interpretation of his plays and to introduce outrageously fresh readings of the situations he presented.

Now, in addition to twenty-one such social plays in Kannada, Kailasam also wrote five mythological plays in English. The Burden (1933), Fulfilment (1933) and The Purpose (1944) were published while he was alive. The Brahmin's Curse and Keechaka were reconstructed and published after the death of Kailasam in 1946 by B.S. Rama Rao, popularly known as the Boswell of Kailasam.

As a writer who consciously wrote numerous social plays in Kannada on themes of great current relevance, why did Kailasam feel the need to write mythological plays, that too in English? In the essay "Kailasam's quest for greatness", one answer is suggested by G.S. Amur:

> While Kailasam considered his command over Kannada adequate to the treatment of social themes, he thought, as a man who had spent quite a few years in England, he could do justice to the great epic themes only through the medium of English.
>
> (Amur n.d., 164)

Amur's analysis raises a central question about Kailasam's choice of dramatic speech, one that concerns his Kannada plays as well. We have already mentioned that Kailasam's intention in writing dramas pertaining to social themes such as dowry and the caste-system was to make public the problems plaguing his society. Naturally, he must have found it not only adequate but also appropriate to employ Kannada "to the treatment of social themes".

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This is not: the case with Kailasam's mythological dramas. They are written in English, that too in what may resemble Shakespearean English, which is far removed from an ordinary educated Indian's knowledge of the language. Considering Kailasam's supposed intention to employ Kannada for the social plays, one wonders whether his English plays merely reflect the thought that "as a man who spent quite a few years in England, he could do justice to the great epic themes only through the medium of English". If the reasons go beyond this, then what are they? Kailasam had created a revolution by using the speech of English-educated ordinary people in his Kannada dramas. His intention to write mythological plays in English seems, in fact, to complete the revolution which began with his social dramas.

Until then, speech in Kannada literature, be it prose or poetry, was classical. Kailasam's need to rebel against his society and its many constructs perhaps instigated him eventually to write in English. Being the first social dramatist in Kannada, one would probably expect Kailasam to use the speech of Henrik Ibsen or Oscar Wilde, whose works had considerably influenced him while in England. But the language employed in his tragedies is different from contemporary English speech. What we find is a blend of Shakespearean English and a few Sanskrit terms either retained or translated into English. For example, while words such as "my liege", "sire" (Kailasam 1987, 670 & 671), or lines such as "The Royal Patriarch/ Hath ruled that none but fate may dare/ Condemn thy wishes and commands" (Kailasam 1987, 762) bear striking resemblance to Shakespearean English, terms such as "Prostrations Achaarya" or "it is CHATHURTHEE

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today" (Kailasam 1987, 659) are direct importations from Sanskrit- Here is, quite obviously, an evident attempt to imitate the western mode of speech and sculpt it to suit the Indian themes. But this does not explain why Kailasam resorted to dated English. Kailasam was writing tragedies and in the West tragedy was one of the most established of forms. Its popularity, especially through Shakespeare's works, had spread among the English-educated Indians too. Kailasam's works evidently express the influence of Shakespearean tragedy. The Brahmin's Curse carries as an epigraph part of the famous Shakespearean song "Not marble, nor gilded monuments,..", which helps to emphasize our claim that Kailasam must have found the western mode of tragedy a suitable model for constructing tragedies in English and consequently the language of established tragedy must have seemed to him a natural choice.

Another reason for Kailasam's intention to write in English could be sought within his social context. The social plays had explicit messages for the audience, hence they were rendered in the language of the educated people. The mythological plays, however, too had an implicit message for the audience. They were aiming to retell a familiar past from an unfamiliar point of view. Therefore, Kailasam must have found it appropriate to distance this retelling from his audience, to render the themes in a completely alien language, which was not even Kailasam's contemporary English. In that case, who were the plays addressed to? Kailasam's English plays involve incidents from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The protagonist in The Burden is Bharata; in Fulfilment and The Purpose it is Ekalavya; in The

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Brahmin's Curse it is Kama; and finally in Keechaka it is Keechaka. There is a pattern in the selection of these protagonists. All are 'marginalized' characters, characters slighted or ill-treated, who have been only minor figures in the lives of the traditional heroes of the epics, Rama or the Pandavas, or in others words, they have not had their due in the epics. This drastic change of character is probably matched by the language of the plays. These men are also figures, incidentally, who represent the western concept of 'masculinity'—a trait involving qualities like achievement, control, competition and power.

The 'heroes' of T.P. Kailasam's mythological plays resemble Michael Madhusudan Dutt's protagonist Megnad. Megnad, as Nandy explains, was "majestic, masculine ... courageous, proud, achievement-oriented, competitive, efficient" and "technologically superior" (Nandy 1983, 19). So were Kailasam's Kama, Keechaka and Ekalavya. Ekalavya was a self-made archer whose skill had exceeded that of Arjuna and also Drona. But his skill had been thwarted first by Arjuna and Drona, and later by Krishna. Kama had mastered the most powerful weapons but he was a victim of a brahmin's curse. All these figures had genuine heroic qualities, but fate' (or deliberate trickery) had brought them only misfortunes in the end.

For the colonizer, who is an outsider, Kailasam's plays might appear as challenges against western perception of the Indian heroes. On the other hand, for an insider, especially an upper caste/class Hindu, the plays must act as a critique on the then prevalent social structure. They highlight the exploitation of the marginalized by upper caste Hindus. One should remember

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that during Kailasam's time, such Hindus were almost the only people to receive English education. Hence a claim that Kailasam's English plays were addressed to this class of the colonized and simultaneously also to the colonizer, ought not to sound far-fetched.

Kailasam's mythological plays not only sought to criticize society but also to challenge the prevailing mythological framework on the stage. As against the purely conventional portrayal of mythological characters by the popular theatre groups, Kailasam's characters are first of all unexpected choices. And they are all brought out as human, briefly developing into representative types that make us feel that they have received 'shabby' treatment in the 'authorized' versions of the epics.

In his book The Oppressive Present. Sudhir Chandra discusses the need felt by nationalists to create alternatives out of indigenous tradition in order to reshape Indian society. To borrow his idea for our purpose here, the humanization of mythological characters by Kailasam seems to arise from the need of the moment "to glean from this [mythological] past the traditional alternatives for reshaping Indian society" (Sudir Chandra 1992, 70). Naturally, it ought to be obvious that the emphasis here is on 'alternatives', new ways of questioning or interpreting an unquestioningly accepted tradition.

