

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

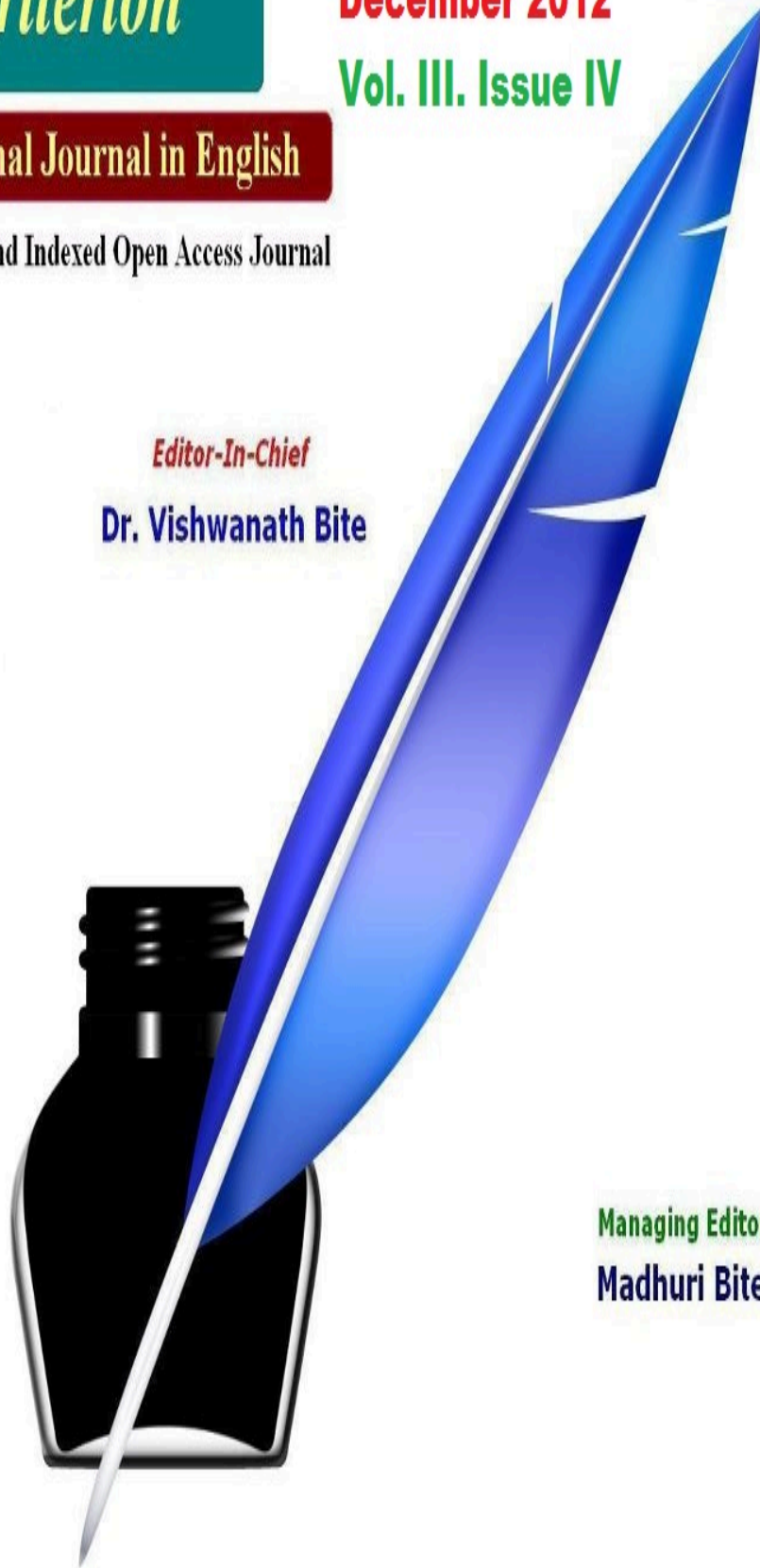
Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

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Intersecting Spaces and Their Influences in Selected Plays of Girish Karnad

