

A Brief Study on Girish Karnad's Plays

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Abstract

Indian actor Girish Raghunath Karnad is also a Jnanpithawardee Playwright, film director, and master of the performing arts. His plays were first composed in Kannad before being translated into other loan languages. He has English transcriptions of his plays. He is now widely regarded as the greatest modern playwright thanks to his plays. Karnad had direct involvement with Natak Companies and folk theater. He is one of India's three greatest novelists. The other two are Bengali writer Badal Sarkar and Marathi writer Vijay Tendulkar. He attempts to bring back the regional customs and culture in his plays. The plays of Karnad heavily reference Indian culture and customs.

Keywords: *culture, tradition, folk-lore, myth, history etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Karnad has taken use of Indian mythology with a specific intention in mind. The foundation of Indian mythology is a written textual tradition that has endured over time despite attempts at subversion and outside influences. To prevent them from going extinct, however, the folktales and traditions that capture the social and cultural ethos of the country are deeply embedded in an oral heritage that needs to be preserved right now. Folk theater is a useful method for preserving many of these folk traditions and cultures into the modern era. The contemporary dramatist Karnad is among those who have made significant contributions to the genre. As a member of the postcolonial playwright movement, he draws a great deal of inspiration for his plays from myths, tales, and folklore, as well as from their rich Indian sensibility and heritage. By incorporating many methods and devices from folk theatre, he has tried to preserve the essence of Indian culture and tradition in his plays. Along with attempting to depict modern society and its problems, Karnad has included a variety of traditional folktales as well as folk theater techniques and devices in many of his plays. He has worked with folk theater forms and native theater styles such as Yakshagana and Parsee Natak models.

In addition to focusing on the complexities of human relationships, the Karnad drama subtly criticizes contemporary Indian culture. With the release of his play *Yayati* in 1961, Karnad launched his literary career as a dramatist. Drawing inspiration from the mythical *Yayati* figure in the *Mahabharata*, Karnad illustrates the modern problem faced by every man torn between the competing forces of materialism and renunciation, pleasure and responsibility. Karnad has used the role of *Sutradhara*, who is based on the narrator/commentator of folk theater, in addition to the puronic mythology upon which the play is based. The *Sutradhara* tells the audience of the play's mythical beginnings and its central theme—which underscores the significance of accepting one's responsibility in life. The monarch *Yayati* meets the lovely *Devyani*, *Shukracharya*'s only daughter, in his first play *Yayati*. It was in the dry well that he had first seen her. She was attracted to *Yayati* and requested him to marry her right away, pleading that he had raised a lady by the right hand. She believed that *Yayati*, the emperor, would make a worthy husband. In spite of social taboos and caste infractions, *Yayati* and *Devyani*'s marriage was formally celebrated. Due to her indecent act against *Devyani*, *Sharmishtha*, who pushed *Devyani*, was forced to go with *Devyani* after their marriage. This age-old story has been given fresh meaning and significance by Karnad, making it extremely pertinent to the current state of affairs. *Yayati*'s final renunciation and his attachment to life and its joys remain as a symbolic motif. Karnad's creative contribution is his ability to grasp *Yayati*'s final decision's motivations.

Karnad used a legendary figure from Indian history, a visionary and an idealist, in his second play, *Tughlaq* (1964). Karnad's *Tughlaq*, regarded as a masterpiece of theatre, uses a number of folk theatrical techniques taken from Parsee theater, such as the usage of *Deep Scenes* and *Shallow Scenes* to show the exterior of a street and the interior of a palace, with a focus on scenery, drama, etc. Karnad attempts to capture the disappointment and collapse of Nehruvian idealism in Indian political history through the historical figure of