The Kannada plays of Kailasam are popular even to this day. They are staged very frequently, especially by school and college students. Besides, they are also prescribed as texts to be read at the school and college levels. This is certainly not the case of the English plays. What could be the reason for

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this? First of all, most of them are not full-fledged dramas
like Kailasam's Kannada dramas. The plays briefly explore the
psychological depth of a character's predicament, for instance,
Kama in The Brahmin's Curse or Keechaka in Keechaka. Unlike the
Kannada dramas, they do not capture obviously essential features
of the lived experiences of the audience. Secondly, the English
plays employ a language which is far removed from the English
that is commonly understood and spoken by educated people. It is
archaic, and even awkward, verging on bombast at times. For
example:

> Bharata: (catching him [Anga] in his arms) Poor
> ancient! He will brush aside his king's behest to
> forbear from work and rest his limbs sore tried
> [sic] in the service of the Estate. Why, he has
> fainted dead away! ... What ho! Without! More light
> ho! Their gloom is maddening!   (Kailasam 1987,
> 631)

or

> Bheeshma: ... Blessings, my budding bowman! But you
> will never bloom into a better until you better the
> bearing of your body whilst at bowcraft.
>   (Kailasam 1987, 665)

or

> Raadhaa: But why anon? Meseems, my child, you're
> frighted to speak out! Whom was it that bought your
> secret of?
>
> Anga: An ancient dame that came hither to-night
> To caution me 'gainst FRATRICIDE!
>   (Kailasam 1987, 800)

There are too many archaic and awkward words here, like 'With-
out!', 'Avaunt', 'meseems', etc. This aspect has undoubtedly

contributed to the neglect of Kailasam's English plays.

To conclude, Kailasam's English plays are perhaps experimental, but not practically structured to meet the demands or the standards of a popular, action-packed theatre performance; nevertheless they are definitely works of significance and make worthy objects of study- If nothing else, since an otherwise extremely successful and serious dramatist has ventured to write them. More, however, because they participate deliberately in the process of nation building. To appreciate them, it is essential to locate them in their nationalist context. Therefore, in the next chapter, we shall analyze the texts in detail in an attempt at 'locating' them contextually.

Chapter 3

HEROES FROM THE FRINGES[1]

The need to deny the alleged inferiority of the Indians to west-
erners and to show that, even if it is considered **a** backward
nation, India could modernize itself while still retaining its
cultural identity, necessitated the re-structuring of the Indian
past. The re-structuring was attempted for the benefit of both
the colonizers and the colonized. In the previous chapter, we
have briefly observed how T.P. Kailasam's drama played a dual
role in contemporary society. For, his English plays were ad-
dressed simultaneously to the colonizers and the colonized. The
present chapter attempts a detailed study of the manner of re-
structuring and re-interpreting the past in Kailasam's mytholog-
ical plays.

The past to which Kailasam returned was one of the most
influential periods in history, the epic past of the Ramayana and
the Mahabharata, the two organs that carried the Hindu tradition
forward, at least as far as the general populace was concerned.
Selectively, he constructed five tragedies from the lives of
characters like Kama and Ekalavya. What prompted Kailasam to
write these tragedies? And what may have prompted him to select
neglected or ill-treated, and in several ways slighted and mar-
ginalized figures as heroes? The answer seems to be at least
partially suggested by Nandy's analysis of the major reform
movements that occurred during the nationalist period. Nandy
observes that the reform movements were mainly engaged in an

attempt "to explain the West in Indian terms" and to "incorporate it in the Indian culture as an unavoidable experience" (Nandy 1983, 22). The model was the West, and the resource or material, Indian.

In the West, tragedy was one of the most established forms of literature. Aristotle's Poetics can be said to have established the superiority of tragedy over the epic form. Tragedy was superior in terms of unity of action, unity of time and also the emotional effect. But tragedy in the Indian classics had not been defined in similar terms (refer to Chapter 2, 32 above). The need of the moment was to deny the alleged inferiority of Indians, and one of the means for doing so was redefinition of ancient Indian texts according to the models presented by the West. Therefore, in the field of Kannada literature, English-educated Indian writers like B.M. Srikantia and T.P. Kailasam wrote tragedies which derived inspiration from Greek tragedies even as they derived thematic motivation from the need to re-structure the Indian past.

Consider The Brahmin's Curse. which was created in the small, dingy room that Kailasam had deliberately occupied in order to become a 'guttersnipe'. The play begins with a complication[2] when Kama is cursed by his guru Raama after it was discovered that he is, after all, not a brahmin. Kama's repeated confession that he is a sootha forced to lie so as to receive otherwise unavailable education does not convince Raama, who assumes that Kama belongs to the kshatriya clan, against which he bears hatred and vengeful thoughts. Enraged by Kama's deception, Raama curses him:

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IF EVER YOU SHOULD HENCEFORTH SORELY NEED THE USE
OF ARMS YOU HAVE LEARNT OF ME, ... THE BAREST TALK,
THE MEREST THOUGHT OF THY SUPPOSED SOOTHA BIRTH
CROSSING THY MIND ... WILL SWELL THY HEART TO SENSE
OF SHAME, WILL DULL THINE EYES AND MIND, NUMB AND
PARALYZE THY LIMBS BEYOND THEIR POW'R TO HELP THEE
MAKE THE SLIGHTEST, SMALLEST USE OF KNOWLEDGE THAT
YOU'VE LEARNT OF ME [sic] ! (Kailasam 1987, 729)

With the curse begins Kama's downfall, and the following acts of the play serve to unravel the mystery behind Kama's inability to accomplish any task he undertakes. The intensity of the post-curse tragedy is doubled by Kama's discovery that the Pandavas are, after all, his brothers. Unable to bear the tragic plight of Kama, Ashwatta, the son of Guru Drona, curses Arjuna: "NOT A SINGLE SCION OF THY SINFUL HOUSE OR SEED/ SHALL EVER RULE THIS LAND" (Kailasam 1987, 825). Thus the play concludes with Kama, a "scion of" the same "sinful house", once again becoming a victim of a brahmin's curse.