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The evolution of different spaces in the modern world literature in English is an important phenomenon which has enabled us to relocate the individual within the postcolonial discourse. It is true that different factors have emerged in the national and international levels which have redefined the space of an individual in the modern society. Girish Karnad has used his theatrical arena to create these spaces and locate the individual, irrespective of his or her historical or racial identity, in respect to the position that the individual holds in the postcolonial Indian society. In Karnad's plays we see that the political, historical, social and psychological spaces are intersecting and overlapping with each other thus modifying and redefining the position of the subject. My paper focuses on these intersections of spaces as shown by Girish Karnad in his plays. I also intend to highlight how these intersections are influencing the space occupied by the individual which is very relevant in the post colonial scenario of the Indian society. The individual itself becomes an open ground for these intersections and several other conflicts to develop. The individual becomes a cross section where we see the interaction between different spaces is taking place that reflect the complications of various issues that are highly relevant in the context of the postcolonial Indian scenario in the modern times. In Karnad's plays we generally get a view of these newly evolved spaces which coexist with the already existing spaces and observe how they are intersecting each other thus, getting overlapped and creating new spheres which are redefining the national discourse as a whole. Karnad has successfully delineated these intersections of spaces and how they are creating new spaces which are restructuring the whole discourse in the modern context.

In the literatures produced during the modern period throughout the world we see that different issues like the pre-colonial cultures, traditions, human mind, questions relating to women, morality, politics and different other perspectives are highly relevant in the present postcolonial scenario. In his classic play *Tughlaq* we see that Karnad has painted the character of a person, through the historical figure of the Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, who goes against his time and tries to bring some major reformations in the political, administrative and social structure which he fails to make acceptable to his people thus becoming an object of ridicule. Tughlaq, as an individual, is farsighted and he lives in a space where his own individual self can perceive the changes that are going to takeover India in his future times. But Tughlaq fails to be a part of the social space and as a result of that he is unable to convey his thoughts to the people. There is a growing conflict between these two spaces and the intersection of these two creates a dark area, a no-man's-land, for Tughlaq where he is left out totally detached from reality. This we witness at the end of the play where we see that Tughlaq, a tired and frustrated man, is totally disillusioned. Defining Tughlaq's state of mind Karnad says,

“As the Muezzin’s call fades away, Muhammad suddenly opens his eyes. He looks around, dazed and frightened, as though he can’t comprehend where he is.”(Karnad Vol. I, 99)

It is the space created by the intersection of the two spaces (social and individual) which is a dark region where the individual finds himself nowhere thus, remaining all alone and which is very similar to the situation of schizophrenia which is a common psychological disorder among the people of the postcolonial era. Here occurs the interaction between the spaces (historical and individual spaces) described in the plays and the spaces that are evolving in the postcolonial modern India. Karnad has painted the character of Tughlaq from the modern perspectives. Karnad has drawn an implicit analogy between Tughlaq and the Indian government in the post-independence era. The disillusionment of Tughlaq signifies the frustrations of the Indian people in the latter half of the twentieth century. Thus, different domains and spaces of different time frames (past and present) are juxtaposed to highlight each other and delineate the national situation of modern India. The transgression of the individual space by the social, political and other spaces has given rise to the creation of a hybrid space which can be considered as equal with the ‘third space’ described by Bhabha where the competing powerful narratives having immense mutual differences, interact, intersect and redefine each other to create a space of intense tension and complexity.

Karnad has often located this hybrid space in the darkness. He has used his stage props to fit into the actual atmosphere that is appropriate to delineate this space. This darkness signifies the psychological domain of the individual where his own space of existence interacts with the social space. We see this in *Tughlaq* where darkness prevails to enhance the creation of this third space where temporal dimension is lost. Darkness does not depict the night but it is a symbol of the hybrid space which is detached from the other constituent spaces. We see this darkness in Karnad’s another play *Naga Mandala* where the feminist space is in conflict with the social and the moral spaces. Karnad, very symbolically and implicitly puts forward the issue of an Indian married woman having extramarital affair with another man while her husband is of oppressive nature and inflicting tortures on her. The play not only supports the issue of liberation and empowerment of women in the Indian society but also puts forward an important question regarding the traditional concepts of marriage, moral values and sexual conducts by a woman in society. The issue of husband-wife relationship is portrayed and again, we see that a new space is created which remains unexplained by either of the parties. Rani, the wife, is unaware of the fact that the person with whom she is spending her nights is not her husband but the snake(Cobra) or the Naga in the disguise of her husband Appanna. Karnad does not exploit the implied question of adultery but it is perceived when we analyze the space that is created at night in the darkness where the Naga meets with Rani. This space is more a part of the feminist domain which advocates the liberation of a woman and is in direct conflict with the social and the patriarchal spaces. The newly evolved space has originated from the intersection of the space of feminist discourse and the psychology of an individual which goes unrecognized by the individual herself. But, it is true that this newly evolved space is a potential challenge to the social space that is fast changing in the Indian scenario. Rani’s confidence regarding her own moral purity, while facing the questions from her husband and the villagers, indicates to

