



GIRISH KARNAD: A TRUE CHAMPION OF TRADITION AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad, a multi-faceted genius, attained an early interest in drama and dramatized contemporary socio-political and cultural issues in his plays through the use of myth, legend and folk-lore. While dealing with history and culture he has tried to relate them with contemporary issues. He carefully uses the substance to reshape our society. Though studied at foreign universities, his deep sense of Indian tradition and culture is very much reflected in all his plays. In that sense he is versatile genius. To literature point of view, it is someone or something that encourages progress and change. Unlike poetry and fiction, Indian drama has been unable to grow and bear rich fruit but Karnad being a playwright feels comfortable and at his best. Girish Karnad is truly a lover of Indian tradition and culture because he brings out all the aspects of tradition and culture of Indian society through his plays.

KEYWORDS: *multi-faceted, excavates, renaissance, delve, myth, legend, folk-lore*

INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is one of the towering figures in the world of Indian theatre. The present paper is an attempt to reinforce the paramount role of the dramatist as a reformer of the society. . To literature point of view, it is someone or something that encourages progress or change. Karnad is the real performer behind the theatre though not actively participates as a character in each and every play. Basically Indian drama in English has not registered very notable gains during the post-independence period. If Indian English Literature is the Cinderella of literature in English, Indian drama in English is the Cinderella of Indian English Literature. Unlike poetry and fiction, Indian drama has been unable to grow and bear rich fruit but, Karnad being a playwright, feels comfortable and at his best. He confesses: "I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I have been an actor, a publisher, a film maker. But in none of these fields have I felt quite as much at home as in playwrighting."

Karnad's construction of a new idea of drama that digs up from the immensely rich, unexplored holdings of Indian myths and history, re-reads their communicative practices and cultural contexts and invites a new mode of reception. Unlike, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar who delve into the problems of the middle class man, Karnad goes back to myths and legends and has made them a vehicle of a new vision. This shows Indianness and contains the element of post colonial attitude. By using these myths, he tried to show the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Karnad is an existential playwright. He concerns himself with the problems of existence, the quest for equality, search for identity and the problems of isolation and frustration. Existentialism asserts

humanism or the dignity of man. This philosophy is exemplified in all his plays.

He dramatizes contemporary socio - political and cultural issues in his plays through the use of myth, legend and folk-lore. Problems like caste, heredity, religion and gender are discussed in his plays. He performs as a reformer that takes help of myth, legend and folk-lore like a jar and keeps heterogeneous elements rendering the effect to the audience. He meticulously uses these devices to project the situations in our society. The play *Tughlaq* dramatizes the political disillusionment of the post - Nehruvian regime. Gender is an important issue in *Hayavadana*. *Yayati* is about king's passion for immortality and the picture of a power hungry politician. *Naga-Mandala* deals with the ironic predicament of a woman who becomes a victim of her husband's indifference. The play questions the very institution of marriage and the sense of isolation and loneliness resulting from post- marriage pressures. *The Fire and the Rain* takes up complex issues situations like revenge, futility of knowledge, jealousy and ego. *Wedding Album* reinvents with introducing a new visual tool – that of technology and its new found issues in traditional situations. *Tale- Danda*, an excellent tragedy, deals with the failure of Basavanna's effort to reform society, sunk in the mire of caste divisions, discrimination between the sexes and exploitation of the marginalized sections. *Bali: The Sacrifice* explores the existential dilemmas of passion and violence posed by an ancient Jain myth.

Post colonialism rejects the claim to universalism made on behalf of the western thought and literature. It examines the representation of the non- western cultures with and within the texts. It develops a perspective in which the conditions of marginality, plurality and otherness are seen as the sources of cultural valorization and potential changes. It celebrates



hybridity and cultural polyvalency. The Indian writer can never get rid of Indian culture, philosophy, as a result of which that writing has a strong element of Indianness.

Karnad is truly a traditionalist while dealing with *Naga-Mandala*. The play is supported by the oral tales from Karnataka. In his play *Nagamandala* Karnad offers an insight into the private lives of women. The flames gather at midnight to tell tales about the private lives of couples and rejoice in their findings. The latter word *Mandala* is a magic square that has a charming power to control, guide and direct human lives. Here in the play, Naga makes the mandala and plays with human lives. Karnad makes use of myths and folk forms in his plays to exercise socio-cultural evils. In *Naga-Mandala*, he exposes male chauvinism, the oppression of women, the great injustice done to them and stealthily deflates the concept of chastity. There is a significance of shape shifting in the play. *Hayavadana* is based upon one such folktale. Karnad's *Hayavadana* is a play of cultural symbol. Through the folk tales Karnad deals with the problems of human identity in a world of confused relationship, with the theme of incompleteness and man's desire for perfection. He creates a strange world. It is a world of incomplete individuals, indifferent gods and dolls that speak. It is a world different to the desires and frustrations, joys and sorrows of human.

