

## Convergence of Media: Television, (tele)Film and Theatre in Girish Karnad's *Broken Images: A (Dramatic) Monologue*

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Girish Karnad, one of the four major Indian playwrights<sup>1</sup>, credited with having initiated Modern Indian Drama/Theatre in the sixties in post independent India has only twelve plays to his credit and writes both in Kannada and English. His plays have been translated and performed in multiple languages, and *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala* and *Fire and the Rain* have been prescribed as texts by major Indian Universities as part of Indian (English) Literature Courses. *Fire and the Rain* has traversed from the stage to its cinematic version as *Agnivarsha*<sup>2</sup>.

Karnad's multiple mediatic roles as a playwright, translator, editor, director, administrator, an actor, director, script-writer for telefilms and films give him a greater edge in examining the place of theatre within the New Age metaphorical landscape of (mass) media and technology in the global context. The playwright's note<sup>3</sup> is a useful pointer to the play's genesis and hints at the impact of media on the audience (consumers). Deploying the shared realm of multiple media (print, radio, television, film, video, internet), Karnad raises significant postcolonial generic concerns. *Odakalu Bimba*(Kannada) and *Broken Images*<sup>4</sup>(English) were written as companion pieces for the Bangalore-based Rangashankara Theatre's opening festival in October 2004. This paper on *Broken Images* is largely inspired by Henry Jenkins'<sup>5</sup> ideas on the convergence of media and empowered consumerism. Before proceeding, a brief look into the difference between media and theatre is warranted.

Patrice Pavis'<sup>6</sup> observes that the basic difference between theatre and media is that theatre "tends towards simplification, minimalization, ... to a direct exchange between actor and spectator" and "is 'in essence'

(i.e. in its optimal mode of reception) an art of limited range”; in stark contrast, media with its multiple spectators, “tend towards complication and sophistication ... open to maximal multiplication, inscribed in technological but also in ideological and cultural practices, in a process of information and disinformation”(1992:101). Moreover, “... a television or radio broadcast presents itself sometimes as real (as in news broadcasts) and sometimes as fictional (telling a story)” compelling spectators to ask “if it is fact or fiction?” and though theatre “plays on the two levels of fact and fiction” yet, it is credible for “its story is continually supported by reality effects and remarks”(ibid:102-103). In so far as they are relevant to the play, I have outlined Auslander Philip’s<sup>7</sup> insights into the difference between television, film and theatre.

One cannot refute Auslander’s proposition that television has turned from a medium to an environment in itself i.e. “the televisual” or “the cultural context” and based on the real economic relations, power and prestige, “theatre (and live performance generally) and the mass media are rivals and not partners”(1999:1). He elaborates that what circulates on television(audio/video recordings) is mediatized<sup>8</sup> performance leading to mediatization, which in Fredric Jameson’s words, is “the process whereby the traditional fine arts ... come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system”; furthermore, pressurized by mediatized culture and corresponding audience-expectations, performances require a remediation<sup>9</sup> wherein the response of “live performance to the oppression and economic superiority of mediatized forms has been to become as much like them as possible”(ibid:7).

Debating television’s relationship to film and theatre, Auslander contends that the “ideologically ingrained sense of TV as a live medium” distinguishes it from film enabling it “to colonize liveness” with the potential for turning “the home into a kind of theatre characterized, paradoxically, by both absolute intimacy and global reach”(ibid:13,16). Endorsing the impact of television on theatre, Karnad admits that the play’s form was “entirely due to the practical exigencies of production cost and the scarcity of actors for rehearsals because TV has drawn away

most of the good actors”(Kumar, 2008). Let me now turn to the idea of convergence.

Convergence, according to Henry Jenkins, is “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences” describing “technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who’s speaking and what they think they are talking about”(2006:2-3). Declaring that “in the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted”, instead of looking at convergence as merely “a technological process bringing together multiple media functions within the same devices” he proclaims it as “a cultural shift” wherein new, active and socially connected consumers “are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” simultaneously involving media producers and consumers in a “participatory culture” as against the old “passive media spectatorship”(ibid:3).

Convergence takes place “within the brains of individual consumers” who comprehend their environment, interact and transform “bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow”, and therefore Jenkins asserts that “collective intelligence<sup>10</sup>” is an “alternative source of media power”(ibid:3-4). Likewise, industry leaders make “sense of a moment of disorienting change” by articulating their doubts and anxieties, acknowledging the significance of consumers and networking, albeit are unsure as to how to proceed.(ibid:6-7) Drawing upon Pool’s<sup>11</sup> insights, he sees divergence and convergence as two sides of a single phenomena for “convergence of modes” not only reduces barriers between media and communication technologies but also enables diversification, participation and content-circulation through multiple channels.(ibid:11) As “digitization set the conditions for convergence; corporate conglomerates created its imperative”, he agrees with Pool’s regarding the age of media transition with their strategies, “competing interests” and “unclear directions and unpredictable outcomes”, calls for localized perspectives in asking if they “open new opportunities for expression or expand the power of big media”(ibid:11-12).