the hidden intention in the heart of a socially subjugated married woman to exercise her sexual independence and still remaining pure. This is emphasized by Rani when she says, "But I have not done anything wrong. I am not guilty of anything. What shall I plead guilty to?" (Karnad Vol. I, 289)

This innocence on the part of Rani can be taken as a deliberate ignorance of the hidden desire which has come out as a form of protest against the patriarchal oppression in society. This is the space which reveals the suppressed spheres of the human mind. While talking about Rani P.D. Nimsarkar says,

The journey of Rani's life, from complete innocence to liberated self assertion, indicates the history of the treatment meted out to women in the Hindu society and culture. She has broken the cells of misconception and blind faith by asserting her identity. (Nimsarkar, 127)

The overlapping of spaces is more prominent in Karnad's another famous play *Hayavadana*. The heads of Devadatta and Kapila are exchanged. Now, these two individuals are having problems in identifying their own spaces in society and also in relation to Padmini who is originally the wife of Devadatta. This transposition of heads redefines the space occupied by an individual in society. This interchange leads to the intersection of the original spheres (that existed before the transposition of the heads) which Karnad deals with as an experiment to study the modern Indian scenario where, in the postcolonial phase, the Indian society and culture have emerged as a transposed structure in which the Indian tradition and culture are fitted with the Western modernization. It is clear that the space of Indian nationalism, culture and tradition is intersected by the space of Western modernization which has created a new space. This is common in most of the newly independent countries. The people of India are still trying to interpret and locate themselves in this newly created space. Karnad has indirectly, but very skillfully, pointed out the hybrid nature of this space which is redefining the Indian culture and tradition. This spatial conflict has its origin in the history and myth of India. While talking about his plays Karnad says,

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries. (Karnad Vol. I, 301)

After the transposition of the heads Devadatta with Kapila's body and Kapila with Devadatta's body suffer from identity crises. With the transposition of the heads their individual spaces of existence have intersected each other and this overlapping has given a new meaning to their existence thus redefining the individual as a whole. Since Devadatta is a Brahmin and Kapila is a low class dalit therefore the intersection of their existential spaces also refers to the intersection of their class identities as well. Since the two levels of Indian class system have crisscrossed each other therefore it has created a new social space that dissolves the stereotypical class differences and establishes a unity in diversity which truly represents the postcolonial modern Indian society and its people.

The blending of spaces is not new in Karnad's plays. In his another play *Broken Images* we see that Karnad has dealt with a number of intersections between different spaces. Through the use of modern technology, the plasma screen, Karnad has blended the bodies of Manjula Nayak and her sister Malini thus, obliterating their individual existential spaces and identities and creating a new space with a newly formed identity. In this play we also see the intermingling of the space of a writer and that of a reader where Malini is the actual writer and Manjula is the reader. We also get an idea about the conflict between the spaces acquired by writers writing in English and those writing in the regional languages in the Indian literary domain. Both the individuals emerge together as an Image which denotes the newly created space from the intersection and blending. About the real identity of this space the Image says,

Of course, I shall continue with the name of Manjula Nayak. As Manjula Nayak, I have been invited as Visiting Professor to seven prestigious American Universities. I use that nomenclature for my passport, my bank accounts, property and financial investments. However I am in truth Malini, my genius of a sister who loved my husband and knew Kannada and wrote in English. (Karnad, Vol. II, 284)

Broken Images provides us with a cross-section of several interactions at various levels that bring into discussion a large number of issues. The individual identity of the writer resides in various domains which include the languages, culture and society. The Image depicts the amalgamation of the various other domains that include the writer as well as the reader. The book *The River has no Memories*, for which Manjula Nayak is being felicitated, is originally written by her sister Malini. Manjula has committed an act of plagiarism. Malini and Manjula reside in two different spaces. The text of the book originally written by Malini contains the psychology of Malini. Manjula turns out to be the reader and exists in a different domain. The blending of Manjula and Malini through the Image displayed on the plasma screen depicts the intersection of these various spaces and domains thus, forming a hybrid space where the reader and the writer co-exist to define and interpret the meaning of the text and as a result of that individual identities of the reader and the writer also blend together to make the text a free space for various interpretations. The intersection of these various spaces depicts the identity crisis as well.

