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Theory of Corporeal Dominance in Karnad's Dramatic World
With Special Reference to *Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadan, Nagamandala* and *The Fire and the Rain*

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the themes and psychological development of Girish Karnad's characters and the techniques he deployed in his plays. Here, his important and popular five plays have been taken in a chronological order. Girish Karnad as a man of letters wants to produce to his audience/readers. Now in the ensuing study, the theory of corporeal dominance in the plays of Karnad is delineated very sturdily so that his vision can be interpreted.

Keywords: Corporal, Divine, Spiritual, Mandal, Existentialism, Dionysian Ego, Apollonian Ego.

Girish Karnad is a man of extra ordinary intellect. His multidimensional persona shows his various interests. He has proved his adeptness in all the forms of arts, whether it is writing plays, theatre artist, director, academician and an excellent actor. He has endowed with a great richness not only to the Kannada Theatre, but the entire Indian dramatic stage.

He is a recipient of a number of prestigious awards including "Jnanapith Award", which established his supremacy as a literature. With the help of mythological, folk and historical plots he has tried his hands to explore the universal problems of human psyche. He with an amazing observant way reveals the contemporary issues which have universal relevance.

Tutun Mukherjee writes:

Karnad's plays have been able to strike a balance accommodating both efficacy and entertainment in good measure, because his interest is to urge a socio-cultural interrogation through his plays without burdening them

with overt ideology. As a result, his plays are universalistic, allegorical, ritualized as well as individualized and entertaining show business. (22)

After the thorough and deep study of themes and techniques, around which Girish Karnad creates his dramatic world is theory of corporeal dominance, which prominently found in his plays.

As an existentialist, Girish Karnad chooses a different band of themes from mythology and history, so that the existence of an individual, in a given cultural and social milieu can be interpreted. Existentialism represents the philosophy of man who is mired in life and its problems and sufferings. In the words of one of his critics Ramakant, "Existentialism postulates no scheme, no method and no formula. It approaches human life as one continuous flow of consciousness, struggling, suffering, despairing and tending towards death." (4)

Thus, existentialism in the modern era displays the predicament of man, who feels the sense of protest, anger, hopelessness, loneliness, rootless condition, alienation, despair and anxiety, where he feels the loss of his self and that loss of world. Existentialism can be searched in his plays *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana* and others. In his first play *Yayati*, the protagonist suffers with the problem of social alienation, self alienation, and divided self. The play *Tughlaq* shows the problems of restlessness, loneliness of Muhammad-Bin -Tughlaq, in *Hayavadana*, Padmini and Hayavadana endure with the problem of split personalities and divided self. Rani is the victim of existential suffering, agony, helplessness and isolation, while Raibhya, Parvasu and Vishakha reveal their characteristic nature in the form of protest and anger. Karnad presents the problem of society through his characters. His major protagonists are victimized by their personal as well as social problems, which create hurdles in their lives and they remain incomplete. They long for completeness, but it becomes a difficult dream in their lives which makes their lives miserable, tortured and exploited, isolated and captivated. Finally, they themselves become the sufferer. Karnad adroitly portrays them as existentialist characters. In the words of Punam Pandey, "Karnad as a playwright constructs the master design of existentialism in his plays." (163)

The plays of Girish Karnad deal with problems of existentialism in the modern world, in which the temperament of selfishness is found. Everyone loves his own identity; no one wants to

lose it because identity gives one an authentic existence. This is the harsh reality of life. Modern men never care for each other. Love, respect and harmony are taking a backseat in today's world. The ambition of man can never be satisfied and this very dissatisfaction or incompleteness of wishes or desires is the root cause of all sorrows and disasters. Modern man's behavior is very selfish. One thinks only about one's own welfare, even if it can be achieved at the cost of someone's life or emotions. Modern man is heartless, and has forgotten the journey from head back to the heart. He lacks human values, ethics and moral ideas. Keeping aside the spiritual progress, he is into the rat race of materialistic world. The playwright has succeeded to a great extent in depicting the reality of twentieth century, which has been an era of great spiritual stress and strain. It is languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and meaninglessness. The existential encounter with nothingness is typical of modern man's life. Modern man suffers from powerlessness, isolation, self estrangement and meaninglessness in his way of existence.

