

Girish Karnad: A Legendary Playwright

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Abstract

Girish Karnad is a well known Indian writer, a critic, an actor, a publisher and a director of Indian cinema. Karnad is a legendary modern playwright to deal with the societal issues of the modern era. In his writings, he focussed on the importance of tackling contemporary issues by using effective tools like myth, history, legend and folktales. Myth provides a proper understanding of Indian culture, tradition, religion and ethics to deal with the modern scenario. Myth and Literature are closely related to each other. His writings include the psychological conflict of a man and his quest for completeness. He was very keen to deal with the suffering of women in the patriarchal society. His themes have the reflections of human sufferings. The issues such as Existential crisis, psychological crisis, absurdity, chastity, alienation, complex relations, superstitious beliefs and social evils formed the central theme of Karnad's works with reference to Indian history, myth, legend and folk-tales. He had presented his ideologies to revolutionize the society, eradicate the social evils, promote peace and protect the rights of women in India. He was a great Indian actor and a film director of Hindi and Kannada movies. He was a recipient of various prestigious awards. Few to mention are Jnanpith Award, Padma Bhushan Award, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. He was influenced with the writings of Henrik Ibsen and started the usage of myth and symbols in his writings as well. He was greatly influenced by Shakespeare's dialogues and adopted the same style in his works, effectively. His literary contributions and theatrical performances gained a lot of popularity and recognition. Karnad is known to the world as a noteworthy playwright.

Keywords: Critic, Contemporary, Myth, Existentialism, Alienation, Absurdity.

Girish Karnad (1938-2019)

Girish Karnad is a well known dramatist and a contemporary writer of a modern age. He was influenced by Atheism and Existentialism which formed the essence of his writing style. His plays are a satire on social evils. He exposed the narrow mentality of Indians through different perspectives and aimed at the betterment of the society. He is known to the world for the characterisation, plot, style, theme and the realistic approach to deal with contemporary issues.

Karnad was a skilled man with exceptional qualities.

Life

Girish Karnad was born on May 19, 1938 in Maharashtra to Dr. Raghunath Karnad and Krishna Bai Mankeekara. He was born in a saraswat Brahmin family. His schooling was in Marathi.. In those days, travelling theatre groups were very common. He admired the theatre groups or Natak Mandalis in his village. Karnad completed his graduation from Karnatak Arts College and earned his Master of Arts degree in political science, economics and philosophy from Oxford University.

In 1963, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras where he was exposed to various kinds of writings from different places and he gained interest for writing the plays.

In 1974, Karnad was appointed as the director of the Film and Television Institute of India and in 1983, he was a chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy. In 2000, he was the minister of Culture in the High Commission, London.

Karnad started his career as a playwright with his play *Yayati* in 1961. He wrote his plays in Kannada and translated them into English. He was influenced by Henrick Ibsen for using myth and symbols in his plays.

He was also influenced by William Shakespeare in writing effective dialogues for his characters. He used Masks in characterisation to bring reality in the plays. myth, history, legend and folktales are used to deal with the contemporary issues of the society.

Themes

Karnad's writings deal with the psychological crisis of a modern man. He used myth and history as the powerful tools to liberate the people from misery and sufferings. He analyzed human behaviour from different perspectives. He questioned the traditional beliefs that restrict the progressive ideas of the people. Karnad rejected the social norms and dealt with controversial topics. He was a political activist who strongly opposed political issues such as corruption, colonialism, suppression, tyranny and inequality. He explored complex themes related to religion, caste and gender. He wanted to change the social system by eradicating the social evils. He was against caste discrimination and caste superiority.

Karnad incorporated the blended elements of myth and history with western techniques to deal with the contemporary issues. His unique style made the traditional Indian theatres experimental, innovative and engaging. He used theatre as an effective tool to reflect the social issues. He promoted social equality, individual identity, religious tolerance and social justice in his plays. He spoke for women's rights and challenged the patriarchal norms of the society.

Karnad was a critical thinker and he touched various contemporary issues such as love, hatred, alienation, jealousy, Inter-caste marriages, casteism and used various tools like myth, history, legend and folktales in his works. His plays are a satire on socio- political norms and his rejection of the norms to live a progressive life.

Karnad contributed to his native soil significantly. He was influenced by the writings of Shakespeare and included the comic, tragic and romantic elements in his plays. He was also influenced by the western literature and the Renaissance movement. His plays deal with the conflict between the western ideas and traditional beliefs. He laid importance on modernisation, equality, eradication of social evils, women rights and Nationalism. He wrote the plays to promote his ideologies and to enhance the living conditions of Indians. He was an intellectual and an excellent literary genius. As a critic, he tackled contemporary issues with a different perspective. He used myth and history as effective tools for his writings.

