

**GIRISH KARNAD'S WORLD- WORLD OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY: AN EVALUATION****DR. BOLLA MALLIKHARJUNA RAO**Asst. Professor of English,
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India.**ABSTRACT**

Girish Karnad has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. Karnad in all his plays moved away from tradition. Karnad used many techniques like folk tales, folk theatre, masks, curtains, dolls, the story within the story etc. for the success of his plays. Iyenger writes that his approach is 'modern' and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements. Girish Karnad handled the themes in his own style to mock the society to revive the political situations and to transform the people to be aware of the political unrest. Ifind logical presentation and development in his plays that inspires and excites the reader to know more about his characters may be from myth or history. Karnad is undoubtedly the most renowned media personality in the contemporary India. He is one of the most popular playwrights today in Kannada and English. He is India's leading playwright and an adept practitioner of performing arts. The innovative aspect of his plays, blending folk themes and folk modes of performing arts with themes and issues of universal significance, gives them a distinct character that turns the reader into Karnad's world- world of tradition and modernity. He is a multi-faceted personality. The paper is an attempt to study Girish Karnad's world of tradition and modernity. It is not an offspring of any specific tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk love with context to contemporary socio-political issues in the sub-continent. He has manifested his individuality in so many ways. His presentation of problems from real life situations is significant contribution to Indian English Drama. He is the most serious contemporary dramatist in Indian drama in English. He takes up serious problems prevailing in urban India. He, very successfully, gives voice to the problems and sufferings of the marginalized people of our society. His plays contain some important elements like human pathos, passions, conflict and appeal to human sentiment, which can immediately touch and stir common audience. He puts Indian drama in English to the level of world drama.

Key Words : *Origin, Indian English Drama, Vedic Aryans, Karnad`S Plays, Socio-Moral Codes, Audiovisual Expression, Sentiments, Folktales, Cultureand Tradition.*

A literary art attains cosmic value when it reflects human experience and sensibility faithfully, and also corresponding with the universal socio- moral codes. By virtue of its live performance and potential to facilitate direct communication between the artist and the audience, drama has immersed as a potent literary mode of representation of human



sensibility that is universal and is beyond the limitations of time and space. It is the oldest, authentic, and the most appealing form of literature. It has also been acknowledged as an instrument to human entertainment and enlightenment for ages. It has close affinity and affiliation with religion since time immemorial. Drama is a genre, an audio-visual medium for the expression of human sentiments. Drama is a mimetic representation of life. It is a lending of poetry, dancing and music. Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage and through that medium reacts on the mind of the audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience. Theatre is certainly an offshoot of an organized effort of some sensitive social activists. It is an illusion, a fleeting shadow, a vision and a dream-like experience. Theatre is a close parallel between life and theatre and quite often life is theatre-like and vice-versa.

Indian English poetry and fiction have been the richest branches of Indian English Literature. But Indian English drama has not been so fortunate for many reasons. The first and foremost reason is that it requires specialized skill and talent in selecting a theme which is represent able on the stage and in picking up a technique which appeals to the audience. It is a composite art involving the playwright, the actor and the audience in a commonly shared, and even created, artistic experience. The drama, unlike its two sisterly branches, poetry and fiction, requires appropriate senses, subject, plot, characters, dialogue and technique to achieve the desired result.

Foreign language is also one of the biggest hurdles in its rapid growth. The audience of India and mostly of the Northern part of the country prefers to go to the theatre which presents the drama in their mother tongue, and not in a foreign language. That's why Indian drama mostly flourished in regional languages. Indian English drama does not enjoy this privilege and had to pass through a tortuous experience. Moreover, Indian English drama has not been able to plant itself in the India ethos. India has been a rich store-house of myths and legends, of folk-tales and customs, historical events and cultural heritage, and our dramatists have made use of them in their creative writings.

Indian English Literature is a distinctive body of writing. It has been growing in volume and vitality since last two centuries because the climate of thought and education in India was favourable enough to permit this literature to grow more and more with the years in the development of India and the world. The French literature historian M. Taine said that literature is the creation of three factors – the race, the milieu, the moment. Only India has its mixed race extending over a period of five thousand years. Its 'milieu' is of variegated Indian subcontinent and its 'moment' is the meeting of the West and India.