The emergence of new spaces through the intersection of different spaces involves the development of new ideas and concepts. It also portrays the ideological conflicts that are occurring in the modern India after independence. This we see in *The Fire and the Rain* and *Bali: The Sacrifice*. In *The Fire and the Rain*, like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, we see the people suffering from drought and degeneration. The mythical ceremony (that is depicted in the 'Vana Parva' or the Forest canto of the *Mahabharata*) or the Yajna and the sacrifices performed for the rain and regeneration of the land bring in the intersection of different spaces relating to several issues including the question of religion, women, sufferings and sacrifice for the cause of the whole nation or race. In *Bali: The Sacrifice*, on the other hand, we see a conflict between the ideologies of violence (blood sacrifice or the 'bali') and the Gandhian principle of nonviolence. Here, like *Naga Mandala*, we witness the struggle of a married woman to exist freely and exercise her sexual freedom without becoming spiritually impure. In both *The Fire and the Rain* and *Bali: The Sacrifice* the marginalized space crisscrosses the mainstream space through love and physical relationships. In *The Fire and the Rain* the love relationship between Arvasu

(who is the younger brother of the chief priest Paravasu), and Nittilai, a low class girl, creates a new space for the two classes to interact. In *Bali: The Sacrifice* the Queen's extramarital relationship with the low caste Mahout depicts the intersection of the feminine space, social space, class, and religion that depict the desperate attempt on the part of a woman to discard the oppressions of patriarchy and also the norms of violence by declaring her sexual freedom thus, establishing her own space of existence which is not dictated by any of the social constructs like violence, chastity, morality and ideal womanhood. Purity cannot be defined by patriarchy but should be realized by the individual through enlightenment that comes from the freedom that an individual must exercise for his or her all-round development. Karnad brings the Queen, Rani and Nittilai on the same plane thus, highlighting their existential domain that is intruded by so many variable spaces that continue to modify the meaning of the text.

Karnad's play *Yayati* also deals with the question of a woman but in a modified way where the social rights and family relationships are questioned, intervened and reconstructed to relocate the position of a woman in the postcolonial modern Indian society. The individual's roles as a father, as a husband, as a ruler and as a lover are transgressed by his own sexual desire and the feminine domain. All these are individual spaces which intermingle to create the desired hybrid space where the individual often feels difficult to locate itself thus creating a modification in its own existential space within society and within the family. Like Rani and the Queen discussed earlier in *Naga Mandala* and *Bali: The Sacrifice* respectively, Sharmishtha (in *Yayati*) also desires to achieve her social right as a woman which has been snatched away from her due to her low caste. Sharmishtha's space of existence is defined by the feminine and class domains that intersect each other to give a new identity to her individuality. This modification has its negative aspect as Sharmishtha seduces King Yayati who is already married to her friend Queen Devayani. Queen Devayani is a Brahmin by birth and she enjoys her class superiority while marrying King Yayati. Sharmishtha, on the other hand, compels the King to marry her by seducing him to extramarital physical relationship. This act of Sharmishtha depicts the conflict within the feminine domain and that conflict is governed by the space occupied by the individual according to her own class. A woman goes against another woman due to the class differences between them and thus the feminine space is intersected by the social space. But this feminine space counters the patriarchal space when King Yayati is transformed into a mere puppet in the hands of Sharmishtha thus nullifying the influence of the male hegemony and the exploitation of women. The male, on the other hand, stands confused and helpless being torn in-between so many social and family spaces which identify him as a ruler, as a husband, as a father and so many. Yayati neglects his kingly duties and also his responsibilities as a father and as a husband. But, like *Naga Mandala* and *Bali: The Sacrifice*, here the patriarchal space is challenged and subdued by the feminine space and characters in these three plays like, Rani, Sharmishtha and the Queen emerge as the new women of modern Indian society in the postcolonial period. This newly formed feminine space has intensely modified the modern Indian social space thus rendering the stereotypical patriarchal constructs null and void. In spite of her misconduct Sharmishtha stands as a unique character who defines her own space of existence defying the dictates of the class and the patriarchal constructs. This act of Sharmishtha is against the Indian Hindu tradition. But if we consider the point of individual right then Sharmishtha's act stands justified, and King

