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Girish Karnad's influence on Indian theatre and Indian English literature

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Abstract:

Girish Karnad has a noteworthy position in the Indian English Drama. He had an excellent understanding of Western dramatic aesthetics and skill while remaining strongly rooted in the cultural traditions of his native land. Karnad believes that India has a rich and magnificent tradition of folk arts which Indian English writers should incorporate in their writings. He was against blind imitation of western writers which was popular at that time. In this generational effort, he made a unique contribution by using myth, history, folklore, and modern urban life as four distinct narrative elements that he could draw on throughout his career. Among contemporaries such as Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, UtpalDutt, Habib Tanvir, G.P. Deshpande, and Mahesh Elkunchwar, Karnad is a writer whose work demonstrates a deliberate and self-conscious effort to create a new Indian theatre. This research seeks to examine Karnad's contributions via the lens of our vibrant Indian folk cultures, which have existed from the beginning of human civilisation, to the Indian English Theatre.

Keywords: Indian Theatre, Indian English Drama, Myth, Realistic Approach, Existentialism.

Literature is connected to human life in every way that is even remotely feasible. It is possible to say both “life is literature” and “literature is life,” and both statements are true. Poetry, fiction, and theatre are the three fundamental components that makeup literature. Because it puts life “on stage,” drama is the art form that comes the closest to representing human experience. It is a reflection of actual life and is mostly affected by that life. In contrast to poetry and fiction, theatre requires both the hearing and the observing channels of human participants. In its very nature, it possesses several dimensions. It requires components such as a narrative, a stage, and artists who can act or perform in front of an audience. Because it allows all types of people to communicate with one another on the same level, it is the most efficient method of human expression. Since the beginning of civilization, drama has had its origins in religious practises and has been deeply established in many cultures. As a result, the theatre has its origins firmly planted in the annals of history all across the world.

It is common practise to refer to drama with the terms “theatre” and “play.” However, there are also some distinctions between the three of them. According to the text, the performance that takes place on stage is called “drama.” This piece of writing is referred to as the “Play.” And the “theatre” refers to the building, the location, or more especially the areas that surround the stage. A reading audience, on the other hand, is



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not the play's intended audience. The playwright is conscious of for the audience to respond appropriately, the performers, directors, and designers must all interpret his or her work. These skilled readers will create a theatrical production using the play's text or written words production that an audience will see and hear in a theatre. *They are theatre professionals.*¹

Since it brings together educated individuals and members of society, drama contains elements of both literature and sociology. It provides a stage for us to demonstrate the social realities. It communicates the prevailing ideologies of society and the culture that dominated that civilisation via narrative and the arts. It has been said that it serves as a mirror for society through which the audience may view reality via a creative lens. This occurs when a play is being seen by an audience. It is possible to employ it to start a revolution within society. It established a connection between human history and the current day. Both England and India may trace their dramatic traditions back to a very early period in history.

The Sanskrit language may be traced back to the beginnings of Indian theatre, namely the Natya-Satra, which has a wonderful presence in Indian culture. In addition, it is thought that Natya-Sastra has some sort of relationship with the holy Vedas. Folk theatre is an integral part of Indian culture and has been performed there since ancient times. In ancient times, when individuals from different tribes gathered together to execute certain rights, they would often put on plays in which they portrayed various types of humans and animals.

The two categories of Drishya (that can be seen) and Sravya are used to categorise all of the literature written in Sanskrit (that can be heard). The latter category may be considered to encompass all types of poetry, whereas the former category is where one will find theatre. In Sanskrit literature, drama is referred to as Rupaka, which translates to "depiction of life in its different parts depicted in forms," and it refers to how performers take on a variety of personas throughout the performance. In the classical writings of our ancestors, the theatre was considered to be "the fifth Vedas," and our ancestors appropriately referred to it as the "Drishya Kaavya" (visual poetry).² When discussing the presence of English play in Indian literature, it is extremely obvious that the British conquest was the impetus for the introduction of English to India. Because it was a foreign language, learning our tongue took some time. The original draughts of plays were written by writers in their mother tongues before being translated into English. However, after a while, authors started to write entirely in English. "The Prosecuted," which was written by Krishna Mohan Banerjee and published in 1831, is considered to be the first drama written in English. The most English



theatre was seen during the years before independence. In the history of contemporary Indian writing, Michael Madhusudan Datta, who was born in 1824, is regarded as the first dramatist to write in English. He adapted and translated his three Bengali dramas, *Ratnavali* (1858), *Sarmistha* (1859), which was based on the Mahabharata, and *Is This Called Civilization* (1871), into English. The majority of his writing was done in English.

The post-independence drama in India has not seen a significant amount of change. The only change is at the administrative or legislative level. The era known as the “New Dramatists” saw a flourishing of Indian plays written in English during this period. Some playwrights use their scholarly expertise as a way to portray themselves. G.V. Desani, Lakan Deb, Nissim Ezekiel, Assif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Gurucharan Das, Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and Mohan Rakesh are just a few of the prominent playwrights that belong to this group.