In his plays, Karnad tries to prove the existence of body. All his major characters demonstrate that body i.e. physical shape is more important than social and cultural ethics. His character Yayati craves for the eternal youth, attractive and muscular body, so that he can enjoy the worldly pleasures. Yayati does so not only for enjoying physical pleasures, but he wants to maintain his identity as a strong, versatile and perpetual king. Yayati while cursed gets the condition of old age. In this condition of his decrepitude, with his pleasures, his identity would have lost. In this predicament, he loses his control on himself and does not know how to handle the situation. Sharmishtha advises him to keep patience, but he fails to control his emotions and says "Patience? Patience of man falling into a bottomless pit. Patience? The deafening rush of emptiness. What can be more terrible than that?" (Karnad, *Yayati* II. 42).

Yayati is perplexed, turns violent and refuses to accept old age. He craves for his identity and remains adamant. Even while on bed, he looks here and there like a mad man and searches for something on the bed and reels back in the past.

YAYATI. I am trying to recapture my youth. Moments when I handed out pain, moments when I slaughtered out enemies, raised hostile cities to the ground, made my queens writhe in pain and demanded that they laugh and make luck to me in

gratitude. Why do I think of those moments now Sharmishtha? Why do moments of tear and torture and blood seem priceless? (Karnad, *Yayati* II. 43).

Thus, *Yayati* is lost in an emotional trauma. It is very evident to him that childhood and youth come and go, but decrepitude comes to a person, never to go back. When he is cursing, crying, cribbing, complaining and searching for the person who can take his old age, his own son *Pooru* readily agrees to do so. Therefore, he exchanges his decrepitude with the youth of his son and this very extra ordinary exchange of the physique between father and son becomes the root of all the problems in the play.

Karnad's another important character *Tughlaq*, who has been taken from the medieval history also explores the concept of existence and individual identity. *Tughlaq* always pretends to think about the welfare of his public/subject and wants to establish an idealistic and visionary kingdom. His life is full of difficulties, ironies, contradictions and catastrophes. Throughout the play, *Tughlaq* does not have even a single moment of peace and rest in his life. He has many qualities like patriotism, scientific temper, liberalism, studious nature, idealism, innovative and original ideas, but in spite of all these qualities, he achieves nothing, but only chaos and anarchy in his life and kingdom. But like a smart politician, he knows how to covert the adverse conditions in to favorable situations. He says

Make a public announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and that the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by *Shaihab-ud-din*, who died a martyr's death defending him. The funereal will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair. Invite his father to it and see that he is treated with the respect due to the father of a loyal noble man. (Karnad, *Tug. VI* 43-44)

To this, *Barani* replies, "Oh God! Aren't even the dead free from our politics?" (*Tug.* 6.44) Karnad's *Tughlaq* is not only a historical character, but also an existentialist hero, full of contradictions, "He is at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and Godless" (Mukherjee 93) .*Tughlaq* with his self knowledge and self-awareness creates a world, in which he keeps least concern and care for the views of his subjects and other people. Thus, *Tughlaq* fails in forming an ideal state of Utopia miserably, because of his over-idealistic vision for his kingdom.

While developing the character of Tughlaq, Girish Karnad portrays the intellectual and psychological condition of Mohammad-Bin-Tughlaq as a king and as an individual. Karnad makes Tughlaq an idealist, and establishes that in politics, idealism does not pay. It is bound to fail, especially when the idealist is impulsive. Tughlaq is a very intelligent man and works hard for the welfare of people. This play is basically a tragedy of the limits of human power. Tughlaq's regime is considered to be one of the spectacular regimes of history. Tughlaq is a firm, ruthless monarch who is not only indulged in patricide and fratricide, but his creativity is shown by the fact that he is also the founder of paper currency. Karnad has made a clever use of Tughlaq's paradoxes for dramatic success. He has brought out the spectacular beauty of the play, by using paradoxes of Tughlaq to the maximum extent possible. Karnad beautifully depicts the psychological state of Tughlaq and his determination and anguish are revealed nicely.