Kailasam describes this play explicitly as "An Impression of Sophocles in Five Acts". What Kailasam attempts here is a trans-creation of King Oedipus by Sophocles, not by creating a new fictional character who would fit an Indian setting but by dramatizing an existing figure from Indian mythology. A striking resemblance can be seen between Oedipus and Karna. As infants, both are separated from their real parents. Though innocent, both become victims of fatalistic curses which ultimately lead them to death. But in King Oedipus, the complication is unravelled without Oedipus himself realizing his predicament. The realization occurs only in the last scene, at the end of the play, where as Kama suffers his predicament in the knowledge of

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its causes, yet completely unable to help himself. This provides for a totally tragic situation,[3] The unravelling occurs, there- fore, essentially for those around Kama, not for him. For instance, in Act III, Scene I, as Kama prepares to win Paanchaa- lee [Draupadi] at her Swayamvara she screams "in a sudden frenzy of overpowering pride and hurt" (Kailasam 1987, 749):

> WHAT INSULT THIS, YE GODS ABOVE! WITH ME
> A DAUGHTER OF A KING, A SOOTHA'S SON
> MY SPOUSE! THE GODS FORBID!
> (Kailasam 1987, 749)

The curtain drops with Kama departing from the scene in misery and totally unfair public humiliation. Act III, Scene II serves as **a** revelation to Suyodana in particular. The King of Kuruland is perplexed by Kama's inability, procrastination, or failure to live up to his image. Kama, in agony, narrates the episode which had brought upon him the fateful curse of his brahmin guru.

But a far more traumatic revelation confronts Kama himself in the last act, when Kunti barters the knowledge of his royal birth in exchange for **a** promise from Kama that he will not put the devastating Naga shaft **to** his bow **a** second time. The circum- stances leading to the gradual revelation of the curse to Suyoda- na and the princes in each act, along with the final revelation of Kama's royal birth, which reduces him to a mere shadow of his warrior self, demand the complete sympathy of the audience. In attempting to create the necessary emotional effect, and elevate Kama to the status of an ideal hero, Kailasam has interpreted various episodes in the Mahabharata in an altogether

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new light. For instance, the 'Sabhaparva' episode, where Paanchaalee is humiliated by the Kaurava princes in front of all the courtiers. In the <u>Mahabharata</u> it is Krishna who rushes to the aid of the distressed Paanchaalee; but in <u>The Brahmin's Curse</u>. Kailasam entrusts the role of saviour to Kama, whose conscience bids him   speak against his own friend and King, Suyodana.

What makes Kama noble is that he is the only person with the courage to protect Paanchaalee from further humiliation, even at the cost of his loyalty to Suyodana.   Karna's speech at the court is both daring and thought-provoking.   He strips the noble men of "royal" and "godly" birth of their royalty and godliness by exposing their inability   to protect a woman's honour.   There is as much sarcasm as disgust in his words when he says:

> Nor may I boast, my liege, descent from Gods
> Or heav'nly Orbs ... to brook this dire
> Abomination with a god's indifference
> To human suffering! I am no scion of
> Mahendra, Vaayu or the Ashwinees or Yama, like
> The Paandu Princes who, despite divine
> Descent, do condescend to yield to greed
> of gambling, and, in their defeat and loss,
> Do suddenly remember their own godly birth
> Which doth forbid them to stoop to harbour such
> Infirmities of human [sic] as the qualities
> of manliness and chivalry that do enjoin
> Upon a manly man, the duty of
> Protecting helpless maid that left her parents care
> To trust her life and honour in the hands
> of God-begotten Princess [sic]....
> (Kailasam 1987, 764)

In his rage, here Kama comes close to destroying the entire Kuru clan by invoking "THE DEADLIEST ASTRA OF/ DREAD BHARGAVA" (Kailasam 1987, 768), but the attempt to destroy the clan fails in accordance with the curse when Kama utters: "NOW WATCH THE

PROWESS OF A PUPIL OF/ THE DREADED BHAARGAVA E'EN THOUGH HE BE/ A LOW-BORN SOOTHA" (Kailasam 1987, 768-769).   Though a failure, Karna's intervention provides Paanchaalee the confidence to react against her abusers, the Kaurava Princes.   She retaliates but not before repenting her behavior towards Kama on the day of her Swayamvara.   She acknowledges Kama as "SOME STRANGE STRANGE STAR THAT HATH, BY SOME/ MISHAP, ASTRAYED INTO THIS SINFUL WORLD" (Kailasam 1987, 773).

   In this process of idealization of Kama, Kuntee's por-trayal has also undergone considerable change.   Vyasa's <u>Mahabhar-ata</u> has Kuntee meeting Kama on the eve of the battle and reveal-ing to him her identity as his mother.   But in <u>The Brahmnin's Curse</u>. Kuntee remains in the disguise of an "old dame" (Kailasam 1987, 789) refusing to provide the slightest clue to her actual identity.   The transaction she carries on with Kama is most business-like, especially when she says:

                                   I came not to BEG aught
            Of you! I came here but to SELL! I came to SELL
            you THAT, that you will give your very SOUL to buy!
                                        (Kailasam 1987, 787)

   A contrast to Kuntee in Kailasam's play is Raadha, Karna's foster-mother who also visits Karna on the eve of the battle. The scene is Kailasam's own creation.   In the <u>Mahabharata</u>, Raadha's role is almost negligible.   But here, she acts a foil to Karna's real mother.   She rebukes Kama for having made a deal with Kuntee.   Her anger comes from Karna having jeopardized his life by making a crucial promise to Kuntee.   Her anger re-flects a greater concern:

> "Gift Away"! But you and I have naught
> To call our very own, to gift away?:
> Thy Kingship, Marshaldom, thy pow'r, thy pelf
> The food that we consume ...
> they all are but the EMPEROR'S
> To gift away! ... not thine! ... not mine!
> <div align="right">(Kailasam 1987, 799)</div>

Raadha's indignation at Kama's folly prompts him to assure her that "JUST THIS ONCE AT LEAST/ I'LL CIRCUMVENT A BRAHMIN'S FATAL CURSE" (Kailasam 1987, 805).

But in vain! On the battlefield, as he prepares to invoke the 'Bhargava astra', Karna is once again paralyzed by the curse when he hears Maadra, his charioteer, say: "Am I not mad myself____aplaying Sootha to a SOOTHA'S SON?" (Kailasam 1987, 814). Paralyzed and disarmed, Karna becomes an easy victim of Arjuna's arrows. However, Krishna justifies the need to kill Karna despite his helpless state. He tells Arjuna:

> It is the PURPOSE of the killing, not
> The MEANS and MANNER of the killing that
> Decides the FAIRNESS____JUSTNESS of the killing!
> <div align="right">(Kailasam 1987, 820)</div>

The "purpose", one may notice, engulfs a larger cause which includes securing for the Pandavas their right to the throne. And such purposes are accomplished at the cost of innocent individuals like Karna or Ekalavya (see the analysis of Fulfilment). Kailasam allows Krishna to make his justifications but, simultaneously, he also exposes the unfair treatment meted out to innocent individuals like Karna in the name of destiny or the will of God. Krishna consoles a confused Arjuna: "ETERNAL HE ... STANDS/

BEHIND HIM [man] USING MAN FOR HIS OWN USE INSCRUTABLE" (Kailasam 1987, 819).