Yayati seems to be doing no wrong in rendering her with her womanly right. While talking about the issue Dr. Falguni P. Desai observes,

Devyani thought Yayati had violated his Dharma, when he married Sharmishtha. She was right in her own way. But if a man is bogged by a woman for Dharma's sake to pour in the seed he must do so, as a king & a Kshatriya Yayati followed his Dharma in doing so....Sharmishtha asks from Yayati her ritu right, ritu embrace, so that her ritu may not be in vain and in such circumstances Yayati rightly follows his dharma and grants her an offspring by practicing world's highest holy law of their union. (Desai, 51-52)

Thus, while Devayani achieves her right to become the queen through dharma, Sharmishtha also claims her right in the same way though belonging to the lower class. Thus, she replaces Devayani and challenges the superiority of Devayani's class. As a woman Sharmishtha establishes her own right and by violating the social norms of chastity and morality she establishes her own position as a woman who, like any man, has every right to go to any extent to achieve her own goal.

Flowers is a significant play where Karnad more vigorously points out the conflict between the religious, social and the psychological spaces that intersect each other and the individual finds it difficult to locate its space of existence. The conflict becomes so intense that the individual sacrifices its life. The religious and social spaces intersect and intrude into the psychological space thus influencing the libidinal desire and the activities of the individual. The play is based on the legend of Veeranna of the Chitradurg region and became widely known when a Kannada writer T.R. Subbanna included it in his novel *Hamsageete*(1952). The married priest is having an extramarital relationship with a courtesan. But he is a true devotee to Lord Shiva and worships Shiva Linga everyday. But, he is not true to his wife who is a sufferer. Karnad depicts the male desire that is uncontrollable and irrespective of social, religious and familial bonding and responsibilities the Priest finds it difficult to ignore the sexual urge in him. His existential space is at stake and he suffers from the bite of his conscience from within. Veeranna continues to jump from one space to the other thus lacking his own actual location within the social space. One day the Chieftain discovers a hair in the prasada(flowers and other offerings) and demands an explanation from Veeranna, who claims that the hair belongs to God. Challenged by the Chieftain to prove the truth of his claim the priest in turn challenges God to display hair or accept his head in punishment, and enters a meditative trance. When the Chieftain arrives the next day to expose Veeranna's lie, the Shivalinga has indeed sprouted long silken hair, and when the Priest plucks a hair to become sure about the matter blood begins to ooze from the crown of the Lingam. Veeranna realizes his sin and repents. At this point of time Veeranna succeeds in locating his own space. He realizes his own fault and understands that God has forgiven him. The intersection of various spaces had created a no man's land for Veeranna which now dissolves and he discovers his own space of existence. He sacrifices himself out of the sense of guilt in him that arises due to the intersection of the psychological space with the social space. The social responsibilities and duties intensely influence his psychology that makes him pay for his misdeeds. Veeranna sacrifices his life for the sake of his love to God. In this play we see the conflict between religious devotion and erotic love that acquires a huge space that engulfs the social and religious stereotypes thus reconstructing the identity of the individual as a whole. This in turn changes the meaning of the text.

Thus, Girish Karnad aptly uses his dramatic narration and characters to highlight the meaning of the text that continuously gets changed and modified with the interactions between different spaces that confine not only the characters but also the action of the play thus, depicting the various problematic issues through several conflicts that exist on different levels. If we consider modern literature as an area where geographical spaces delineate the contours of modern society then, obviously, Girish Karnad's plays provide us with a panoramic view of different issues that are occurring in modern India which are located and relocated in different spaces. The intersection of these spaces creates a hybrid space which redefines the post-colonial Indian social discourse. The existential space of the individual gets crisscrossed by these various intersecting spaces thus, providing the individual a new identity and recognition that also define the face of the developing image of the postcolonial Indian society in the present scenario. Karnad's plays provide a ground for the intersection and evolution of different spaces. This in turn allows us with the opportunity to interpret our history with reference to our present. The modified domain that the individual occupies in the present social scenario is obviously reflected symbolically but logically through the plays of Girish Karnad discussed above. Through the depiction of these various spaces and their intersections Karnad symbolically points out the social and psychological complications that affect the existence of the concerned individual in the postcolonial scenario of modern India.

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