India has rich heritage of Drama from the ancient times. Drama in India begins its journey with the Sanskrit plays. A.L. Basham, a prominent historian, expresses his views in this manner: "The origin of Indian theatre is still obscure. It is certain, however that even in the Vedic period dramatic performances of some kind were given, and passing references in early resources point to the inaction at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and mime".



Indian traditions are preserved in the “*Natyasastra*”, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama. This play claims for the drama divine origin and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. Origin of Indian English drama can be traced to the ancient rules and seasonal festivities of the Vedic Aryans. The dramatic performances of those times mainly included such events like depiction of events of daily life accompanied by music. Some members of the tribe acted as if they were wild animals and some others were the hunters. Those who acted as animals like goats, buffaloes, reindeers and monkeys were chased by those, playing the roles of hunters and a mock hunt was enacted. In such a crude and a simple way was drama performed during the age of the Vedic Aryans. Later, different episodes from *The Ramayana* [*Ram Leela*], *The Mahabharata* and *The Bhagvadgita* were chosen and dramatized in front of the people. This kind of performance is still very popular in India especially during the time of *Dussehra*, when the episode of the killing of *Ravana* is enacted out in different parts of country.

There are references to drama in Patanjali’s *Vyakarna Mahabhashya*, as well as Vatsyayan’s *Kamasutra*, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* and Panini’s *Ashtadhyayi*. Thus the origin of Sanskrit drama dates back to 1000 B.C. All literature in Sanskrit is classified into *Drishya* (that can be seen on exhibited) and the *Sravya* (that can be heard or recited). While poetry in all forms can be said to fall under the later, drama falls under the former. Drama in Sanskrit literature is converted under the broad umbrella of ‘*rupaka*’ which means depiction of life in its various aspects represented in forms by an actor who assumes various roles.

Drama in India has a long history. The dramatic tradition may be said to have matured here even before Greek drama came to the Indians’ knowledge. Taking recitation from *Rig Veda*, imitation from *Yajur Veda*, melody from *Sama Veda*, and aesthetic flavour from *Atharva Veda*, as a legend would have it, Indian drama is said to have come into being as a subtle means of communicating significant experiences. Bharata’s *Natyashastra* is considered to be the foundation of the discipline of dramatics in India. Scholars equate it to Aristotle’s *Poetics* as a treatise in the field of drama. *Natyashastra* elaborately discusses the poetics and stagecraft of drama. Various aspects of drama, including plot construction, characterization, stage setting and music have been dealt within this treatise. The norms prescribed in *Natyashastra* were generally followed by Sanskrit dramatists such as Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha and Bhavabhuti, whose works are imbued with technical excellence. Bhasa (dated between 1st century BCE and 4th century CE) is the oldest known Indian dramatist. He is said to have written plays, but only of them are available to us. *Urubhangam*, *Dutavakya* and *Karna* are his most famous plays. Sudraka (200 BCE), who was a king, became famous for his social comedy *Mricchakatikam*. His two other plays are *Vinavasavadatta* and *Padmaprabhritaka*.

However, Indian English Drama is growing slowly and steadily for carving its niche in the realm of commonwealth literature. Since the pre- independence era, there have been constant efforts to create the plays with due dramatic qualities. Even after decades together, the attempts were not met with handsome result. The most Indian plays, available in English, are the translated works. We have but very few little original works in English. Drama, being composite art, it should be endowed with both qualities - literary and stage.



The origin of Indian drama in English can be traced back to the pre-independence era. Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote the first Indian English Play entitled *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*. It appeared in 1831 on the literary horizon. Thus, the journey of Indian English Drama embarked with the appearance of this plays more than a century before the independence era. The play depicts clash and conflict of a sensitive Bengali youth that occurs due to traditionalism and liberal views resulting from the acquisition of foreign education.