Modelled on the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, the above dialogue enforces the plight of a noble man pitted against the forces of 'destiny'. Aristotle's <u>Poetics</u> also maintains that the downfall of a hero should come about because of some flaw in the hero himself. In <u>The Brahmin's Curse</u>. Karna's downfall can be attributed to his feeling inferior for being a sootha. However, all the acts of the play also convince us that the flaw has been thrust on the character of Karna. The very title is suggestive of this. Kailasam has chosen to call the play <u>The Brahmin's Curse; a play of "Karna"</u> and it is the brahmin's curse which moulds Karna's tragedy.

Karna's sensitivity towards being considered a 'sootha' itself arises from the brahmin's curse. We may draw such a conclusion in the context of the larger or widespread "curse" on the lower castes by the upper-castes. Although Karna opines that it is the "INTRINSIC WORTH ... NOT ACCIDENTAL BIRTH" (Kailasam 1987, 739) which is crucial for any individual, circumstances force him to lie about his "true" birth because brahmins had restricted the opportunities of education only to the upper-castes. Karna's struggle may or may not be seen a caste strug-gle, but in the context of nationalism and the rest of Kaila-sam's English plays, his individual struggle surely embraces the larger cause of the lower castes. The prevailing social demarca-tion based on caste had invariably made the sensitive Karna conscious of his low-born status. And this inferior feeling had robbed Karna of all bright opportunities that came his way: for

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instances the 'contest' (Act **II)** or the 'Swayamvara' **(Act** III). Perhaps it would be appropriate to say that Karna is not so much, or not even really a victim of 'destiny', as he is a victim of 'circumstances'. For his tragedy is the 'tragedy of circumstances' essentially brought about by a brahmin's curse.

A similar concern surfaces in Purpose, which is a play about Ekalavya. Ekalavya is a nishaada who seeks education from Drona but is dismissed because of his low-born status. Though Drona personally bears no grudge against Ekalavya, he is forced to reject him because of the promise made to Bheesma that he, Drona, would concentrate only on the education of the princes. Therefore, the keen and talented student is turned away, because he is not a prince but a mere low-born person. The play aims to highlight the problem of a tradition that allows birth to usurp the function of the inner worth of an individual.

A dejected Ekalavya returns to the forest but his determination to learn his chosen craft enables him to instruct himself into becoming the greatest archer in the world. For inspiration, he installs a statue of Drona and practises his lessons before it (The irony of this act seems to be lost on millions of Indians! The matter is routinely interpreted as signifying the guru's greatness and the disciple's devotion). Six years later, while hunting in the forest, Arjuna becomes acquainted with Ekalavya's skill, and overcome by jealousy, accuses Drona of breaking his promise to Bheeshma. Unable to accept such accusations against his guru, Ekalavya cuts off his thumb (without which archery is impossible) as Gurudakshina, thus silencing all Arjuna's fears. The play ends with the agony of Ekalavya over the loss of his

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power to protect: his fawns from the wolves in the forest, the sole reason for which he had, in the first place, desired to learn archery.

The incident of Ekalavya in Vyasa's <u>Mahabharata</u> occurs mainly to emphasize Arjuna's supreme, unparalleled status. The incident is narrated in 'Adiparva' of the <u>Mahabharata</u>. at the end of which Vaishampayana tells Janamejaya: "O King of men, Arjuna's fever was gone and his heart was happy; and Drona's word was proved true; no one besetted Arjuna" (Ganguli 1973, 129). Kailasam magnifies this small incident in the <u>Mahabharata</u>. deprives it of its larger 'received' context and significance, and gives it a status of tragedy, thus elevating Ekalavya to the level of a tragic hero. Ekalavya is the ideal hero who is competitive, efficient, achievement-oriented, considerate towards the fawns in the forest and loyal to his Guru Drona. But owing to his low-born status, he is foiled in his ambition of excelling at archery. Like Karna, Ekalavya becomes an innocent victim of circumstances.

The size and the structure of the small play does not provide room for "complication" and "unravelling" of the situation as in <u>The Brahmin's Curse</u>. However, the action in <u>Purpose</u> emerges through a conflict between various characters and their purposes in life. Chief among them is the conflict between Arjuna and Ekalavya who share the same purpose (of becoming the greatest archer in the world) but with a different motive. Unable to withstand the threat posed by Ekalavya, Arjuna plans his downfall. And 'caste' serves both as original excuse and greatest weapon for him against Ekalavya. When Ekalavya aspires to study

under Drona, Arjuna condemns him for thinking that a "Nishaada" (Kailasam 1987, 684) could even hope to "become what is almost impossible even for an ARYA" (Kailasam 1987, 684). The insult fails to perturb Ekalavya, who has realized that "PRIDE IN ONE'S CASTE MORE THAN IN ONE'S POWER TO BE GOOD is the surest sign of a weak head" (Kailasam 1987, 687). But being a royal prince, Arjuna has the power to change Ekalavya's destiny. He not only forces Drona who, according to Kailasam, loves "all little men of all castes alike" (Kailasam 1987, 692), to reject Ekalavya but also situates Ekalavya in a position of obligation to Drona. In this the prevailing social order stands condemned.

M.K. Naik accuses Kailasam of remaining contented "with only limited innovation and never progressing further in the much more challenging direction of harnessing ancient myth and legend to a revelation of contemporary life" (Naik 1984, 61). The validity of his criticism is questionable especially in the light of Kailasam's selection of and emphasis on 'fringe' characters like Karna and Ekalavya. Both the tragic heroes represent the oppressed castes who were denied education and other privileges not only in the dim mythological past but right into the early twentieth century in India.

But how can one assume that Kailasam was probably making a case for these oppressed castes? The answer may be first sought in the social plays of Kailasam which suggest that he was very highly conscious of the social issues and problems of his time. In the English plays, next, Kailasam is obviously deliberate in retracing myths to reflect upon these social issues because myths largely contribute to the transmission, continuity, and

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authorization of cultural practice, including oppressive pat
terns such as were evident in Kailasam's India. The legitimacy
of such cultural practices is often backed by myth. Therefore,
if changes are to be made in the cultural practices of the
present, they can be made effectively by first questioning the
legitimacy of the myth itself. Kailasam's preoccupation with
fringe heroes like Karna and Ekalavya seems to derive from the
above concern.

