

variations, is true of all children in the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, its political and cultural implications have never been properly understood by those who pretend to be the guardians of our socio-political organizations. For them, for all those who fought for the freedom of the country and later became its rulers, consciously or unconsciously, the European model with one language, one culture, one nation remained the ideal model of a political city state. Instead of dividing the Indian subcontinent into a few hundred administrative units with English as its administrative language, the language of one region was elevated to the status of the official and national language of the entire subcontinent. This political blunder resulted in disastrous consequences. Other linguistic regions reacted violently and the country was divided into several linguistic states with enormous political power. As all administrative work was supposed to be conducted in the regional languages, the states became hermetically sealed for all outsiders, the citizens of the same country.

In the ancient times, the Indian subcontinent was divided into several thousand princely states or political units. Whenever a foreign power invaded India, it imposed a unitary form of administration and language on the area conquered by it. As a result, the number of states was gradually reduced and more uniform administrative units came into being. With the British, it extended from Afghanistan to Burma with Ceylon and Nepal also a part of the same set up. If the narrow sectarian interests had not played havoc with the political aspirations of our people, this whole region would have been today one federal republic of the Indian subcontinent.

In this context, Afghanistan is extremely important. In ancient India, this region was the cultural centre of our people. Afghanistan was the preeminent centre of Sanskrit language and culture in Paninian times. It was also the greatest centre of Buddhist art and culture. Subsequently, the cultural and religious colours changed. But the history of a people is not just the history of one community or religion or language. The Indian subcontinent, very different from the European homogenous linguistic and ethnic states, has always been a multilingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious region. No micro regional language or culture ever dominated its entire political space. It was always due to a given foreign administration that larger and larger units were formed. The normal course would have been to inherit this politico-historical legacy. Unfortunately, this was not to be. None of our great leaders had the intellectual and political vision of a Bharat that could extend from Afghanistan to Burma with

Ceylon and Nepal as its integral parts. And, yet, it was all there to take it if we had not been mentally stuck with our extremely narrow sectarian interests. There was one administrative language, one administrative block, fashioned by the vicissitudes of history over a thousand years of political upheavals. From the very beginning of the freedom struggle, this historical evolution was ignored. Our leaders dreamt only of a Paninian India of 500 BC with uniform language and culture.

This excellent book of Shreesh Chaudhary traces the history of these linguistic transformations during the last two thousand years but maybe it is too late to have any impact on modern India. His grandson may speak several languages with his friends in a fluid colloquial register, but for all that matters, for official work as an administrator or the one who has to deal with him, he has no choice but to have a very high level of proficiency of discourse in one regional language, only to throw it in the cultural dustbin when he moves to another region-state. This multi-ethnic, multi-cultural entity that is India is now a linguistically highly compartmentalized country with hermetically sealed communicative channels.

HARJEET SINGH GILL
Professor Emeritus
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Pradeep Trikha, *Multiple Celebrations, Celebrating Multiplicity: Girish Karnad*, Ajmer: A.R.A.W.LII. Publications, 2009. pp.92. pb. Rs.400

When Girish Karnad wrote *Tughlaq* in 1964 to mitigate the lack of plays on a historical theme on the Kannada stage, he was bringing a consciousness which was extremely attuned to the realities of his times. Though written during his stint at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, Karnad's *Tughlaq* is not merely a faithful portrayal of the times and experiments of a troubled ruler in the pre-Mughal subcontinent. He brought into the script the dilemmas of modern India – clashes between the ideals of the then Prime Minister Nehru and the powerful classes who were suspicious of his motives, the desire to build a secular polity in a society which was deeply divided by the scars of partition. When Karnad wrote the play he was utterly unsure of it being staged. So he let his creative energies loose, conceiving scenes of epic proportions, requiring a large cast. Yet *Tughlaq* has been performed regularly through the decades traversing the changing political climate of independent India – the

India of Indira Gandhi and the imposition of draconian internal emergency in 1975, the era of Rajiv Gandhi's vision of the twenty first century, but mired in several controversies, the communal tension of the nineties with the ugly and shameful face witnessed in Gujarat in 2002. At each stage directors have sought to seek interpretations from the text which have made the play seem to be well-suited for commentary on the contemporary events. Such renewal of relevance becomes possible because Karnad had not attempted a superficial mirroring of history or contemporary reality, or a mere universalisation of the themes in the play. His analysis in *Tughlaq* historicised the action, the characters and the relationships. It is only by being steadfastly faithful to its period of representation that the play becomes timeless in its relevance.

