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## Reviews that Analyze Girish Karnad's Plays and Turn him into a Chronicler

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### **Abstract:**

Girish Karnad stands out as the most powerful writer and his plays have turned into a precept for creative ability, advancement, and craftsmanship. By going through some of his iconic plays, it seems, he had a great vision for India where he wanted to see everyone living in a libertarian culture where all sit, eat, work and worship together. Karnad, in his plays, has a universal approach using the examples of the past targeting the societal mal-practices. He knows the fact that the root of problems lies in the historic details. He excavated history and found the solutions to the present complexities. He suggests not repeating the mistakes which the emperors or other people made in time and led society to destruction and utter confusion.

This research paper would provide a scope for a study as it serves to be suitable data to be explored to reveal the chronicle of the events.

**Keywords:** Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Nagmandala, Fire and the Rain, Tale-danda.

### **Introduction**

In India, religion is always given importance and people are superstitious in the name of religion and God. Shrewd politicians who know how to use this weapon of religion for fulfilling vicious intentions taking the wrong advantages out of the common people. Tughlaq in the play *Tughlaq* and the king Bijjalal in *Tale –Danda* represents such rulers. In *Nagamandal* two forces are at the struggle the patriarchal and the matriarchal and in *Tale-danda*, orthodoxy and heterodoxy are creating havoc in the life of people. These types of open and hidden struggles are visible in the present times too. A woman has been a weakness of a man for ages. This theme is also recurrent in the work of Karnad.

Girish Karnad always wanted to be an author. He started as a dramatist. Since 1980 a plethora of plays has been generated. Indian plays are widely appreciated and carry huge

respect and importance at the national as well as at the international level. Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sarkar are also among the names in the list of great dramatists. He is moreover, seen, as a conspicuous figure in Indian film, where he has worked as an on-screen character, and screenwriter, earning respect. *Utsav*, *Godhuli*, *Pukar* were famous movies that were produced by Karnad. He played the role of an actor also in some of the famous movies like *Nishant*, *Manthan* and *Iqbal*.

Some notable playwrights are contemporary of Girish Karnad like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, G.V. Desari and Gurucharan Das. The plays which these writers have written are staged all over the world like Europe and America. Asif's *Inquilab* (1970) and *Sonar Bangla* (1972) have a deep political impact. Another play *Goa* (1970) talks about colonialism. Mohan Rakesh wrote *Ashad Ka Ek Din* (1958), *Lehron ke Rajhans* (1963), and *Aadhe-Adhure* (1969). *Ashad Ka Ek Din* is about the love of a Sanskrit poet Kalidasa named Mallika. *Lehron ke Rajhans* talks about the modern life in which the ego clash between man and woman is shown. *Aadhe-Adhure* also focuses on a similar theme. Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is a social commentator for post-independent India. His work *Kamala* (1981) shows the deplorable plight of women in which a woman is sold for Rs 250 in the Luhardagga Bazaar in Bihar. *Kanyadan* (1983) is another good play. Mahesh Dattani is a great playwright. He wrote *Where There is Will* (1988) shows the negative love of a father for his son.

The enigma of the generation gap is also shown by him in *Dance Like a Man* (1989). Badal Sircar a Bengali playwright delves into the problems of middle-class families. He is very famous as a 'barefoot playwright'. He has also given the concept of Third Theatre—supported by people—and his plays like *Procession* (1972), *Bhoma* (1974), and *State News* (1979) are based on this technique.

Krishan Mohan Banerjee wrote the first Indian English play entitled *The Persecuted* in 1831; this was more than a century before independence. Girish Karnad has selected a very interesting way to write plays and that is using old myths to discuss major problems like the eternal struggle for perfection and complexities of life.

Karnad talks about all the touching issues of life and he stirs the social ethos to reject brutality through his dramatizations. Talking and discussing the social issues, the approach to gauge an individual is also visible in Karnad's plays. As in the play the king maintains distance from the common crowd but ironically the queen yearns for common touch and gets

involved with another lover. The details of such incidents are very much in the dialogues of the characters where a powerful king is found helpless as the queen is interested in someone else.

So we begin our tale —  
 and in any tale  
 the King and the Queen  
 sitting on the throne  
 should merge into one—  
 she on his lap  
 become half his royal frame  
 or entwined in bed, tangled together  
 they must turn  
 into a four-armed deity  
 thrashing and moaning  
 for the good of the land.  
 But woe betide the times  
 where the King sits alone  
 outside on the steps  
 racked by sighs  
 while the Queen is trapped  
 in her lover's thighs. (190)

Naik States, “It won’t be wrong to state that in *Bali: the Sacrifice*, Karnad —negotiates between the culture and need-based ideology and philosophical thinking” (80) and Rajeswaran reiterates that “The moral choices that the King has to make in this play reflect the choices before contemporary Indians” (141).