The legitimacy of what is conventionally accepted by his
society as 'good' and 'evil' is questioned in Kailasam's works to
the extent of re-interpreting 'evil' as 'good' in Keechaka. Here,
Kailasam goes back into mythical history (as opposed to factual
history) and subverts the standard expectations of Indians,
especially of Hindu society regarding Keechaka, who according
to the 'received' myth, is a villainous character eventually
eliminated by Bheema for humiliating Draupadi. The episode
appears in "Virataparva", where Keechaka is King Virata's broth-
er-in-law. After the completion of twelve years of exile in the
forest, the Pandavas arrive at the city of Virata in order to
spend the thirteenth year incognito. Keechaka is at once at-
tracted to Draupadi who is in the disguise of a maid. Despite
his sister Sudeshna's repeated pleas, Keechaka makes advances
towards Draupadi. On account of the harassment, Draupadi
conspires with Bheema to kill Keechaka. She arranges to meet
Keechaka secretly in the night and sends Bheema to confront him.
And in the fight that follows, Bheema emerges victorious.

Kailasam's Keechaka derives from the above episode in Virataparva.   But Kailasam's Keechaka is not the lusty villain of Vyasa's Mahabharata.   Vyasa's Mahabharata maintains that Keechaka already had many wives when he decided to pursue Draupadi.   He even promised Draupadi that with her consent he would order his wives to become her maids.   Let alone being married to many wives, Kailasam's Keechaka has never been married in his life.   In Scene I, Keechaka returns from a war and Sudeshna is overjoyed to know that her brother has brought a bride with him this time. But seeing no bride she asks:

> Why?   Where is the bride?   Let us look at your
> choice selection [sic], (Kailasam 1949, 2)

Keechaka replies:

> There is no new bride, sister, but
> what I have been bringing home all
> these years. None else but the bride of
> Victory!   (Kailasam 1949, 2)

Later in the scene it is revealed that Keechaka has never married.   He confesses that it is Draupadi who is "a wife after my heart" (Kailasam 1949, 6).   But the circumstances are such that he could not win her; he had entered her Swayamvara with his mace and not a bow and arrow, which turned out to be the chosen weapons for the contest. Disappointed, Keechaka had returned and remained wedded to "victory" won by waging war with other Kings and noble men.   Kailasam's Keechaka is predominantly a tragic love story. Keechaka is not only a great warrior but also a sensitive lover and an excellent dancer, formally "dubbed" as

"Naatyacharya" by Guru Balaraama. Sensitive as he is, Keechaka
looks at Sairandri (Draupadi in disguise) and (no wonder) is
immediately reminded of Draupadi:

> Strange! Today of all days should
> I see visions of the past? Strange
> again to see a semblance of
> Draupadi in this maid of honour?
>   (Kailasam 1949, 16)

But no resemblance to Sairandri can arouse temptation in
Kailasam's Keechaka. So why then does he develop a keen interest
in Sairandri? The reason is apparent in Scene III where he tells
Sairandri:

> Sister told me you were a princess
> in disguise.... Hast fallen on
> evil days? In the land of Keechaka
> such troubles vanish like mist....
> Heard you not of great Chandramati....
> [she] was sold to a brahmin's
> household to attend on not only the women
> but the men-folk of the house. When this
> story was told me [sic] and my sister in our
> younger days, we resolved to throw wide
> open our gates to all such, low and high,
> to easily come here, live here, dance, walk
> and talk with us royal folk and thus
> forget their miseries.... So may you.
>   (Kailasam 1949, 33)

So when Keechaka discovers that Sairandri has no one to protect
her except the five husbands who she claims to be "Gods being the
offsprings of Gods" (Kailasam 1949, 34), he assigns to himself
the task of finding Sairandri a husband. Clearly, Keechaka
misunderstands Sairandri's five husbands to be the 'Panchabhoo-
tas' who are figuratively acknowledged by the scriptures as the
husbands of every Hindu woman. Therefore, Keechaka is convinced
that "they are not human and so she [must] marr[y] a sixth one in

flesh and blood, to protect her in this life" (Kailasam 1949, 35). Unable to select the *right suitor[1] for her within the stipulated time, Keechaka finally decides—"why not take her to wife myself and make my sister happy, why, the whole land happy" (Kailasam 1949, 41).

But Keechaka's good intention can only bring him misery. As he hurries to break the news to Sairandri, he finds her with Valala (Bheema in disguise) at the "sacred spot" where "people of true love have ever met to plight their truth" (Kailasam 1949, 24). Although Sairandri declares that Valala is her "husband" and "true love" (Kailasam 1949, 44), the discovery leaves Keechaka feeling cheated and angry, for he says:

> ... How can he be a
> true lover to a liar that you are ... you
> said you have five Godly husbands! ... just
> today in the royal court you agreed to
> marry a roan of royal blood if I found one
> and I vowed to find you one before sunset
> tomorrow. Is it to slip out of the grip of your
> promise before the worthy counsellor that you
> are saying this?.... You are a liar!
> (Kailasam 1949, 44-45)

Finally, only a combat can convince Keechaka that Sairandri is indeed married to five gods who are none other than the Pandava princes. The fight between Keechaka and Valala not only unravels the story of Sairandri and the pandava princes but it also enables Keechaka to be "vanquished" by one of his "own comperes" who are "equal in rank and strength" (Kailasam 194 9, 63).

Kailasam's Keechaka demands not just our sympathy but respect and admiration too. He is like Michael Madhusudan Dutt's

Meghnad. Nandy suggests that the qualities shown by such heroes were the qualities upheld by the West. The need, on the one hand, was to accept these qualities as superior, and on the other, to show that they were very much present in Indians too. What better, or more effective examples than mythological characters to prove the same both to the colonizer and the colonized? In re-interpreting the ancient Hindu myth, Kailasam has stripped Keechaka of ill-repute and raised him above his traditionally marginalized 'evil' status. The Keechaka in the play is not only a courageous and victorious warrior but also a secular and liberal administrator besides being a just man.   For he tells Sairandri:

> Besides, my court in my dance
> hall and there all men and
> women are equal and but help to
> fulfill each other's purpose.
> (Kailasam 1949, 32)

For someone who is conditioned to believe that Keechaka is evil, Kailasam's portrayal may seem too exalted and idealized. Here we need to consider that in rendering a new interpretation of the Keechaka episode, Kailasam has not merely explored the possibilities of various, till then unacknowledged, view-points but also decentred the hegemony of traditional heroes by noticing and glorifying the otherwise fringe characters.