Tughlaq has been staged in varied performance conditions. From the first production at the Indian National Theatre in Bombay in 1965, to Ebrahim Alkazi's memorable production for the National School of Drama (NSD) Repertory at the ruins of Purana Qila in 1974, to Prasanna's 1982 production for the NSD – the play has allowed the opening up of varied new dimensions. While the Purana Qila staging brought out the historical resonances within the ambience of this pre-Mughal fort, Prasanna's decision to use the string curtain to divide the performance space between the street and the court, between the plebeian and the aristocracy, returned to the play Karnad's adoption of the original performance traditions of the "Comapany Natak" and the Parsi theatre.

Tughlaq thus becomes a play which, while being unique in its particular respects, is representative of an entire generation of modern Indian theatre in the decades of 1960s and 70s, which was in search of developing newer idioms, borrowing and adapting from traditional performance forms of the country, striving to represent and analyse on the stage the realities and contradictions of independent India.

It would be difficult to reach an adequate understanding of the importance of *Tughlaq* and the meanings it generates without attention to its performance conditions and contexts. Yet that is what Pradeep Trikha attempts to achieve in the monograph which is the subject of this review. Trikha's survey of Karnad's dramatic career on the basis of textual reading of the scripts. Though this by itself cannot be considered a demerit it could be seen as the limitation of the work.

Trikha offers a fresh perspective on the symbolism in Karnad's work from the point of view of a contemporary reader who seeks to correlate the plays to today's realities like the return to critical interest in mythologies and religion, the increased communication in a cyberworld

and a simultaneous distancing of individuals. In fact, one of the virtues of Trikha's criticism is that he focuses on Karnad's recent work. The chapterisation follows a thematic rather than chronological order. The first chapter 'Karnad via Girish: The Playwright Iconised' introduces the reader to the Karnad's recent plays like *Bali*, *The Sacrifice* and *Wedding Album* and locates them within the recent developments in the world of Indian theatre. Trikha's analysis of *Wedding Album* builds on Karnad's portrayal of the desire of the mother to fetch NRI grooms for her daughters, by connecting it to the dowry market in India where grooms of various accomplishments are sold to the highest bidder. Trikha demonstrates how Karnad as a social physician is able to diagnose the maladies of the Indian society and recommend remedies.

Chapter Two focuses on the reworking of myths and folklores in *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala* and *The Fire and the Rain*. The 'new', the contemporary is given the treatment of the 'old', the mythical and the folkloric, as the myth and the present interpret each other. Trikha pays particular attention to the indictment of patriarchal society and the sense of insecurity which results from the control over women.

The study of modern relationships in what Trikha terms the 'cyber-spaced world' is the subject of the third chapter, where he studies some of Karnad's recent plays – *Broken Images*, *Flowers* and *Wedding Album*. The love triangle and the dissipation of the idea of the home is shown to hurt the modern woman. Trikha demonstrates Karnad's use of language in shaping characters who gradually lose control over themselves.

Karnad's use of historical subjects to comment on the present concerns Trikha in the next two chapters. He goes behind the texts to reveal the well researched nature of the plays like *Tughlaq* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. But the plays do not remain splendid documentation of the past, but Karnad's ability to rework elements of history allow him to make his plays contemporary. According to Trikha *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* being written in English for the BBC to mark India's independence presents simultaneously a paradox as well as an opportunity. He celebrates Karnad's bilingualism which is an uncanny representation of half a century of independent India. The play itself is a bringing forward of the historical resistance to the erstwhile colonial masters. Yet Karnad's mastery shows how Tipu's dreams, influenced by Western ideas, were the source of his downfall.

Though Trikha's monograph is a tribute to a playwright he admires, his prose is not inspired by Karnad's mastery of narratives. He moves uncontrollably from one point to another without allowing each one to register itself before the reader. On more than one

occasion one is left wondering if the chapterisation is of any consequence. If Trikha's bumpy prose is not enough, the numerous typographical errors are bound to catch attention.