Karnad, thus, has an array of social beliefs which he challenges. One can get a taste of the diversity and complexity of Indian culture. He realizes the power of Indian Society which can cater to all sorts of people provided they are free from social evils like superstitions, factions by the name of religion, caste-based society, etc. Using all the accessories and characters, Karnad becomes the magician to show his magic in writing dramas with all the typical material in form of stage equipment for representing things in a better way.

Chanana says that “The screenwriter utilizes the traditions of society’s stories and themes of people’s theater as veils, blinds, mime, melodies, the pundit, storyteller, dolls, horse-man and the story inside a story. He creates a magical world.” (1)

Tutun Mukherjee says that “the dramatic world of Karnad is very real; the dream is simultaneously reality, where the invisible coincides with the visible.” (Mukherjee 17)

Karnad says about his life that, "I've had a good life," he said. "I have managed to do all I could wish for, even be a government servant! Now I feel whatever time I have left should be spent doing what I like best, writing plays." (Karnad 45)

Some critics believe that the plays of Karnad talk about the problems of life. Every play is the story of a new problem of modern man. (Sravana Jyothi 96).

A critic R K Dhawan tells his conception about the author that he is a man with a great cool mind. He is not at all impulsive in detailing and shows everything perfectly, "His plays are full of classical richness and they talk about the past stories and popular thoughts.

The way Karnad looks and delineates the myths is wonderful; he is a man of a golden thought process. His matchless expressions and the way of presenting the things with great timings are remarkable." (Dhawan 20) Praising Karnad, Dhawan states “Nature may stand up and say —here’s a man.” (Dhawan 20)

A famous critic, M K Chaudhary says that Karnad uses all these techniques to make his written pieces livelier. His major focus is on the divided self of India which has remained unchanged until the present time. (Chaudhury 223) One other critic says that his major focus is to show unchanged India long after freedom from colonial rule.

Girish Karnad wrote in Kannad Language, later his works were translated into multiple languages and got widespread publicity. The translated play poses a challenge for the translator to show the sufferings visible in the text in the translated language. It is seen that the translations were well performed and the meaning of the expressions was kept intact. One critic wrote “Good translations made the world of literature more and wider spread. Many plays of Girish Karnad have been translated. Thus, it creates a new reading framework that challenges the classic approach to translation and allows the widening of the scope.” (Prabha 1)

Girish Karnad is one of the exceptional writers of present-day India who has improved and brilliantly illuminated the convention of Indian English Drama. His commitment to Indian drama in English is based on *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale- Danda*, and *Fire and Rain*, which he created in English. Girish Karnad has gained

worldwide recognition in light of these plays. His masterstroke lies in the fact that he can visualize the requisites of the production on the stage and hence the brilliance of his presentation comes forth.

R. K. Dhawan in his article *Myths in the Plays of Girish Karnad* estimates his contribution to Indian theatre and drama in the following lines:

Girish Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. He 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 directed feature films, documentaries, and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English, and has played leading roles as an actor in Hindi and Kannada art films, commercial movies, and television serials. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. (115)

A reader can see the plays with different edges and levels and the ultimate feeling is that a reader feels close to India. The more a person goes towards the West; he is pulled back to India. It happened with Karnad himself. He went to the West but finally reached India. He even influenced Western theater with his customary approach.

Dr. Shalini Virmani states that "Karnad is perfect in plot building, characterization, spectacles, and songs." She further says "the most remarkable feature of these plays is the use of T. S. Eliot's phrase "Objective Correlative" for representing contemporary social issues and dramatizing psychological and spiritual conflict." (Virmani 17)

One of the critics, *Mee* mentions that the stallion faced human epitomizes the subject of acceptance of such personalities in the society:

Hayavadana comes from two different worlds but does not feel at home either. He represents the divided self of the post-colonial subject- a character attempting to decolonize his mind. (Mee 144)

Aparna Dharwadker says: Karnad has shown us how the matter of the myth and legend resonates in modern experience and how the history of the nation prefigures its present. (Dharwadker87)

The issue of a person who is not similar to others looks wise is raised by Karnad. His desire to end up as entire human shows that closeness in appearance is essential to pick up acknowledgment amidst individuals. Peculiarity like that of God isn't at all helpful for the steed head animal which infers that he has a place with minority areas of society who never-endingly take a stab at acknowledgment amid the dominant part gatherings.

*Anti-Cathartic theory* of the German playwright Bertold Brecht tells that the real role of a play is not only to generate the therapeutic impact but to show the cause and effect. Similar to Brecht, Karnad wrangles about the issue of contention between brutality and peacefulness and abandons it to the group of onlookers for their particular comprehension. Karnad's preface to this play where he praises the astuteness and sensitivity of Mahatma Gandhi, "the importance of non-violence to the cultural and political survival of India." (Roy 283)

For four decades Karnad has been using history and folklores to reflect and solve the problems of contemporary time. Karnad is a performing artist and he is not bound to only writing rather he has excelled in everything which is associated with drama: screenplay, enactment, scriptwriting, etc. When he turned 60, he told people that he wanted to remain devoted to such work till the last day of his life especially writing plays.