Analysing Dutt's <u>Meghnadvadkavya</u>. Nandy shows the manner in which Dutt freed Ravana from "traditional constraints" like "his rakshasa self" (Nandy 1983, 20). While <u>The Brahmin's Curse</u>. <u>Purpose</u>. <u>Fulfilment</u> and <u>Keechaka</u> derive from and significantly re-read and re-write the <u>Mahabharatha</u>. only one of Kailasam's

plays derives from the Ramayana, The reason could be Kailasam's conviction that unlike the characters in the Mahabharatha. the characters in the Ramayana "are all so Adhyathmic [spiritual] that a pure soul alone should handle them, for such a purified soul alone can understand them **even a little"** (emphasis added; Kailasam quoted in Sivaram 1969, 88).

Hence, we have only The Burden, a playlet by Kailasam based on the Ramayana. It is perhaps the shortest of Kailasam's plays. In it, Bharata and Satrughna return to Ayodhya from their grandfather's place to find the atmosphere there strange and unwelcome. On making enquiries, they learn about the death of their father and banishment of their elder brother Rama. The play ends with a grieved Bharata being consoled by Vasista, the Royal priest.

The incident is from 'Ayodyakanda' of Valmiki's Ramayana. Ignoring Rama, the most important character and hero in the Ramayana. Kailasam attempts to elevate Bharata to the status of a tragic hero. But there is only a slight hint of tragedy in The Burden. Surely the reason is the length of the play. It is so brief that it ends even before constructing the required emotional effect in the audience. The lacuna also arises from the vague unravelling of the complication. Here, one wonders whether our dissatisfaction arises from our prior knowledge of the incident which figures in Valmiki's Ramayana, or whether Kailasam has let slip from his hand an excellent opportunity to explore in depth the virtuous younger brother's predicament. This much seems clear in the context of the other Kailasam plays,

that here he definitely wished to focus on a character who is penumbral, in the half-shadows of Rama's dramatic life.

Like all his mythological plays, Kailasam' <u>Fulfilment</u> also comes to us with a difference. The location of the play is "A Glade in Ekalavya's Forest". Ekalavya enters the scene to find a person surrounded by the fawns of the forest. It is none other than Krishna who has come to dissuade Ekalavya from joining the enemy camp. But Krishna fails in his attempt because of Ekalavya's conviction that he owes a duty to his King. Krishna even reminds Ekalavya of his "greater" duty towards the fawns, but to no avail. Finally, when Krishna finds no way of stopping Ekalavya, he stabs him from behind. Ekalavya calls Krishna a coward but Krishna proceeds to justify his act thus in his predictable fashion—it is the purpose of killing and the not manner of killing which decides the fairness of the killing.

Ekalavya is not easily convinced but there is also this realization of Krishna's wiles: "It is hard to talk with you! You are far too/ clever for me! And yet you sound truthful" (Kailasam 1987, 649). Therefore, he entrusts to Krishna the responsibility of shielding his mother from the misery of his death. Krishna obliges Ekalavya by killing his mother also, and once again stealthily! The play ends violently with "a piercing scream of anguish" heard from behind the trees of the forest. The play is shockingly different even from the rest of Kailasam's plays, not merely from the received shapes of the myths he has studied. Kailasam, who was also a poet, has composed a poem titled "Krish-

na", which may provide a better understanding of the play for
our purpose here:

> A woman's witching face, her ways, her eyes;
> A panther's frame, its grace, mayhap its heart;
> An eerie mastery of ev'ry art;
> A honey-tongue that steep'd all truths in lies
> And yet could strip all lies in light of Truth
> A smile that mock'd at plight of friend in Woe;
> A breast that bled at sight of fallen foe;
> Ador'd and yet afear'd of all, in sooth:
>
> Thou tangl'd mass of man and god and brute,
> What mortal mind may con thy rainbow-life
> That blazed undimm'd mid storms of human strife,
> And glean the wisdom of thy madd'ning flute,
> Thy love-lit crimes, thy kindly cruelties,
> Thou paradox for all eternities!
>
> (Kailasam 1987, 625)

Kailasam's effort at re-shaping traditional interpretations
are hardly likely to be missed. For instance, his Krishna appears
a "brute" when he addresses Ekalavya at the beginning of the
play:

> Krishna: (almost roughly pushing aside the fawns in
> his way, walks full three paces away from Ekalavya;
> with stiffened neck and averted face; in harsh
> haughty and almost grating accents) You are the
> barbarian bow-man, the thumbless nishaada, Ekala-
> vya, are you not?   (Kailasam 1987, 640)

So also at the end of the play when he hears the voice of Ekala-
vya's mother, does he appear unattractive:

> Krishna: His poor old mother! Mother? (his face
> suddenly takes on a grotesquely humorous expres-
> sion; he bursts into an unearthly guffaw of laugh-
> ter sounding less of a human than of a hyena)
> HA! HA!! HAA!!! MOTHER! BROTHER!! SISTER!!!___HA!
> HA!! HA!!! ...   (Kailasam 1987, 650)

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When Ekalavya ignores Krishna's attempt: to dissuade **him** from enrolling in the war on the Kaurava's side, Krishna's reactions are almost human:

> Krishna: (with his fingers twitching impatiently)
> Will nothing stop you your mad resolve to bring
> your hand into a fray of no concern to you?
> (Kailasam 1987, **641)**

Krishna is super-human, almost god-like when he engages Ekalavya in a long conversation about the ways of God who is also "helpless to treat good and bad apart" (Kailasam 1987, 645). In all, he is someone who cannot be easily comprehended or understood by 'people' like Ekalavya, as he is someone with the power to decide their fate, the charm to "sound truthful" (Kailasam 1987, 649). Indeed, Kailasam here succeeds in making us also doubt the validity of the authorized or conventional image.