Girish Karnad is one of the outstanding playwrights in the modern India. He has considerably enriched and enlightened the tradition of Indian English drama. During his childhood days in country side of Karnataka, he encountered with some *Natak Mandalies* which made indelible impression on his sensitive mind and subsequently found expressions in his dramatic works. Karnad has composed eight plays. All these plays are originally appeared in Kannad and later on, have been translated into English. His dramatic career with the publication of his maiden play *Yayati* in 1961. He is retelling the myth of *the Mahabharata* very skillfully in this play. He works out the motivation that facilitates Yayati's final choice. It is a very unique and original play. Of the eight plays, five plays *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Madala*, *Tale Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain* are reincarnated into English. It is very essential to mention here that *Tughlaq* is also converted into some foreign languages especially Hungarian and German. Of course, Indian drama in recent years has attracted a good deal of in-depth critical analysis; a lot of critical work has been done on Indian drama in translation as well.

As a result, a considerable body of critical work exists on Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani as their plays have been interpreted and analysed by using different critical techniques and tools.

Today, Girish Karnad is considered as significant Indian dramatist. We encounter in him a playwright as a thinker, artist, actor, poet, and a producer who as a true culture-smith intends to awaken the contemporary Indian intelligentsia from cultural amnesia. He has enriched the Indian literary scene by his contribution to art, culture, theatre and drama. Girish Karnad is one of the most popular playwrights in Kannada and English. The innovative aspect in the plays of Girish Karnad, gives him a distinct character that appeals to the reader.

Karnad's plays take up the moral problems that are left unresolved in myths, legends and folktales. In Karnad's opinion, myths and legends have an enduring significance, for they thematize fundamental human obsessions. Their logical conclusions are often open-ended, leaving immense scope for reworking the whole story and arguing out amoral, philosophical or psychological point.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad re-shapes an ancient Indian myth from the *veralapanchavimsati* to point to man's eternal quest for completeness, or self-realization. With its highly stylized action and mimicry, especially the scene at the temple of Kali and the sword fight between Devadatta and Kapila in the second act, Karnad invests the play with a significance, which brings out the emptiness of the "incomplete" human being. Girish Karnad is a Modern Indian Playwright and is one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts. He has acted in



movies, directed and produced movies, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English.

Unlike his contemporaries, who develop deep into the problems of middle class society, Girish Karnad goes back to myths and legends with a view to making them a vehicle of a new vision. By employing the various myths, he shows the absurdity of modern life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man's eternal struggle to attain perfection. Karnad has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture.

Karnad in all his plays moved away from tradition. Karnad used many techniques for the success of his plays. They are mainly conventions and motifs of folktales and folk theatre, masks, curtains, dolls, the story within the story. These elements have not been used much by the other playwrights, while Karnad emphasized them in his works.

About his style and technique Kirtinath Kurkoti writes. 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 Karnad admirably succeeded in his attempt to show the Indian playwrights as well as the world Theatre Community at large how our past and present can coalesce to give present-day existence meaning and to theatre activity a direction. For *Yayati*, he was given the state award. In 1972, he received Sangeet Natak Akademi's award for playwriting.

For *Hayavadana*, Bharatiya Natya Sangha honored him with Kamaladeviaward. His plays have pioneered a style, which unites the elements of traditional Indian theatre, such as Yakshagana and strikingly modern sensibility for contemporary socio-political realities. Karnad's acquaintance with colonial history brought a disgusting temperament within him due to the imbalance between native and alien theories of art. This made him to consciously adopt Kannada local forms. However, this suggestion carries a tri-dimensional and a polemical analysis. In the first place, he attempts to oppress the dominance of western form over native arts. Because of this alien interference the native individuality of Kannada art is completely buried.

On the other hand, the colonial imperialism made the westerners gain an authorization from the local population by surpassing the establishment of native culture. In the second place, Karnad strongly condemns the luxury of the western theatre, which stood as an impermeable hindrance for proletarians and lower class people to enter into the world of dreams.