Girish Karnad is regarded as a member of the Kannada theatre group because he was born in this area. His plays were first written in the Kannada language. Kannada theatre draws on a wide variety of rich, magnificent, and ancient performative traditions, many of which are concentrated in Karnataka's south-western area. Yakshagana Bayalata, Sannata, Talamanddale, puppetry, etc. are popular traditional arts.³ He not only wrote plays but also contributed to the development of Indian theatre. In addition to being a gifted dramatist, he also works as an actor, director, and screenwriter in Hindi and Kannada movies. He has won honours for his work. He received the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awards from the Indian government and won four Filmfare Awards, including three for Best Director - Kannada and one for Best Screenplay.

The first drama Karnad ever wrote, *Yayati*, was initially written in Kannada. It was initially performed in 1961, and in 2007 an English translation was made. When Karnad was creating this play, he was reading about Jean Paul Sartre and other well-known existentialists, and this reading assisted him in structuring the play in a more modern manner. He once stated in an interview:

“I was excited by the story of *Yayati*, this exchange of ages between the father and the son, which seems to me powerful and modern. At the same time, I was reading a lot of Sartre and the Existentialist. This consistent harping on the responsibility which the Existentialists indulge in suddenly seemed to linkup with the story of *Yayati*”.⁴



The character known as “Sutradhara” enters the stage at the beginning of the play and addresses the audience to provide an overview of the play's setting. In his presentation to the audience, Sutradhara provides the following definition of himself:

“Good evening. I am the Sutradhara, which literally means ‘the holder of the strings’...I have designed and consecrated the stage. I am responsible for the choice of the text. And here I am now, to introduce the performance and to ensure that it takes place without any hindrance.”⁵

Karnad based this play's structure on the traditional Yakshagana format, which calls for a presenter to enter the stage and provide further context. In order to help the current or younger generation grasp the work that is theirs, he skillfully combined old mythology with the method of Yakshangana. In the opening of the performance, the Sutradhara provides a summary of the play and informs the audience of the primary subject as well as the objective of the play. He walks through the events of the story and provides a synopsis of the author's motivations in writing the piece. The story of *Yayati* may be located in the first chapter of the Mahabharata, often known as the “Adi-Parva.” The story of an alcoholic monarch who resides in his zone and enjoys his youth. He doesn't want to give up his rich lifestyle, even if it causes serious harm to those who belong to him. The story is told from his point of view. Karnad has utilised the Myth of King Yayati in order to symbolically represent the troubled lifestyle of modern man as well as the idea that man's aspirations have no limit.

His subsequent play, *Tughlaq*, which was performed in 1964, is an authentic historical drama that depicts a significant event from the Sultanate period of Indian history. The enigma that is Sultan of Delhi and idealist Mohammed Tughlaq, is the central theme of this work. The play possesses all of the necessary components that are necessary to render it highly actable. It makes use of some of the most effective dramatic tropes, such as irony, humor, pathos, and suspense. These include speech, silence, and gesture. It does not have any melodramatic potential, and it does not contain any overwhelming feelings or sentiments either. Composing the play Karnad had replied to Eunice de Souza in one way as she had commented that, "Indian plays in English do not go back to history to establish modern man's relationship to history, to interpret contemporary problems."⁶

Hayavadana, his third play, was performed in 1971 and was based on the short story “The Transposed Heads” written by Thomas Mann. This narrative is, once again, a duplicate of a story that can be



found in *Kathasaritasagar*. Karnad composed the play in the style of Yakshagana, which is a type of folk theatre that is performed in Karnataka. In a society full of tangled connections, *Hayavadana* addresses the issue of how a man might find his identity in this environment. Karnad uses the Brechtian approach to deal with the topic of identity crisis. The performance starts with Bhagwata performing the puja of Lord Ganesha (kind of Sutradhara). In later scenes, *Hayavadana* takes over the stage, and as a result, we travel from one play to another inside the same play. Watching the characters from one narrative interact with the characters from another story generates a certain type of engagement among audience members. Karnad offers his explanation of the entire situation, which is as follows:

“Two stage hands enter, hold up a half curtain, above six feet in height, the way the curtain is held up in Yakshagana and Kathakali. The curtain hides the entry of Hayavadana, who comes and stands behind the curtain.”⁷

Moving on to Karnad's second published book, *Nagamanadala* (1990), Karnad has used his storyline inside the plot method (frame narrative style) of *Hayavadana*, but this time it has been utilised in a more effective manner than before. Karnad wrote the following the three plays he has collected together are introduced by all of which were plays he had written, in reference to the source material that was utilised to construct the play:

Naga-Mandala is based on two oral tales I heard from A. Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women—normally the older women in the family—while children are being fed in the evening in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore, these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as a system of communication among the women in the family. They also express a woman's understanding of the reality around her, a lived counterpoint to the patriarchal structures of classical texts and institutions...⁸

Naga-Manadala is Karnad's most accomplished piece of artwork, and it illustrates the contradictory standards that exist in society. The figure Rani is meant to be interpreted as representing every girl in the culture who is subjected to servitude by her husband. Due to the play's overwhelming popularity, it was eventually adapted into a motion picture. The performance is mostly based on traditional folk stories that are told in Kannada and are most commonly found in rural regions. The play is an amalgamation of folkloric



and legendary aspects of several cultures. The play is an example of the dreamy fantasy genre and is highly imaginary overall.