Hayavadana, the story of transposed heads, which is a great success on the stage, also deals with the complex concept of existence and search for identity through a folk tale. Through the characters of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, Karnad raises the question of identity, completeness and existentialism. To highlight these characteristics, he further adds the subplot of Hayavadana, who has a horse's head and a human body. Here his heroine Padmini longs for the man having a fabulous body with a fabulous brain. The unfulfilment of human desires is symbolized by Padmini. She fails in getting re-unification of mind and the body in Devadatta and Kapila. Padmini's extra ordinary desire for completeness and perfection brings calamity in her personal life. Devadatta is the symbol of mind and Kapila is the symbol of physical power i.e. body. Norman O. Brown was a psycho-analyst who used Greek myths of Apollo and Dionysus in interpreting the alienation of mind and body and their unification. Dionysian Ego means the state of perfect harmony between the body and mind, while Apollonian Ego means the state of differentiated and divided mind and body, i.e. there is no harmony between mind and body. Earlier, people used to live their lives according to Dionysian theory, hence lives used to be easy and smooth. Now-a-days, with growing ambitions, desires and cravings, people have started following the Apollonian. Therefore, life becomes alienated and the root cause of all the problems in this world is the same alienation, as it is lethal to both mind as well as body.

Now, she expects her dreams to be fulfilled for completeness through her child. Thus, she wants to provide both physical and mental training for her son, so that he may obtain perfection in his life. Thus, Girish Karnad in case of His character Yayati craves for the eternal youth,

attractive and muscular body, so that he can enjoy the worldly pleasures. Yayati does so not only for enjoying physical pleasures, but he wants to maintain his identity as a strong, versatile and perpetual king.. Karnad condenses several themes into the plot of the play and enriches it with cultural significance. The themes of identity, incompleteness and love and mind body dichotomy give a new dimension to this play.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad directly deals with the themes of love, sex and adultery to probe in the tradition of marriage institution. Through these concepts, he tries to conclude that for existence in the society, body is the most essential aspect. A woman desires for a husband not only for the namesake, but also needs his attention and care along with physical relationship. Here Rani, who is wife of Appanna, is loved and impregnated by the Cobra who comes in the physical form of her husband; virtually she loves this Naga, who fulfils the duties of her displaced husband Appanna. Like Yayati and Padmini, Rani enjoys corporeal pleasure, through the body of Naga in the disguise of Appanna, as physical shape is the identity of an individual in Karnad's dramatic world. The playwright in this play deals with the male female sexuality. Naga employs the myth of life to educate Rani about sex. Sleep (nindra), food (ahara) and copulation (maithuna) are common to man and animal. Naga as the phallic symbol performs as per his nature or Swadharma and initiates her into sex. He comes disguised as her husband but he cannot change what he is. This is artistically described by Karnad.

Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows-even the geese! The female begins to smell like wet earth. And stung by her smell, the King Cobra starts searching for his queen. The tiger bellows for his mate. When the flame-of-forest blossoms into a fountain of red and the earth cracks open at the touch of the aerial roots of the banyan, it moves in the hollow of the cotton-wood. Within everything that sprouts, grows, stretches, creaks and blooms-everywhere. Those who come together cling, fall apart lazily! It is there and there and there, everywhere. (Karnad, *Naga Mandala* II. 45)

Earlier, Rani was innocent as she was unaware of love and sex. The Naga made her experience all this. After this, her life changed forever. Thus, it is proved that in the life of a common man, love and sex have got their own importance and these aspects can't be neglected.

In the play *The Fire and the Rain*, the concept of corporeal dominance and physical pleasures reaches a new domain. In *Yayati*, identity means youth, and in *Tughlaq*, it comes in the form of desire of perfection. In *Hayavadana*, Padmini seeks identity at two levels i.e. physical and mental and in *Naga-Mandala*, identity comes in the form of biological shape and herein *The Fire and the Rain*, it comes in the form of power politics. If one studies Girish Karnad's incremental development, one can find this thematic growth in the form of power politics. After getting youth (*Yayati*), perfection (*Tughlaq*), a fine mixture of physical built and strong intellect (*Hayavadana*) and loving and caring companion (*Naga-Mandala*) what one can desire, definitely 'Power' over others (*The Fire and the Rain*).