Media convergence is not just a technological shift, Jenkins adds, for convergence (a process and not an end) changes “the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences” as also “the logic by which media industries operate and by which media consumers process news and entertainment” and illustrates that our portable cell phone testifies to technical convergence and alters media ownership which controls the entertainment industry and in turn modifies our consumption. (*ibid*:16-17) Entertainment content also projects “our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desires”, so he cautions that consumers<sup>12</sup> handling media can be creative or controversial; while “the cultural shifts, the legal battles and the economic consolidations” lead to media convergence and technological changes which reduce costs, multiply channels and enable empowered consumerism but might be monopolized by a few media multinationals<sup>13</sup>. (*ibid*:17-18)

Paradoxically, in the convergence process, media companies increase the flow of content through innumerable channels “to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments” and new consumers use media technologies to control media flow and ensure democratic participation resulting in tense relations between media producers and consumers. (*ibid*:18-19) In their ambiguous response to empowered consumers (equally confused), media producers concede that convergence offers opportunities with the risk of threatened markets if consumers migrate (from television to the Internet). Given that “Extension, synergy and franchising are pushing media industries to embrace convergence”<sup>14</sup>, he champions a responsive “transmedia storytelling<sup>15</sup>” by calling for active participation by consumers belonging to knowledge communities. (*ibid*:19-21) In tune with the above and Karnad’s insight that the play is a discussion between woman and technology, I pose some conflicting perspectives regarding our reading, viewing and writing practices from an educator’s perspective influenced by interactions with learners.

Having delineated the analytic premise of the paper, I would like to cite M.W. MacCallum’s remarks on the dramatic monologue as pertinent to

a greater understanding of the play: "... the object [of the dramatic monologue] is to give facts from within. A certain dramatic understanding of the person speaking, which implies a certain dramatic sympathy with him, is not only the essential condition, but the final cause of the whole species"(qtd in Langbaum, 1957:78). I find a coming together of writers, translators, sponsors, readers, viewers and spectators, critics and English lecturers; the last of the implied audience-consumers are highlighted by the epigraph and the protagonist's profession:

"... for you know only,  
a heap of broken Images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter ..."

(T.S.Eliot, *The Waste Land* )

The detailed stage directions evoke the predominantly realistic interiors of Shree TV Studio with multiple television sets of different sizes in the background (silent till the last few minutes), a big plasma screen in the forefront on the right, a chair and a telly table, a small overhead red bulb on the left and a camera placed at the stage end. The middle-aged Manjula Nayak (an English lecturer, a Kannada short-story writer and an international celebrity with her first English novel), who confidently walks into the broadcasting studio with her lapel mike and earpiece and easily converses with the offstage cameraman Raza, hints at the impact of media culture.

In the convergence paradigm, Jenkins assures us that the old and the new media co-exist for "delivery technologies" or, in simple words, the tools for accessing media content "become obsolete and get replaced" but media continues to evolve notwithstanding the change in content, audience and status of a medium and it follows that print and spoken words, cinema (television?) and theatre, TV and radio co-exist. (*ibid*: 13-14) This awareness is brought out in the play through Manjula's conversation with Raza:

MANJULA: But where is the camera? ...New Technology. Isn't it scary?

Theatre of obsolescence? ... when you think of Indian television studios, you always imagine them cluttered. ... Elephantine lights. Headphones. Cameras. ... But here ... I mean, it's all so Spartan ... I know. But a bit lonely too. Like a sound studio ... All right. No camera. I just look ahead and speak to an invisible audience in front of me ...(261-262).

Poised to deliver a ten minute drafted speech before the broadcast of a Kannada telefilm based on her bestseller *The River Has No Memories*; her role-play enabled by the Announcer's onscreen Image and voice-over, her own onscreen Image (pre-recorded video recordings which function as performances i.e. telecast in the play) creates a tension between the speaker-receiver or performer-spectator. In tune with Jenkins' observations, the play depicts the convergence of print and television industries and the networking of literary agents, media launchers, sponsors/advertisers, translators, producers, directors, actors and crew enabling the flow of Manjula's English novel through multiple media (print and television) and languages (English and Kannada) as proof of 'participatory culture' and 'expanded markets' and conflicting perspectives on the entertainment industry.

