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## ART &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

*Searing idea of incest*

**G**IRISH KARNAD invariably dismissed Anju Mallige (1977) when speaking about his writing. Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Nagamandala were the plays he and those discussing his work readily accepted. He once said Anju Mallige would not go down well in India, dealing as it did with incest, which he felt was alien to Indian culture. His fears of rejection were strengthened after a production by Shankar Nag dismayed Kannada critics.

However, Girish, who was present in the audience, will most certainly have to change his mind and join us in proclaiming Anju Mallige misjudged. It took the astute director from Karnataka, Prasanna, to prove Girish wrong. The NSD 3rd year student presentation of Anju Mallige in Hindi (Devendra Raj Ankur and Krishna K.) revealed a disturbing play, a realistic drama that dares to raise issues buried in the collective cultural subconscious.

The play is set in Oxford where Girish studied on a Rhodes Scholarship. The time is the sixties and the main players are Satish, an Indian student, and Yamini his artist sister. Julia is Satish's British fiancée and David a white fascist lorry driver who speaks to Yamini in the voice of God. Gautam, the other Indian student, who is in love with Yamini, represents the rare breed that wants to return to India. India is a 'rog', a disease. I shall return and quoting Yamini's mother at the news of the death of her daughter he says, 'jo hona hai wohi hoga'. Fatalism!

Girish employs the Indian in a foreign land syndrome as a provocative background against which the inexorable sequence of fateful events occur. Harin in his Harry avatar is the funny face, and David the cruel face of racism. But neither Oxford, nor any other 'real' space matter: The drama is realistic but the landscape is immemorial time in abstract space, and Yamini both real and mythical. At the level of reality Yamini is the loving sister and sister in law, Gautam's compliant girl friend.

However, when she travels back in time — and the writer/director



Anju Mallige by Girish Karnad

have invented a chronic headache for this — she is the Yamini of mythology — Electra, Jocasta, Eve, or Yami of the Rig Veda? She then enters a world only she inhabits. In one of those moments, after she has been released from a mental institution, Yamini tells Julia, whom Satish has married in the period of Yamini's incarceration, how she slept with Satish, bore him a child which he had aborted before leaving for England.

Satish denies incest but recoils in horror when Julia comes dressed in Yamini's saree. This is the last scene in the play. It follows Yamini's suicide. The act of incest is a question mark, but its idea is a searing presence in the play.

Contrary to what Girish imagined in the rejection of his own spontaneous writing, incest, besides forming a part of Indian mythology is not a stranger to its reality. A girl at puberty invests her dreams in the male closest to her. In the extended family in India there are cousins who become repositories of sexual fantasy, and the appetite to experiment with natural urges is an adventure often innocently undertaken.

Yamini's desolate adolescence has only one inhabitant, younger brother Satish. He is her comrade, her protector, her love. There is no fear when she explores her own

adolescent puberty with a person so close, so easily accessible. The availability of a girl burning with desire, aroused easily, is more often than not, a young boy's first experience with sex. But the boys become men and move on, whilst the women are left behind in closed houses. And they dream. The dreams are the only world they can call their very own. Mrs Yamini dies in just such a dream?

The speaking visual design of movements and montage, set and lights (Ranjana Singh), colour and contrast, moved in deliberate apposition to the music (Santanu Bose), speech pattern and physical features of the players, created a dramatic tension which left one breathless with apprehension. Prasanna read the drama for meaning and literary value as a text for further explorations in other languages.

Anju Jaitley as Yamini gave a moving performance. She, and M. S. Moinuddin as David, rescued the play from banality at dangerous moments. Atul Kulkarni (Satish), Ashwin Dighe (Julia), Paresh Parekh 'rose to the challenge posed to them by Anju Mallige, which incidentally means 'frightened jasmine', and by the demands of the intellectual inputs demanded by Prasanna.

Kavita Nagpal