Tughlaq. The drama explores the pursuit of cultural ideals and offers an understanding of human character, including its breadth and complexity. Its main argument is that it's one of the best attempts ever made in India to create an authentic English historical drama. Karnad successfully attempted to bring religion and politics to Tughlaq. The play's protagonist, Muhammad Tughlaq, is an optimist who wants to see secularism, Hindu-Muslim cooperation, and the creation of a new future for India. The most important lesson that Karnad imparted in his Tughlaq is that social impurities cannot be eliminated by religious saints. He transforms history into a topical issue that is pertinent to his own day by dramatizing it. He meticulously portrays his observation of post-independence Nehruvian policy and his generation's disappointment with socio-political reality in Tughlaq using his inventiveness and magnificent finding of the dysfunctional politics of the 14th-century Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

Karnad's third play, Hayavadana (1971), is based on Thomas Mann's tale *The Transposed Heads*. Originally drawn from Somdeva's Brihatkatha Saritsagara and Vetala Pathavimshati, Hayavadana literally means "one with horse head." Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads* is the antecedent text. Though most civilizations' myths, folklore, and folktales don't often depict two people switching heads. These tales have a rather abundant source in Indian mythology. The genesis of the elephant-headed god Ganesha is the subject of the majority of Indian tellings of this story. There is a primary plot and a subplot in Hayavadana. It falls within the umbrella of contemporary Indian drama. Hayavadana demonstrated how contemporary Indian theater is intertwined with national tradition. The protagonists of the tale are Devdutta and Kapila, two friends, and Devdutta's wife, Padmini. In the play, there is a love triangle in which Kapila develops feelings for Padmini. Bhagvata and the others worship Lord Ganesha in the play's opening scene.

O Elephant headed Herambha your flag is the symbol of Victory and you shine like a thousand suns. O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi, you are seated on a mouse and adorned With a snake, you are single tusked and destroyer of Incompleteness. (Karnad 01)

Karnad's Hayavadana deals with the complexity of human relationship and man's yearning for perfection.

Karnad's Nagamandala (1990) is a mythological play based on a folk tale and a snake myth. The play is based on two oral tales from Karnataka, which Karnad had heard from Prof. A.K. Ramanujan. The sub-title *Play With a Cobra*, given by Karnad himself is indicative of its theme and the significance of the role of Cobra in it. In Nagamandala, Karnad weaves two Kannada folk tales together. The play is based on the theme of Injustice done to women by men in a patriarchal society. Women's agony and anguish is shown in the play. The main plot of Nagamandala is the story of Rani. She is introduced as a young bride on the urge of a new life with her husband Appanna. She starts her new life with her husband and has multiple expectations, desires and dreams. But Appanna treats her as if she were a mere servant. The play is a tale of male chauvinism and incarnation of women. Karnad presents the problem of chastity that is primarily related with woman and they must care more for chastity than men in Indian society. Girish Karnad presents 'snake ordeal' for Rani to prove her chastity in Nagamandala. It depicts the pitiable condition of Rani, who can't be said to be representing most of the young girls, who, just after their marriage, fall victim to the ill-treatment and atrocities of their husbands.

Another drama that Karnad wrote in 1990 is called *Tale-Danda*. It tells the story of Veershaivism, the extreme protest and reform movement that arose in 12th-century Karnataka. It is a theatrical portrayal of the unfavorable ramifications brought about by the Hindu legend of Vernas' genesis. The tale of Vernas is contested by Bijjala, a Shudra and caste barbarian, who is portrayed as the ruler of Kalyan. The Mandir-Mandal controversy serves as the context for this writing.

II. CONCLUSION

In his plays, Karnad tackles mythological events and gives a modern interpretation. In his plays, he makes connections between natural and supernatural phenomena in human contexts as well as between ancient and modern theatrical traditions. He transforms Indian myths into a means of expressing fresh perspectives. He illustrates the absurdity of life—complete with its fleeting passions, struggles, and people's never-ending quest for perfection—through the use of myths. He wants to evoke a sense of devotion in us while discussing old stories since we suffer in this world because we have lost confidence in the gods. His plays center on fresh interpretations of Indian mythology in both form and substance. Through the use of myth, Karnad introduces us to India's long-standing customs and culture, giving us comfort and hope. Yakshagana, a type of drama exclusive to Karnataka, is what Karnad pulls upon. His plays are rife with references to Indian customs and culture.

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