Eliot also wrote in his essay '*Traditions and Individual Talent*' that no writer lives in a vacuum. Whatever is written by any author on papers generally reflects the traditions of his culture. Eliot writes the same in his own words in '*The Sacred Wood*.' The sense of history is important for all as, "The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country." (Gupta 28)

Karnad is a hardcore Indian who did not at all depend on any Western theme or artistic style. He always relied on his talent for knowing the great details of Indian culture and traditions. He took the help of Indian tools to make his enactment more powerful. It is a treat for anyone to watch all his plays to know Indian folklores and other myths.

*The idiosyncrasies* in his plays are noticeable. The most important element in the details of the plays shows the spirit of his heroes who try to go beyond their limits and without much ado the matter of the fact is revealed.

*The authenticity* and the reflection of philosophic implication is an inevitable part of his writing. The translation of his plays from English to Hindi has made his content more famous in India. Thus he reached the common people. Contemporary writers like Shaw, Sartre, Camus, Giradoux, and Brecht have written well giving historical details. They got lost in their fancies or in the historical details in their works unlike Karnad who took history and other details of customs to project the *present problems* and connecting the *generic past details* with the present time is remarkable.

The technique in the play *Hayavadana* is twofold one is *socio-cultural* and *metaphysical aspects*. At both the level there is shown the conflict between the binary opposites. In the comic mode, it is technically presented that human beings are having the feeling of incompleteness and that compel them to do strange things.

*The style of showing the generic predicament* of the human race is the common technique of Girish Karnad to express his thoughts. Pure technically, Karnad used the technique of *Yakshagana* in which we have a lot of music, folk dance, and folk songs. These songs have been paraphrased in the English translations. The opening of the play is with the Bhagavata's prayer in the praise of Lord Ganesha. Invocation of God using verse is a very thumping technique to show the rampant issue subtly. When the heads of Devadatta and Kapila are transposed, all the three characters sing a song happily.

What a good mix!  
 No more tricks!  
 Is this one that  
 Or that one this?  
 Ho! Ho! (Karnad 35)

The technique is to present a play within a play is used in the *Naga-Mandalaand* in *The Fire and The Rain* by intertwining the elements of surprise and suspense are leaving the readers to spell bounded. Again and again, the technique of verse is used by Girish Karnad in the love-making scene where Rani and Naga come close is shown by a song called 'Song of Flames', and this song is used two times in act II:

Song of the Flames  
Come let us dance  
Through the weaver bird's nest  
And light the hanging lamps  
Of glow worms  
Through the caverns in the anthill  
And  
Set the diamond  
In the cobra's crown ablaze  
Through the blind woman's dream  
Through the deaf mute's song  
Come let us flow  
Down the tresses of time  
All light and song. (Karnad 30)

*Feminism* in the plays of Karnad the demand of equal rights in the true sense is demanded by women. This spirit of feminism challenges the stereotype, sex role and patriarchal language. According to the renowned scholar Prof. Jasbir Jain, feminism is the conquering the inner fear. In the *Fire and the Rain* Karnad explores different feminist issues like social role of women, sex role, identity and liberation. According to Karnad extramarital affairs are in fact helping women to bloom in true sense. It is wrong privilege, men for doing such things without questions. In the same text, Vishakha and Nittilal show their desire to get free from the shackles of oppressive rules of the world.

Tendulkar, Sircar and P. Dhanavel claim that some of the Indian writers like Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad are incredible and India owe a lot to them.

All other authors wrote a lot and in their confined way stuck to their language or region only. Karnad gives a composite form of all languages, regions and common happenings. Dhanavel says "every one of them are provincial playwrights and the feeling is that the playwrights compose their plays in territorial dialects: Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada, individually."(97)

As a researcher, my views after going through the most of critics that in India, religion is always given importance and people are superstitious in the name of religion and God. Shrewd politicians who know how to use this weapon of religion for fulfilling vicious intentions taking the wrong advantages out of the common people. Tughlaq in the play

*Tughlaq* and the king Bijjalal in *Tale –Danda* represent such rulers. In *Nagamandal* two forces are at the struggle the patriarchal and the matriarchal and in *Tale-danda*, orthodoxy and heterodoxy are creating havoc in the life of people. These types of open and hidden struggles are visible in the present times too. A woman has been a weakness of a man for ages. This theme is also recurrent in the work of Karnad. By going through some of his iconic plays, it seems, he had a great vision for India where he wanted to see everyone living in a libertarian culture where all sit, eat, work and worship together.

Thus, after reviewing the themes of the plays and opinions of the major works of Girish Karnad, it is observed that he has a universal approach using the examples of the past targeting the societal mal-practices. He knows the fact that the root of problems lies in the historic details. He excavated history and found the solutions to the present complexities. He suggests not repeating the mistakes which the emperors or other people made in time and led society to destruction and utter confusion.

Therefore, mentioned plays have provided eminent data to reveal the chronicle of the events and makes Karnad a Chronicler of Contemporary Indian Culture.

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