In *The Fire and the Rain* corporeal dominance comes in the form of power politics, as all major characters crave for authority over others. Raibhya, who is basically a sage, is so highly ambitious for position of the chief priest, that he cannot tolerate even his own son on that post. Parvasu, the son of Raibhya who is appointed as the chief priest is full of cruelty due to unusual ambitions. He exploits his own wife Vishakha, entangles his brother Arvasu in conspiracy and deliberately kills his father. One can witness such rat-race of materialism and power in Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* where, Parvasu wishes to be the chief priest (Maha-Purohita), and he appears as a hurdle in achieving the goal to his own father Raibhya. He does not care for his brother Arvasu and wife Vishakha and kills his own father Raibhya. A common man knows only about Aurangzeb who killed his brothers and imprisoned his father Shahajahan for getting throne. While in Indian Mythology here is an example of power politics of similar nature. Parvasu sits in the shoe of Aurangzeb. The quest for competition, rivalry and jealousy is crucial and existential in approach. Vaulting ambition of Parvasu can be compared with Aurangzeb's unethical ways of snatching power. Karnad in this play shows that man always wants to remain in power, like Raibhya and Parvasu. Yajna was considered a way to access power and success. Like present day political leaders, there was no place for emotions, and even relations are exploited to gain advantages. A man does not spare his near and dear ones, if they come in his path of achieving name and fame. However, at the end of the play, Karnad shows that ultimately the people like Arvasu who are on the path of truth and love are remembered with honor and respect in the long run.

Another prominent character Yavakri, son of Bhardwaja is highly selfish and ambitious. He is a victim of revenge instincts, because he has a false assumption that in place of Raibhya

and Parvasu, he and his father had to be given the respect and positions. Therefore, he goes to penance and pleases Lord Indra and asks for the universal knowledge instead of rain, for the drought inflicted land. He seeks universal knowledge not for the benevolence of mankind, but only for satisfying his revenge instincts. Thus, power politics and to dominate others become the main theme of *The Fire and the Rain*.

In this study, the characteristic nature of all the major protagonists have been interpreted on the basis of Mandala Theory. On being interpreted, on the canons of this specific Hindu originated Mandala concept; certain features are seen apparently in the major characters of Karnad's dramatic world. Yayati, Tughlaq, Padmini, Rani and Parvasu are protagonists around whom the stories of respective plays are woven. They all demonstrate the trend that body i.e. physical shape is important for identity of a person. All these characters are projected on the rectangles of the Mandala Diagram as they exhibit an extra-ordinary inclination towards the corporeal, physical and material aspect of life. In turn, this trend of their personalities becomes the root cause of their failures and plights. In Karnad's first play *Yayati*, the protagonist which has been culled from Hindu epic Mahabharata, has a profound hunger for his specific identity and pleasures. Therefore, in spite of being cursed, he tries to regain his youth, so that he could maintain his identity as a young and exuberant king. He exchanges his youth with his son Pooru, which shows his selfish as well egocentric attitude. Further, it indicates the lack of spirituality and ethereal elements in his personality.

Tughlaq is an over-idealistic man and fully involved in his self-appreciation. He pretends to be a benevolent emperor, whereas like a crafty politician, he pays importance to the extension of his empire, which indicates his materialistic approach towards life. In *Hayavadana*, the leading character of the play, Padmini demonstrates the strong urge for perfection and completeness. In fact, she wants to create harmony between body and mind. For this, she prefers body over intellect. By doing this, she satisfies her thirst for completeness. At any cost, she wishes to get both boons.