The context is brought home to us through the Male Announcer who informs us about Manjula's cross-over from Kannada short-story writing to an English novel, the advances, the adaptation and broadcast of the Kannada telefilm based on her novel. In her address (mediatized) to the viewers, Manjula expresses her gratitude, "...The Kannada reality I conceived in English has been translated back into Kannada – to perfection – by the Director. I couldn't have done it better. My thanks to the cast and the crew and of course, Shree-TV..."(266). At the end of her address, her onscreen Image comes to life, and taking Karnad's hint that from this part of the play, 'the woman is expected to react to her Image as if both were live characters'(267), I go on to analyse the conflicting perspectives. The difference between her public and private view is visible when Manjula reflects on the role of the media in the adaptation of her novel into a tele-film and affirms her complicity through her monologue:

MANJULA: But the film? Hasn't it started?

IMAGE: Aw, screw the film... It's awful anyway.

MANJULA: I told them it won't work. A telefilm needs lots of movement.

Different locations. Pace. Action. Drama. 'A good novel does not necessarily make a good film,' I argued. But they were persistent. Sponsors were easy to find. (Pause) They paid well. (268)

Attending to the difference between television and theatre, her remark, "But the film must be halfway by now. What about the commercial break? I was told advertisers were queuing up ..." (278), makes us collectively wonder if the accusations of betrayal against Manjula and the critique of the (tele)film do not spark a controversy boosting the sales or ratings benefitting the writer and/or the producers. Likewise, the play hints at the collective control of media industries and the global market constraints/compulsions under which the writers apparently operate. Karnad calls for a 'remediation' by projecting into the protagonist's role and we ask - Are we, the consumers, losers in the bargain? Are our reading and viewing practices controlled by networked forces? Are we being forcibly moved from reading short stories and plays to novels, likewise, from reading novels in regional languages to only English novels? Are we being encouraged to move from reading to viewing (tele)films and vice-versa?

Today's delivery technologies (Xerox machines and the all-in-one scanner, printer and copy-maker) enable making of multiple copies, perhaps violating copyright laws but reducing the 'participatory gap' between the educated elite and the masses. A case in point, at least in Mumbai, is the easy availability of English novels at roadside stalls for Rs 60. Additionally, the adaptation of novels into films - like *Harry Potter*, *Q and A* by Vikas Sampat (*Slumdog Millionaire*-English and Hindi), Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ a Call Center* (*Hello*-Hindi) and *Five Point Someone (3 Idiots)* into films and their repeated telecasts accelerate circulation and consumption of similar content hinting at the

shift from reading to viewing or in the reverse. I must admit the pleasure of buying and reading aloud to my children J.K.Rowling's first book after viewing its cinematic version- *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which was followed by three books which turned my children into avid readers and Potter fans. I know of many schoolteachers who used the text and film in the classroom to motivate students to develop reading habits.

Pottermania and the resulting consumption by consumers have been tapped by the media magnates to carve a niche market through translations and adaptations as also indigenous versions of books, films and tele-films based on it leading to media controversies on the infringement of copyright laws. Nevertheless, the reality of cheaper roadside versions makes us reflect- Is it an instance of homogenized consumption sparked by media controversy on aspects of the book/film? Does it depict generic efflorescence, participative culture, extended markets (global/local?) and empowered consumers or undermined genres, participative gap, eroded markets and migrant consumers? The reactions are mixed for neither of the above is wholly true and the truth lies in-between.

It is evident that the prestige and status accorded to an English novel due to its global readership (interestingly, even the translated ones like U.R.Ananthamurthy's Kannada novel *Samskara* among others) undermines the production and consumption of the genres of Indian short stories and plays (regional and English) which are neither saleable nor easily adaptable and enjoy less power and prestige as Auslander suggests. In contrast, spurred by global market economics, the charm of an English novel, with its popularity, assurances of commissions, huge advances, multiple transmissions and media-coverage is brought home to us through the deliberate cross-over of writers like Manjula. Grounded in personal experience, I echo Image's doubt, because writing, although liberating is a slow and painful task for me: "350 printed pages worth of material within two weeks. ... But one hundred and fifty thousand words in 2 weeks? Ten thousand words a day! It was not inspiration, It was a cataract – of words. A deluge not matched since Noah's Ark!"(279)

Extending Jenkin's views on digitization and the Internet, the convergence of print, television and computer industries in our mobile/internet-centred lives proffers a wide range of experiences (entertainment, educative and research, online bookings etc). The availability of ebooks, films, telefilms and today even partial performances of plays which can be read/viewed with the help of portable mobiles/pendrives with free softwares at once empower the consumers as well as lead to (mis)information/plagiarism through instant downloading.