Nagamandala of Girish Karnad presents the deplorable state of women in Indian Society. The play is written in two acts with a prologue. The playwright says in the prologue that man is a bundle of weakness, he is either not aware of them or he cannot get rid of them. The man fails to realize the significance of this prediction. He takes it literally and breaks into laughter because he thinks that keeping awake one night is not a task, failing to realize that keeping awake will rather be a Herculean task for a man who dozes off the month, which can be the



last night of his life also, he awakes up to the fact that he has to do something to avert his death. He comes to dilapidated temple with an unidentifiable statue to pass his last night. But this temple is a favourite haunt of the flames that come from different houses so exchange notes on the present conditions of the society. The first flames come from the house of a miserly fellow who retires to bed early to save spending on lamp oil. The second tells in which the old mother has died neglected and third flame tells about the story of Rani whose predicament reflects the human need to live by fiction and half-truths. The drama is enacted in a temple at night, in the presence of three naked flames, in front of a man cursed to die within a few hours.

The new flame has a different story to tell. The old mistress has seen young women dressed in a Sari coming out of the room in, which her husband is sleeping. However this story also comes to the temple and desires that it should be heard by somebody who can pass it on to others. Flames cannot do it because they are non-living objects.

Thus the prologue describes the aberrations of man and woman to give the message that men in general are slaves of passion and are asleep to the hard realities of life. According to Karnad the sources material of Nagamandala is from a folktale, which he heard from A. K. Ramanujan.

The folktale is about a prince whose extreme mistrust of women prevented him for loving any woman, and whose encounter with a woman's desire for love has Ramanujan writes about this tale as many as forty variants. The central theme of all these tales is Ramanujan remarks, "the narcissism" of the self-involved hero, "who undergoes a test put to him by the wife, in order to survive The psychological inadequacy that the young man is caught in prevents his self-transcendence, causing acute lack of understanding and communication between him and a woman.

Girish Karnad's Tughlaq is an historical play which deals in depth about the last five years of chequered reign of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq. This play was originally written in Kannada 1964. Karnad was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee. This play was first staged at Bhalabai auditorium at Bombay during 1917. This play is the second one of Girish Karnad and it was a great success on the stage. The audiences were able to enjoy this drama without paying much attention to its rich and complex symbolism and the subtle weaving of its different motifs.

The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle, and uses dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Aazam, to which theatre audiences responded readily. This drama appealed to the Indian audience due to the fact that this reflected the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism. Regarding this Karnad himself has commented, Tughlaq is also alienated at the interpersonal level from the individuals around him. The play, which is more than a political allegory, has puzzling qualities, which reflects the character of Tughlaq.

All the other characters in the drama have complex personalities. This play has an elusive and haunting quality. In spite of the fact that the theme of the play is drawn from the history the



author's treatment is not historical. The use of Prayer for the Murder in the drama reminds one of what Tughlaq did to his father. The author has built up the play on opposites. ``ideal and the real`` the divine aspiration and deft intrigue Karnad did his best to dramatize the history of Sultan, Muhammad-Bin Tughlaq the fourteenth century impractical king who become tyrannical and Machiavellian in its activities. The rude stubbornness of the king negated the very basis of idealism.

The author in this drama clearly brings out the mental shift of the king from a benevolent ruler to a tyrannical shrieking head. In this context it will be apt to point out that “Karnad maps Tughlaq progressive alienation from society, more significantly within the self in existential overtones. He infers that the protagonist is liberalism is cramped because of its alienation with time. Tughlaq was born at a wrong time and at a wrong place. The existential angst that permeates the text as another is a geography from an alien ontology. The shift from an idealist king to a tyrant has the mapping of Camus in Caligula, which voices concerns borne out of Camus`` own lived in Algerian Experience”.

Tughlaq not being a pragmatist fails to foresee the emotional attachment of the people to their native land when he proposes the shifting of states capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He could not even foresee and take necessary precaution against the possibility of counterfeiting when he introduces token copper coins. His failure to win people`s contradiction gradually brought him disillusion. This disillusion finally leads to a psychological state of existential alienation. Though Karnad doesn`t fully exploit the Brechtian article of Epic theatre in Naga-Mandala, he claims that the play strikes a departure from the emotion- based world of traditional values.

In Naga- Mandala Karnad has reflected the value of emotional identification and Catharsis. According to Karnad, the position of Rani in the story of Naga-Mandala can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles as a stranger during the day and as lover at night. Karnad proves to be a Modern Indian dramatist in Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana and in his other dramas with the use of sharp situations making the play a grand success.

