



Study of Girish Karnad as a great Indian drama writer

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Abstract

This paper is to study Karnad's plays from the point of view of Themes and Techniques. While doing so, the focus will mainly be on Man-Woman relationship with the institution of marriage in the postcolonial society. Karnad is India's best living playwright whose journey from *Yayati* to *Boiled Beans on Toast* holds a mirror to the very evolution of a truly 'Indian Theatre' which can be true to its traditions and at the same time responsive to contemporary concerns.

Keywords: brahminicide, byword, contemporaneity, continuance, existentialist, funny, futility, incensed, invulnerable, mythology, narrative, revenge, rues, spawned and unnerving

Introduction

Girish Raghunath Karnad is a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, translator and cultural administrator all rolled into one. He has been rightly called the "renaissance man" (Kalidas & Merchant."Renaissance Man"); whose celebrity is based on decades of prolific and consistent output on native soil. He belongs to a generation that has produced Dharamveer Bharati, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar who have created a national theatre for modern India which is the legacy of his generation. Karnad is the most famous as a playwright. His plays written in Kannad have been widely translated into English and all major Indian languages. Karnad's plays are written neither in English, except few, in which he dreamed of earning international literary fame, nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannad thereafter translated by himself into English a language of adulthood. Karnad's practice of drawing source from myths and tales lends the play an immediacy of appeal. Another important fact is that since the audiences are familiar with the theme they curiously watch or read the play, to know the perception and focus handled by the dramatist.

Born in Matheran, hailing from a Saraswat Konkani family, Girish Karnad (1938) spent his early years in the rural parts of Maharashtra, watching, enjoying and internalizing Yakshagana and the *Natak Mandali* performances in his village. After graduating from Karnataka College, Dharwad in 1958, he moved to Mumbai for his postgraduate studies. At the end of his studies there, he received the Rhodes scholarship and went to England and completed his Masters in Arts in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford. He cultivated a keen interest in art and culture and on his return from England he joined Oxford University Press, Madras in 1963. He was appointed as the Director of Film and Television Institute, Pune in 1974. Almost after a decade and a half, in 1987, he was awarded Fulbright Scholar in Residence at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago.

Girish Karnad is one of the most influential playwrights of our time and his plays have become a byword for imagination, innovation and craftsmanship. He has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan and was conferred the prestigious Jnanapith Award. He also received the Sahitya Akademi Award. Girish Karnad wanted to be a poet, but he was destined to be a playwright. Basically Karnad belong to the Kannada theatre. Since 1980s, there has been considerable work done in the field of drama. And especially with the emergence of dramatist like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sarkar and a few more on the scene, dramas written in English in India have started attracting international importance. This article contains views on the thematic and technical aspects in the plays of Girish Karnad. A brief account of the plays of Karnad is given below, basing on this concept.

Plays of Girish Karnad

Karnad's plays are characterized by myths, legends, and folktales and histories not only for literary purpose but also as a surrogate to portray the contemporary situations. In order to attain deeper insight to study and analyze Karnad's plays, it would not be incongruous to discuss how he has employed myths, legend and history in his plays.

1. Tughlaq: It is the second play of Girish Karnad and published in 1972. It was also originally written in his mother tongue, Kannada and later on it was translated into English by himself only. In fact, this play is sufficient to earn for Girish Karnad an assured place among the Indo-Anglian dramatists. It is the play about the life and political career of Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq of the 14th century India. Karnad deviates from history when it is essential to create artistic and a dramatic effect. Karnad's main aim is to highlight the contradictions in Sultan's complex personality, who is both visionary and man of action, devout and irreligious, generous and unkind, human and barbarian. Tughlaq's close associates-Barni,

the scholarly historian, and Najib, the practical politician, represent two aspects of Tughlaq's personality. Aziz and Azam are two opportunists who take the best possible advantage of Tughlaq's ideal politics and befool him. Tughlaq has contemporaneity. It reflects as no other play, perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country. This play is noticeable for consummate and flawless technique, precision and compactness, irony and paradox and symbolism and modernity. The Tughlaq's character has been delineated with psychological depth and intensity. It has been translated into many languages