Why did Kailasam write a play like Fulfilment? Is it only to understand the "paradox for all eternities"? The "Note" to Fulfilment in the collection called Kailasam Krithigalu (Kailasam 1987, 635) says:

> 'Fulfilment',a sequel to 'Purpose', was created on the spur of the moment when Kailasam declaimed his then half-written typed play 'Purpose' to Dr. (Sir) C.R. Reddy (Founder of Andhra University and later Pro-chancellor of the Mysore University) who naively asked Kailasam after the Recital, "Well! What becomes of Ekalavya then?" Kailasam's answer was "Fulfilment!'...
> (Kailasam 1987, 635)

Was the play created merely with the intention to provide Ekalavya "Fulfilment"? Or to show that Krishna is 'ultimately' a questionable "Fulfilment"? Or to show how Ekalavya has been wronged all through his life for being a nishaada, for being a

threat to Arjuna, for being loyal to Drona, most of all, for being the greatest archer in the world and thus upsetting the hegemony of the Pandavas? The note on Fulfilment provides a passage from the Mahabharata which supposedly lent Kailasam inspiration and support at the time of the creation of Fulfilment;

> Jaraasandhaha Chaydi-raajo mahaatma
> Mahaabaahuhu Ekalavyo nishaadaha
> Ekyekasaha twaddhitaartham hataaha MAYAIVA
>   (Kailasam 1987, 636)

According to this passage, Krishna justifies to Arjuna his act of killing Jarasandha, Shishupala and Ekalavya before the actual commencing of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. They had to be eliminated for Arjuna's own good. For otherwise they would have posed a major threat to the Pandavas by sheer strength and loyalty to their King. With this realization in mind, Krishna's explanation to Ekalavya—that "Your King, his friends, are wolves that hurt my/ fawns; Paartha and his friends are wolves that might/ Hurt my fawns, and they shall go too"-— (Kailasam 1987, 649) only seems like a viable tactic employed by Krishna to justify his act of killing to Ekalavya. One may recall that even in the battle-scene in The Brahmin's Curse. encouraging Arjuna to slay the paralyzed Karna, Krishna had said:

> Krishna: It is the PURPOSE of the killing, not
> the MEANS and MANNER of the killing that
> Decides the FAIRNESS ... JUSTNESS of the killing!
>   (Kailasam 1987, 820)

The "purpose" here should be quite clear—it is to protect the Pandavas and restore their right to the throne, whatever be

the cost to anyone else! To accomplish this, it would appear, any number of innocent individuals may have to be ruthlessly sacrificed. In the light of the fate meted out to Karna and Ekalavya in the plays discussed above, Krishna's brutal act of killing Ekalavya and also his mother, however logical he may make it sound, leaves the readers with the feeling that Ekalavya and his mother have not been justly treated. Once again, as in The Purpose. Ekalavya not only wins the sympathy of the readers but also prompts them to think about the unfair treatment to which 'people' like Ekalavya or Karna are subjected in the name of justice or destiny.

Having established that Kailasam's English plays deal with marginalized or fringe characters, it would be interesting to notice the variety among these different fringe characters. Bharata is a fringe character whose life remains shadowed by Rama, the eldest brother. So great is the overshadowing that even an opportunity to ascend the throne appears to Bharata more a blasphemy than a chance to become King. But Bharata certainly enjoys more 'fringe benefits' when compared to Karna or Ekalavya. As a royal prince, he does not have to suffer the humiliation of a lower caste person, through deprivations like education. Again Keechaka is a different fringe character, portrayed as a villain in Vyasa's Mahabharata but as a much misunderstood character in Kailasam's Keechaka. If we notice, the Pandavas in the same play are also portrayed as fringe characters in a different sense, for they are in their thirteenth year of exile. But they are characters who already have the sympathy of the readers. By making Keechaka the hero, Kailasam explores the forgotten or

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ignored sides of the story. It is this selection of varied
fringe characters whose fate and function Kailasam's plays force
us to re-think- They also impel us to re-think the 'history'
transmitted by a complex and pernicious tradition.

To conclude, all the mythological plays of Kailasam expose
his sensitivity towards and concern for nearly perpetual problems
like the caste—system of his society. As a necessary part of his
rebellion against such cultural practices Kailasam creates new
ideals out of the ancient myths, thus providing his society with
modern alternatives. In a real sense, on the other hand, it is a
pity that Kailasam did not write more or more fully. For the
promise of these English plays is substantial.

Notes

1 The idea is from John Wyndham's <u>The Chrvsalids</u>. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955). The text, however, bears no connection to the present project.

2 Aristotle's <u>Poetics</u> maintains that "complication" and "unravelling" is part of every tragedy. The complication is made up of preliminary incidents which lead to the bad fortune of the hero and unravelling covers the part of the play where the hero discovers the reasons for his tragic situation.

3 In his essay "What is Tragedy?" (1964), Albin Lesky opines that for a totally tragic situation the tragic hero must be "fully aware of his situation; he must suffer knowingly" (Lesky 1978, 10).

Conclusion

THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL

Every poet has his private mythology....

Northrop Frye[1]

The purpose of this thesis has been to propose an assessment or interpretation of T.P. Kailasam's "private mythology", of its genesis, its justification and its value for later readers. This mythology was, of course, largely influenced by the circumstances of his time. Indeed, we have noted earlier in this thesis that Northrop Frye looked on myth as a means of recounting "a society's history, religion or social structure" (Frye 1973, 148). This observation is as true of traditional transmissions of myth as it is of such recent and conscious efforts as Kailasam's. Thus it is that the 'telling' of myths in his English plays performs its own part in the nationalist project of re-writing India. It is the interface between Kailasam's "private mythology" in his English plays and the nationalistic context that this thesis sets out to scrutinize.

The exercise demanded an initial understanding of differing perceptions of the conception of "myth" itself as also of Kailasam's Kannada plays. We also noticed various factors involved in the transmission of myth, which assumed concrete shapes within disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and most of all, the literary world (both creative literature and literary criticism). The early sections of this thesis confirm that a myth may be told and retold, that it may be modified in

order to discover different patterns of perception, that willy nilly it participates in the power politics of a society. Therefore, in the context of British colonial India it formed an integral part of the very 'modernity' which resisted it.

To recall, the period in which Kailasam wrote was characterized by conscious attempts of English-educated Indians to construct a well-defined nation, free from colonial slighting readings of India, so as to create new historical foundations for self-respect. Alongside also existed the need to cleanse the nation of superstitions and other baseless and pernicious social phenomena as the caste-system, child marriage and sati, and to modernize it simultaneously to suit the requirements of 'progress* and independence. In this period, the chief model of modernity was undeniably the West, but merely imitating the 'alien culture' meant a loss of one's own identity and many Indian nationalists were keen to defend this identity. Therefore, an attempt was made by many to incorporate the West into this sense of self, but to retain at the same time the distinctive Indian-ness of this identity. Here, the past was a crucially important factor as it determined the identity of the nation and also its future. And Kailasam played his part in re-telling the past to suit this complex motivation.