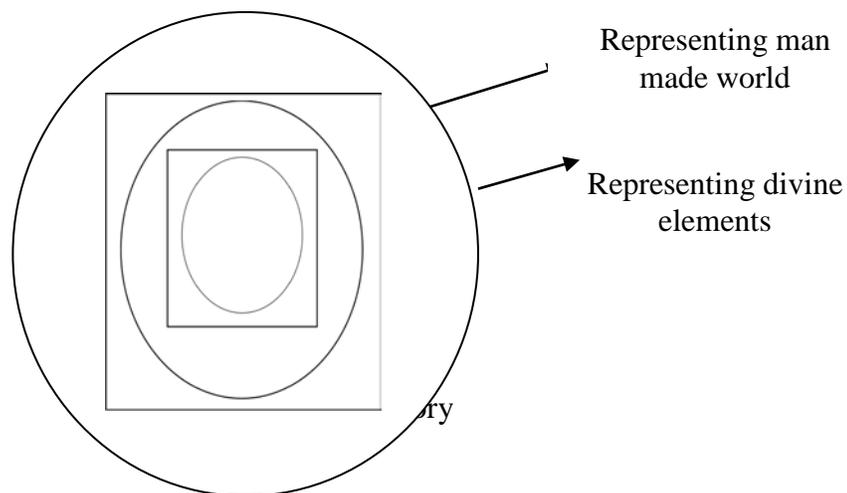
Rani, the folk character of Karnad's dramatic world also shows the corporeal inclination in her actions. She is entangled in a sexual relationship with the Naga, who is not her real husband. In fact, she has been delineated as an innocent village girl, who is ready to tolerate all the atrocities of the society. But as she gets opportunity, like a rebellion, she comes forward and

enjoys the company of Naga; however, her nature of revolt is calm, unlike Padmini and Vishakha.

In the play *The Fire and the Rain*, one of the protagonists Paravasu is highly inclined towards the corporeal and physical activities. He is appointed as the chief priest of the seven years long fire sacrifice; even then he performs the sinful and heinous act of patricide and blames his younger brother for the same.

Thus, all the major characters have been projected on the rectangles of the Mandala Diagram. Their material and physical aspect is much brighter than the spiritual and ethereal side. Karnad has included the same quality in all his characters as he prefers body over the soul, as only body i.e. physical shape is the identity of an individual.

The term ‘Mandala’ is a Sanskrit origin word which means ‘circles’. In fact, a Mandala contains infinite series of squares and circles embedded in each other. This Mandala Theory has spiritual and ritual significance in oriental philosophy. The diagram showing Mandala Theory is:



In this concentric diagram circles symbolize the spiritual and divine elements which were created by one of the Trinity, Brahma e.g. Sun, Moon, planets etc. It is assured that every mortal within his inner conscious has some spiritual and divine elements. On the other hand, squares in this diagram indicate the corporeal and physical development of human mind which is basically composed and imitated by mortals e.g. houses, roads, farms etc.

The characteristic nature of all his major protagonists can be demonstrated as per the following diagram, where sharp rectangles are the representative of materialistic and corporal nature of the man:

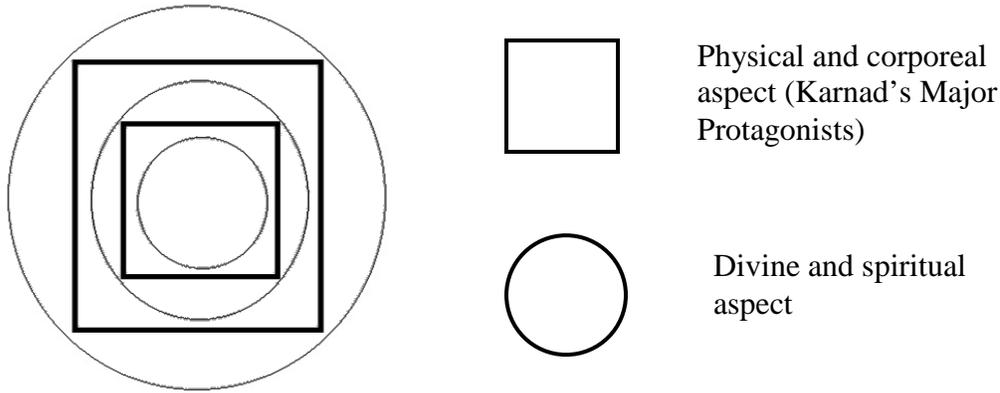


Fig. 22

On the basis of above interpretation it may be concluded that corporal side of Karnad's Protagonists is mightier and they are a spiritually hallow-personalities.

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