You-tube videos, a craze with the youth, with their amazing potency to handle media seem to illustrate Jenkins' concept of creative and controversial use of media by consumers. Examples of creative use could include the various original music/play/archival videos which can be uploaded (a case in point being Justin Bieber, a singing sensation) and the information explosion due to young consumers sharing internet space and leading virtual lives via social-networking sites like *facebook*, *orkut*, and *quepasa*. At the same time, the controversial use of media could well be the recent case of teenagers performing stunts on moving trains, the circulation of porn content, or the deleterious consequences of uploading such content. While asking if strict regulations and monitoring are the need of the hour, we need to agree that the internet empowers us to "archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways" (*ibid*:18). A case in point is the recent public participation in Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign.

In the specific context of classroom teaching, I must say I have begun to use the internet and mobiles in the classroom with three specific objectives: to maintain the interest of students, to create the image of being an up-to-date educator, and to use readily available technologies to enhance their comprehension, democratic participation and analytical skills. With regard to drama/theatre studies, I have begun to experience that video-clippings of various performances could be of great help in classroom teaching in understanding of the form. Since the play has been prescribed for standard XII by the NCERT, in my presentation, I have attempted a brief demonstration of the role of internet-enabled

services. I have included photographs (available online) of the play directed by Girish Karnad for the Rangashankara performance as well as clippings of the play hosted by Sahara International from You-tube videos.

In conclusion, the play's form and my own profession have inspired me to articulate a few conflicting perspectives regarding the convergence paradigm with the aim of contributing towards 'collective intelligence' and 'participatory culture' and reducing 'participating gap' among learners. Although limited, the perspectives posed are intended to generate debates on the way the realm of (classroom) education will gradually operate in future and the role expected of the educators and policy-makers in catering to the diverse demands/interests of the techno-savvy learner communities.

### Notes

1. The Bengali playwright Badal Sircar, the Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar and the Hindi playwright Mohan Rakesh were the three others.
2. The film is directed by Arjun Sajnani.
3. In <http://www.aceproductions.biz/aceprod/theatre/Broken%20Images.html> 'The new technologies — video, television, films, billboards, computers, mobiles — whisper to us in shimmering figures, seduce us with moving lines, colours and luminocities. Softwares speaking through microprocessors mould our tastes, question our judgements, persuade us to take their messages as our own, so that as the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard points out, simulation furnishes us with copies more real than normal reality. When T.S. Eliot talked of 'a heap of broken images where sun beats and the dead tree gives no shelter in his 'Waste Land', he was obviously talking of concrete images found piled in a desert. The images that surround us — in every burgeoning Indian megalopolis

— are digital, insubstantial but persistent, and the desert they define is our 'hyper-reality'. We all have morphed into our own images'.

4. The play was inspired by the Neemrana conference in 2001 and inspired by Shashi Deshpande's talk. Karnad co-directed the play with K.M. Chaitanya.
5. Henry Jenkins is the Director and Professor of Comparative Media Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.
6. Patrice Pavis is Professor for Theatre Studies at the University of Kent, Canterbury.
7. Philip Auslander is Professor School of Literature, Communication and Culture at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta.
8. Borrows Jean Baudrillard's term and refers to mediatized as a cultural object which "is a product of the mass media or of media technology" (1999:5).
10. Borrows French cybertheorist Pierre Levy's term to refer to consumption as a collective process.
11. Ithiel de Sola Pool was the founding chairman of the MIT Political Science department and the founder of the MIT Communications Forum and was the first to use the term convergence in his book *Technologies of Freedom* (1983).
12. He cites the instance of fans of a popular television series who "may sample dialogue, summarize episodes, debate subtexts, create original fan fiction, record their own soundtracks, make their own movies – and distribute all of this world-wide via the Internet" (*ibid* :17).

13. He points out that “Warner Bros produces film, television, popular music, computer games, web sites, toys, amusement parks rides, books, newspapers, magazines and comics”(ibid:18).
14. According to industry insiders “extension” refers to their efforts to expand the potential markets by moving content across different delivery systems; “synergy” to the economic opportunities due to their ownership and control; “franchise” to their coordinated effort to brand and market fictional content under these new conditions”(ibid :19).
15. According to Jenkins, Transmedia Storytelling “is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience”(ibid :21).

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5hWMV0okNM&feature=related> Sahara presents *Shabana Azmi in Broken Images* uploaded by nasirrao1 > 4 September 2011

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