There are also some statements in the book which give away an element of thoughtlessness. Trikha describes *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* in Aristotelian terms as a play that leaves the audience purged 'from their passions spent and calm of mind restored'. Immediately afterward he states that in the play, 'Karnad, like Brecht intends to "break down the emphatic link between spectator and performer"' (p.72). Trikha finds no contradiction between Aristotelian and Brechtian methods. While discussing the passion of the masses in *Tughlaq* he suggests that Karnad's play helps interpret the communalism of the 1990s in India which has 'to an extent effected (sic) *secular* image of *Hinduism*' (p.62. My emphasis)!

The book opens with a Foreword by G.J.V. Prasad which traces Karnad as a bilingualist, as someone who is deft in both English and Kannad, and able to move from one language to another with ease. Prasad refers to Karnad's beginnings at Oxford to lay stress on his return to India even though the promise of a different fame beckoned him in the form of representing India in English, the diasporic route adopted by many. Karnad's return to India brought him in company with generation of playwrights who together transformed the modern Indian stage.

ARJUN GHOSH
Fellow
IAS, Shimla

Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, Noida: Harper Collins India, 2008. pp. 321. Rs. 395

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* created many a ripple when it bagged the Man Booker for Fiction for 2008. The Booker Committee judges praised it as a "new voice", an eye-opener with rare insight and sound ending. The western reviewers were tickled by the "chatty" murderer protagonist's exposé of "the underbelly of India's tiger economy"; his ability to lift the lid off the "economic miracle" of India and the courage to show its darker aspects.

The Indian reviewers were not as amused though. For some the novel is "inauthentic", for others just "tedious and unfunny slog." Many question Adiga's credentials as an insider-outsider to write about India. Son of a doctor, and having lived and studied primarily in the USA, England and Australia his knowledge about "real

India" seems to be limited to media coverage, contend his critics.

The novel tells the story of one Balram Halwai, resident of Laxmangarh in Gaya district. In school it is drummed into them that they are lucky to belong to a place where Lord Buddha received "Light". Balram contends, however, that it is Darkness they are doomed to live in. Balram recounts how he learnt to dream big, got out of Darkness and became a successful entrepreneur. But unfortunately, his is not the usual rag to riches tale worth emulating. It is not even a crime-thriller. It is a grim and angry narrative in epistolary form. The letters are written to the Chinese Premier in the course of seven nights. Balram Halwai is not "an original thinker" but he is "an original listener." As Mr. Ashok's chauffeur he picks up a few useful tricks and becomes adept at turning everything to his advantage. As a fugitive murderer he fears detection but knowing the working of our law enforcing machinery, he is relaxed and chooses to narrate his tale to the visiting Premier.

With his mordant humor, bitter sarcasm and amusing observations the protagonist reveals his march from childhood to manhood, from his innocent past to his corrupt present. Reading on, we put the pieces together and know that his father was an impoverished rickshaw-puller but he had a dream — to educate his son, so that "he should live like a man." But Balram cannot continue his education, he has to work as teashop boy. His parents die untimely death spewing blood lying in a dirty government hospital without medical aid. The narrative goes to and fro and we find ourselves interested further in him, to know how a child who cannot see even a lizard being killed and whose biggest boyhood ideal/idol is the bus conductor, Vijay (with his Khaki uniform and a shining whistle) becomes an inveterate murderer and a grabbing entrepreneur. That is what keeps us glued to the story.

Balram tells a few key points to the readers in the beginning: first, he is a fugitive murderer; second, the police are after him; and third, he cannot be caught as long as he has the "brown" envelop and there are officials ready to accept it. Another significant pointer pertains to his identity. He starts his life without a name but amazingly, he acquires four identities that come handy to him in his chequered career.

His parents call him Munna but since it is not a real name the teacher decides on Balram. Soon, impressed by his quickness the school Inspector calls him "White Tiger" a rare species in "this jungle" of idiots (p.35). In Delhi his rustic ways earn him an appellation "Country-Mouse". Subsequently, he becomes —Ashok — and flourishes as Ashok Sharma, the entrepreneur. Once the school