The source of the play, *Bali: The Sacrifice*, is an ancient Kannada epic, *Yashodhara Charite*, which itself draws on several other sources. The play is one that has multiple ideological issues. Though based on an ancient Kannada epic, the story, characters and incidents are often overshadowed by overt ideological concerns as relevant today as they were many centuries ago. Here the playwright skillfully handles the issue and keeps in front of the audience for further improvement. *The Fire and The Rain* is based on a popular myth from the *Mahabharat*, the myth of Yavakri. Karnad's cultural practice is continued in the play *The Fire and the Rain*. It is structured around ideas and excess of strangled relationship, which unfolds with a rare economy and intensity of emotions. In *Tale-Danda* he uses the history of medieval India to depict the social ethos in contemporary India. Through the play it is revealed that caste system is a great threat to the unity and integrity of Indian society. *Yayati* is an existential play on the theme of responsibility and human relationship. It is also a reflection on the condition of modern man, whose mind, disturbed by many worldly and sensuous passions, has turned into a veritable zoo inhabited by wild desires, sensual pleasures, irresponsible exercise of power and utter forgetfulness of the imperishable values of life. The modern man is in no way better than *Yayati*.

The myth of Yavakri attracted Karnad and he decided to turn it into a play. He adroitly reshapes the myth in order to make it dramatically effective and to interpret it in contemporary contexts. Karnad skillfully revises the *Mahabharata* myth and alters it to suit his dramatic requirements. He adds several characters and situations and deletes some unnecessary incidents and situations. He contemporaries the original myth and reinterprets it in the light of modern ideas and contexts. In *The Fire and The Rain* the basic character of the myth has been changed. What

remains unchanged is the basic nature and atmosphere of the myth. One of the fascinating aspects of dealing with myths is their self reflectivity. A myth seems complete in itself and yet when examined in detail, contains subconscious signals which lead you on to another myth which in turn will act as a conduit to a third one while illuminating the one you started with. Myths are fascinating to the playwright. He skillfully uses and innovates them to suit his dramatic purpose. He knows that the folk theatre derives its energy from traditional values; it also has the capacity to question them. As a folk play *Naga-Mandala* has all the paraphernalia required for the genre. The very idea of a Naga or Cobra impersonating the identity of Appanna, Rani's husband, is unbelievable but the playwright portrays the metamorphosed Naga as a real human character. It has been used to render the inner landscape of the mind or the passion, agitation and ecstasies of the heart and soul of characters. The play opens with the bringing of the mask of Lord Ganesha, the presiding deity of traditional theatre on the stage and his worship like a typical Yakshagana play. The Bhagvata, accompanied by musicians, sings verses in praise of Ganesha. At the outset, the theme of the play is introduced as Ganesha processing the head of an elephant and human body symbolizes incompleteness.

Karnad as a playwright is pre-occupied with the retelling of Indian myths, legends, folklores and history. Of his eleven plays, seven are based on myths and legends and three on history and only one on contemporary experience. The reason why Karnad chooses myths and legends is they embody themselves in the form of motifs and symbols, certain collective human behavior and human experiences. Karnad links the past and present the archetype and the real. The issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths, folklore and tradition. While dealing with all such occasions the playwright is a social reformer.

Karnad deftly weaves multiple threads-sub-plots such as 13-year-old Vivians' passionate and pornographic notes to Hema who is old enough to be his mother and Radhabai the domestic's pathos-filled story. Karnad also introduces various contemporary concerns and issues. When the television producer Pratibha, a Hindu married to a Muslim says "There's nothing I don't know about harassment" or when Vidula's secret life as an anonymous cybersex kitten at the sleazy neighborhood internet café is exposed and shushed just as quickly can account of her Saraswat status by the Saraswat moral brigade, the playwright opens a Pandora's Box of new age crises. Karnad has borrowed the myth of *Yayati* from the "Adiarva" of the *Mahabharata*. *Yayati* re-tells the age-old story of the king who in his longing for eternal youth does not hesitate to usurp the youth and vitality of his son. He takes liberty with the myth and weaves complex dimensions into the plot borrowed from the *Mahabharata*. He invests new meaning and significance for contemporary life and reality by exploring the king's motivations. Karnad makes *Yayati* confront the horrifying consequences of not being able to relinquish desire.

Karnad turns to traditions and history in order to seek an answer there for the failures of present. Karnad revives the ancient traditions by the powerful use of archetypal myths that are resonant with meaning for the contemporary world. Karnad



in his plays does not take myths in their entirety. He takes only part of them that are useful to him and the rest, he supplements with his imagination to make his plots original and imaginative.

CONCLUSIONS

The present paper throws light on the aspects of Girish Karnad as a social reformer. There are innumerable instances stated in the paper to show that how the playwright very potentially has woven the threads of myth, legend, folk-lore and history to display the contemporary status of our Indian society especially keeping himself aloof and entangled in one situation. He very honestly creates different situations and pushes the characters to perform their duties

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