The specific reasons for the use of myth in Kailasam's work were examined in **Chapter** 1. What we have in his English plays is his small but significant effort to perceive and convey an original pattern of reinterpretation of traditional myths. For this purpose he looked afresh into some of the 'fringe' characters from the already existing powerful epics—Ramayana and

<u>Mahabharata</u>. He attempted to bring into limelight marginalized or fringe characters such as Ekalavya and Karna. His plays definitely conjure up the way in which they could oust the conventional heroes like Arjuna or Bheema from their roles. Kailasam's uniqueness lies not merely in evoking our sympathies for Karna, Ekalavya, Bharata or Keechaka, but also in elevating them to the level of tragic heroes who were masculine, skillful and capable of achievement. In addition, Kailasam attempted to reveal in these heroes the features that the colonizers believed they possessed and which accounted for their superiority over Indians.

One can see a play of various "purposes" in Kailasam's mythological drama. For instance, <u>The Brahmin's Curse</u> is built on Karna's intention to prove his worth to the world, and Kailasam's purpose of questioning the treatment given to Karna. <u>Keechaka</u> depicts the protagonist and the ever-victorious hero's overriding purpose to act as protector of Sairandri, thus presenting what may be called 'the other side of the dispute[1]. And <u>The Purpose</u> highlights Ekalavya's ambition to become the greatest archer in the world in order to protect his fawns from the wolves, just as it highlights the questionable motivation of other 'heroic' char-acters in their shabby treatment of the 'low' born hero. These "purposes" of Kailasam can be linked to the broader purpose of the nationalist movement of India—to rewrite India's past as a foundation of the nationalistic feeling, movement and sense of self. For this purpose, like others, Kailasam was willing to subscribe to emerging (western) concepts of modernity—implicit in the redefinitions of qualities such as masculinity and

adulthood—and to 'search' for exemplars of them in India's own 'past'. Kailasam seems to specifically emphasize the "purposes", the predicament and motivation of the fringe characters of mythology to highlight something of the tradition and of what was required for modernization of that tradition. He investigates their characters beyond the roles assigned to them by the 'authorized' versions of the great epics and he transforms them from passive victims to active participants, thus fitting them into western definitions of 'masculinity'. Kailasam simultaneously questioned the 'authority' of unfair projections operative for millennia which have led to our divided and unjust society.

Also woven within these plays is Kailasam's purpose to reinterpret the past in the light of his contemporary reality. Yet in this process Kailasam employs a language of the past, that too a language reasonably unfamiliar even to English-educated Indians. In Chapter 2 we have explored this apparent contradiction. While a thorough study of such phenomena across India in that time was beyond the scope of our study, Kailasam's choice is hardly isolated—consider the form and language used by other writers like Aurobindo Ghosh and Toru Dutt in their explorations of the past.

While analyzing Kailasam's preoccupation with marginalized characters as modern alternatives or exemplars for reshaping society, this dissertation has discovered more topics for study. One of them is the construction of women (and their roles), especially as mothers, in the lives of these heroes. The concept of motherhood for most nationalist writers was associated with the crucial role of procreating and rearing a special breed of

men. This role extended to energizing the menfolk to reconstruct the 'motherland'.[2] In Kailasam's play <u>The Brahmin's Curse</u> there is Raadha who assumes such a role for Karna, and in <u>The Purpose,</u> it is Ekalavya's mother. Surely, this aspect of Kailasam's plays calls for further study.

The theoretical structure of arguments in this dissertation derives inspiration and ideas largely from critics such as Ashis Nandy, Uma Chakravarti and Partha Chatterjee, who have examined the impact of British colonization on India and its "peoples" through study of a few literary works conceived during the pre-independence period. Their critical analysis includes study of writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, and Vivekananda. But writers from the south such as B.M. Srikantia or T.P. Kailasam, who were also actively engaged in the reconstruction of Indian history and construction of the 'nation', seldom figure in such critical examinations. What is wanting in such accounts is not merely the inclusion of these writers but also a balanced view of India across its many parts active in the attempt to modernize India. Such notions based on equations of 'India' with 'Bengal' have existed long enough. Surely there is an acute need to locate and understand other writers using these extremely insightful frame-works. The present dissertation is only a small instance of such an attempt to critically evaluate writers like Kailasam in the broader framework of nationalist literature. Certainly, it would be also worthwhile to study the works of these and other such marginalized writers from other neglected parts of India by locating them within these frameworks and examining the nuances

and subtleties of their work vis-a-vis the larger contexts. Thus the present study hopes to suggest how further spaces for research may be opened up.

Kailasam, in his presidential speech delivered at the Kannada Sahitya Sammelan at Madras, says:

> We are now eager to construct Karnataka as a single region. And as an obstacle to this attempt is our history. The history which was under the Muslims for 60-70 years, the Peshwas for some time and the British for 150 years is causing much anxiety. To overcome this, we must create new histories.
> (trans. Kailasam 1987, 601).

In the same speech, Kailasam speaks at some length about the need to construct Karnataka and also the other discrete regions of "Tamil", "Telugu" and "Kerala" cultures even before planning the construction of the Indian 'nation' (Kailasam 1987, 601). Kailasam's construction of the British and even the Muslims as the 'other'[1] becomes clear when seen from the nationalistic perspective. But it is not as evident why he 'others' the Peshwas. Also, what is his intention in strongly advocating the construction of other political regions before planning a nation? These queries perhaps could be answered only by closely locating Kailasam and his work within the larger dimensions of various other identity movements like the Karnataka unification movement and caste identity movements which were specific to Karnataka during Kailasam's time.

Furthermore, a study of neglected literary documents like Kailasam's plays will have some serious impact on the image and definition, the historical perception of wider disciplines or domains like Indian Writing in English. To take just one in-

stance, such documents will help clarify once again why in a certain period of this century Indian Writing in English was self-conscious of history. A historical element surfaces through a study of T.P. Kailasam's neglected plays—he wrote these plays between 1933 and 1946; that is to say, his re-examination of the problem of discrimination is contemporaneous to that of some important figures in our history. Clearly, taken further than we have been able to here, a study of neglected authors and documents must refine our own sense of history.

In the current phase of modernity, when identity movements are increasingly gaining prominence, perhaps a re-evaluation of Kailasam's work would enable us to historicize and understand these movements. Hence, Kailasam's plays, both in Kannada and English, call for greater attention. The present thesis has, hopefully, carried out the task of showing that his English plays are worthy of such attention.

Notes

1 Northrop Frye, <u>Fables of Identity</u>. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1963) 11.

2   I have depended on Uma Chakravarti's essay "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" in Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid ed. <u>Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History</u>. (New Delhi: Kali for Women) 27-61.

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