2. **Naga-Mandala:** Naga-Mandala was published in 1990. Originally it was written in Kannada and later the dramatist trans-created it into English. It is significant to note that the title of the play takes not after any human character, but after a snake-Naga Rani, the heroine of the play who is humiliated and derided as 'harlot' before the village elders, undertakes the 'Snake Ordeal', like Sita who undergoes the 'Fire Ordeal' and like Sita, she comes out unscathed. She is elevated to divinity and is hailed by all as a goddess. Her husband Appanna realizes his mistakes and accepts her with all humility and feelings of sincere remorse and repentance. It is a folk play and companion piece and sequel of Hayavadana rather than a work of striking originality. Naga-Mandala, a simple but successful tale, celebrates sensuality from a woman's point of view. The noble features of this drama are the use of chorus and music. In the play, all the songs are sung by the flames. The flames are the metaphors of the women of the village who have gathered at the time of the night to tell tales and sing songs.
3. **Hayavadana:** Hayavadana is the third successful and brilliant drama of Girish Karnad written in 1975. It is a memorable treatment of the theme of search for completeness. The main plot of the play is a judicious blend of a folktale from Somadeva's Kathasaritsagara and Thomas Mann's long short story The Transposed Head. The subplot of the play 'Hayavadana', the Horse-Headman, is Karnad's own invention. It serves both as prologue and epilogue of the play. Devadatta, a scholarly young man and Kapila, a sturdy man are intimate friends. Kapila acts as an intermediary and helps Devadatta in marrying Padmini. After marriage, Padmini is drawn to Kapila, which becomes explicit during their trip to the Ujjain fair. Unable to bear this, Devadatta cuts off his head. Kapila shocked, also dies in the same manner. Goddess Kali grants Padmini's prayer to get back the two men. In her excitement, Padmini transposes the two heads. So she now has a man with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body and another man with Kapila's head and Devadatta's body. Padmini chooses to live with the man who is carrying Devadatta's head. After a short time she goes to the other man with Kapila's head. The two men fight and kill each other. Padmini commits 'Sati', leaving her son to be taken care of by Devadatta's father in the city of Dharmapura. The sub-plot has great comic and ironical significance. The horseman's search for completeness ends comically. He becomes a complete horse. Girish Karnad, well-versed both in modern western drama and ancient

drama, has made use of both Western and Indian Dramatic techniques in this play.

As literature reflects the society, playwrights like T. P. Kailasam and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has made use of the sociological aspects, which motivated Karnad to portray the society in his plays. In this respect, Karnad was a dramatist with a difference as his plays were exclusively written for the stage. Karnad makes use of such myths and legends as metaphors for contemporary situations and this has induced the present researcher to make a study of his plays. Regarding the use of myth Hazel E. Barnes' remark is very pertinent, "In a period when values are relatively stable, authors tend to use the classical myths merely allusively, enriching the poetic quality of their work with layers of older connotations. In an age more obviously transitional there is likely to be more of new interpretation."

Karnad's creative genius lies in taking up fragments of historical-legendary experience and fusing them into a forceful statement. By using the grammar of literary archetype, Karnad links the past and the present, the archetypal and the real. By using these myths he tried to reveal the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Karnad delves deep into the traditional myths to spell modern man's anguish and dilemmas that are created in his mind.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude we can say that with the emergence of Girish Karnad's plays, there has been a revival in the interest of drama in English has not only gained vast popularity in India but also has gained international recognition. Indeed, Karnad's art can be interpreted as a vision of reality. This is the effect of post-colonialism. Karnad's plays provided us a picture of a woman in the post-colonial society. So Karnad is India's best living Playwright, whose journey from "Yayati" to "Boiled Beans on Toast" holds a mirror to the very evolution of a truly 'Indian theatre'. In the dramas of Girish Karnad, myth is not merely a ritual or a structural device. It is a means of exploring a modern outcome of a traditional situation. Karnad tries to establish a 'dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity which is a central theme in contemporary Indian society. Karnad does not employ the myths in their entirety. He picks up threads of legends and folk tales that he finds useful. He adds his imagination to construct the plots to these tales. The technique of fringing together myths, legends and folk narratives is his forte.

Karnad is an innovative, multifaceted and problem playwright who imbibes several personalities in one. He has contributed a lot to enrich Indian English Drama through playtext, performance, acting, and direction. Moreover, like his contemporary playwrights Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, and Mahesh Dattani he has reshaped Indian English Drama. But unlike his contemporaries, he adapts mythical and historical material with a view to giving it a psychological interpretation. As a modern playwright, Karnad is always engaged in the act of "deconstructing myths. He takes up mythical and legendary tales from his own culture and unfolds them in the light of modern sensibility. This deconstructing myth becomes an act of self-searching for the playwright...he

combines the past and the present into a unity that bespeaks of tradition and modernity in his art of playwriting” (Gill 8). Karnad upholds the rich cultural heritage of India and endeavours to fight against the legacy of colonialism by advocating Indian values and cultural ethos of India. Subjects from the native soil, characters deeply rooted in indigenous culture, English very much Indianised to suit the context and create feel of Indianness, and folk and classical theatre traditions endorse his well- thought design to set free Indian English drama from the colonial yoke. Indian imagination and sensibility can be easily seen throughout his plays.

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