Girish Karnad's dramatic art lacks stability still his success lies in technical experiment with an indigenous dramatic form. Girish Karnad is only exception who innovated and experimented the theatre in a different way. When he started his career, as dramatist he had no established theatrical tradition to begin with. He, as an impressive actor, intelligent director and powerful playwright, has initiated a conscious movement and experimented extensively in all the spheres of the art of drama-in language, setting, plot and mode of technique (presentation). Although he burrows the plot of his plays from different episodes of myth, history and folklore, no character in his dramatic sphere is a superhuman being. We find that rationality is the hallmark of Karnad's theatre. Girish Karnad rejuvenated, expanded and refashioned the Indian theatre. He is at the position of being compared to Peter Brooks, Jerzy Grotowsky, Eugenio Barba, Phillip Zarrili, in the west, Suzuki Tadashi in Japan, and Wolo Soyinka in Nigeria.



Further, he can be compared to Shakespeare, T.S.Eliot in borrowing and utilizing the sources from Greek legends, chronicles Plutarch and Roman history. Karnad incorporates the western classical tradition of drama and Indian tradition of myth, poetry, history, legend, folklore. Now a new interest in regional cultural expressions and folklore has developed in India, leading to the rediscovery and re-evaluation of indigenous forms of literature and the performing arts. Nowhere is this more apparent than in theatre. The traditional theatres such as Yakshagna, Tamasha, Ras Lila, Nautanki, Bhavai, Jatra, and Khyal have gone through a remarkable revival since Independence.

Girish Karnad handled the themes in his own style to mock the society to revive the political situations and to transform the people to be aware of the political unrest. I find logical presentation and development in his plays that inspires and excites the reader to know more about his characters may be from myth or history.

In Karnad's plays the influence of western writers like Camus, Brecht, Beckett, Osborne, R.Bolt, Pinter, Sartre etc...can easily be perceived. He is influenced more by Henrik Ibsen, an outstanding figure of his age in dramatic art and whose works became the model for many dramatists since the late nineteenth century.

Girish Karnad has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. Karnad in all his plays moved away from tradition. Karnad used many techniques like folk tales, folk theatre, masks, curtains, dolls, the story within the story etc. for the success of his plays. Iyenger writes that his approach is 'modern' and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements.

Girish Karnad is undoubtedly the most renowned media personality in the contemporary India. He is one of the most popular playwrights today in Kannada and English. He is India's leading playwright and an adept practitioner of performing arts. The innovative aspect of his plays, blending folk themes and folk modes of performing arts with themes and issues of universal significance, gives them a distinct character that turns the reader into Karnad's world- world of tradition and modernity. He is a multi-faceted personality. He says, "I have been fairly lucky in having a multipronged career. You know, I have been an actor, a publisher, a film-maker. But in one of these fields have I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting. Further he also realizes that for writers, in India, it is not possible to live on the royalties alone that they get on their writings. He admits, "One can't earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. Take Tughlaq. As you know, it's been enormously successful critically as well as in performance. Playwrights in the West have been able to retire on such success- or at least, to devote themselves to that activity entirely.

Contemporary Indian drama, deviating from classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It is not an offspring of any specific tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk love with context to contemporary socio-political issues. Accumulative theatrical tradition evolved by Mahesh



Dattani, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sirkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, prepared the background of contemporary Indian English theatre.

Girish Karnad occupies a very distinct and illustrious place in the realm of Indian drama in English. He has manifested his individuality in so many ways. His presentation of problems from real life situations is significant contribution to Indian English Drama. Among modern Indian playwrights, he stands forth with singular distinctness, striking artistic perception, and immense dramatic guts. He is the most serious contemporary dramatist in Indian drama in English. He takes up serious problems prevailing in urban India. He, very successfully, gives voice to the problems and sufferings of the marginalized people of our society. His plays contain some important elements like human pathos, passions, conflict and appeal to human sentiment, which can immediately touch and stir common audience. He puts Indian drama in English to the level of world drama. Really hats up for his efforts in the sub-continent.

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