Karnad is responsible for another historical drama known as *Tale-Danda*. He wrote the play to depict the tension that everyone was going through during the “Mandir-Mandal movement,” which the play is about. Everyone was living in an atmosphere of animosity directed toward the community. By presenting this play with an especially specific reference to South India's “Anti Caste System Revolt” in the 12th century, Karnad has provided a particularly critical commentary on this topic. Karnad talks in his interview:

“I wrote Tale-Danda when the ‘Mandir’ and ‘Mandal’ movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. It is not necessarily an attack on caste. It is a question of 'Why', why is it that some of our problems seems perennial.”

The drama *Tale-Danda* demonstrates how big of an impact the caste system effect on human conduct and how it may drive people to behave in a manner that is extremely severe and ruthless in order to maintain purity. In this drama, Karnad has done an excellent job of blending India's many caste systems. He has borrowed the subject from our past, which, in the year 1168 A.D., an anti-caste movement was ruthlessly destroyed by the orthodoxies in the Karnataka area. He has stolen this theme from our history. To combat the caste system in both principle and reality, a Brahmin by the name of Basavanna gathered a group of intellectuals under his leadership. This resulted in an outpouring of unreasonable fury from the general populace and ultimately led to fear and carnage. Although we live in a post-modern society, it is not uncommon for us to hear of acts of violence such as these.

Karnad's plays have contributed significantly to Indian English Drama in their unique style. It is possible that the injustices of the world can be brought to light via the medium of his plays. Each play belongs to a specific area of the canon. This is the style of writing that Karnad employs, in which the listener is driven to reflect on the suffering, misery, and anguish that man endures. Karnad is the only one who possesses the intestinal fortitude to recycle a piece of our history with the present world, demonstrating the continuity that exists the eras between the two. He shows via myth and history that nothing has changed but 'the time,' despite what he claims. The people who lived at that time made the same mistakes that people



living in our post-modern age continue to make. We are not gaining any wisdom from our experiences and continue to repeat the same errors without even realising how silly they are.

Girish Karnad who is always attempting to shake us out of our slumber, but we are not yet particularly willing to admit when we are in the wrong. His plays have made significant contributions to Indian drama, but those contributions won't bear fruit until “we” as a society acknowledge our shortcomings and begin to draw some lessons from our history. His plays have been very influential. It is also crucial to understand that Karnad's plays were translated from and into Kannada and English, but that this was just a small part of the process by which his works were shared both inside and outside of India and left a lasting impact. Again, translations of works like *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*, which include every significant Indian language as well as European tongues like Hungarian, Spanish, Polish, and German, are excellent instances of multilingual circulation.

He regularly used the newspaper or journal interview, the essay, and the author's introduction to talk about his own recent plays, his career as a whole, and the state of modern and contemporary Indian theatre. These plays aggressively intrude in the greater discourse of history by creating Between history, historiography, and fictional frameworks, there are intricate ideological and intertextual links. As a result, they contribute significantly to the revisionist movement of the post-independence era. Karnad's play is heavily influenced by the ancient and medieval past due to both internal and external pressures. He has repeatedly contended that the theatre is a particularly effective vehicle for communicating such culturally resonant fiction and that the deeply embedded an author and his or her audience are fundamentally connected through the use of myth, oral history, and folklore.

Karnad's theatrical talent is excellent and flawless. His writings have a dramatic attitude and tone. In his plays, parallelism, and contrast, tension and surprise are literary devices that help the plot advance logically. He has a distinct personality. Both the plot and the characters work together to create a cohesive impact or impression. His simple English and use of imagery, symbolism, sarcasm and comparisons all contribute to the dramatic effect. The situation-specific language of Karnad is used to convey Indian culture. All of Karnad's plays may be staged; he is a progressive playwright and a pioneer of neo-drama.



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Karnad constantly "deconstructs myths" in his work as a modern playwright. The myths and legends of his own culture are examined through the prism of modern sensibility. The dramatist uses this attempt at myth deconstruction as a means of self-examination. He weaves tradition and modernity together in his plays in a way that is both reflective of the past and the present (Gill 8).¹⁰ Karnad works to fight the effects of colonialism and preserve India's rich cultural heritage by promoting Indian values and cultural ethos. His well-thought-out plan to liberate Indian English play from the yoke of colonialism is backed by using themes derived from the local environment, characters with a strong connection to indigenous culture, extensively Indianized English to fit the setting and foster an Indianness, as well as folk and classical theatrical traditions. In his plays, Indian ingenuity and compassion are evident.



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