The themes like alienation, exploitation, emotional crisis and existentialism in his writings proved to be remarkable. Mental agony of the protagonist and an idea of escapism were very common in his characters.

Rejection of Norms

Girish Karnad rejected the norms which curbed the rights of an individual. He challenged the male dominance and supported gender equality. He rejected the norms of the caste system and believed in religious tolerance. He defied the tyrannical laws which curtailed individual freedom.

Existential crisis was the central theme of *Yayati*, the characters faced a lot of physical and psychological crisis. In *Bali: The Sacrifice*, he challenged the traditional practice of sacrifice and recommended the readers to think critically for the progress of a society. In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, religious tolerance was fostered by rejecting the traditional caste system. Tipu's mother was a strong and independent lady who challenged the patriarchal norm. Karnad wrote for the upliftment of women and he strongly supported the ideals of Tipu's mother. He encouraged the women to participate in social and political forums and to fight against injustice. In *Hayavadana*, the social conventions of women were challenged. Women were controlled by men through the institution of marriage but Karnad rejected the norm and stated that women should be treated as equal as men. He opposed gender bias and supported the cause for women empowerment.

Karnad rejected the norms which restricted human rights. He was against the social, political and religious norms that hinders the progress of an individual. His ideologies were followed by the young Indian writers of the Modern era. His writings shaped the innocent minds of the Indians and directed them towards the progressive ideas.

Karnad, a legendary writer is popular for his ideals and progressive ideas.

Works

Girish Karnad was a notable playwright. His writings were in Kannada language. He translated his works in English and many other Indian languages. He wrote *Yayati* in 1961 which is based on the ancestral story of the Pandavas. The message of the play is to end the infidelity and imbibe the ethical values among the people. *Tughlaq* was published in 1964. It is a story of the sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughlaq. The historical characters reflect the socio-political lives of the people. Karnad showed the identity crisis of a man in his play *Hayavadana*. The quest for completeness and perfection are the

themes in Hayavadana. Karnad sent a message of non-violence in *Bali: The Sacrifice*. The conflict between the two ideologies of Brahmanism and Jainism led to the broader perspective of humanistic approach.

Nagamandala deals with the submissive nature of women in the patriarchal world. Women struggled for her rights, completeness and survival. Karnad wanted to raise the living standards of women in order to eradicate the social evils of the society. In *Tale-Danda*, he discussed the issue of the caste system. The discrimination based on the caste hinders the progress of an individual and the society. *The Fire and The Rain* deals with social issues like caste system, adultery, exploitation of women and human follies. Karnad's plays reflect the social life, culture, ethics and Myth of Indians. *A Heap of Broken Images* is a play based on the identity crisis and psychological issues of an individual. He is known for good characterisation and a significant plot. He used Myth, history and literary tools to transform his ideas in an effective way. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* deals with the modern ideologies of the sultan. Tipu Sultan is described as the far-sighted ruler who wanted to improve the economical standards of his kingdom. Tipu's ideology has a lot of relevance even in this modern era. *Flowers* deals with the conflict of spiritual love and physical love. There is a crisis between Dharma and Kama. The perturbed condition of the priest with regard to devotion and passion led him in distress.

Major Plays:

Girish Karnad wrote many plays in Kannada language and translated them into English language. His major plays are:

- Yayati
- Tughlaq
- Hayavadana
- Bali: The Sacrifice
- Nagamandala
- Tale-Danda
- The Fire and The Rain
- A Heap of Broken Images
- The Dreams of Tipu Sultan
- Flowers

Movies

Girish Karnad is known to the world as an actor and a screenplay writer. He started his career in the film industry with *Samskara* in 1970. He was honored with the President's Gold Medal in 1971 for his movie *Sanskara*. His performance in *Nishant*, 1975 was highly appreciated by the audience. Another movie of great fame in 1977 was *Swami*. His performance in the movie *Manthan* described the problems of the farmers and their hardships. He was an incredible actor with exceptional qualities and remarkable performance. He won the National Film Award for *Vamsha Vriksha* in 1971. He directed many Kannada and Hindi movies. His famous Kannada Movies are *Tabbaliyu Neenade*

Magane, Cheluvi, Ondanondu Kaladalli and Hindi movies are *Pukar, Iqbal, Dor, Ek Tha Tiger* and *Tiger Zinda Hai*.

Major Movies:

- Samskara
- Nishant: Night's End
- Manthan
- Swami
- Bhumika
- Ratnadeep
- Man Pasand
- Paanch Qaidi
- Utsav
- China Gate
- Hey Ram
- Iqbal
- Komaram Puli
- Ek Tha Tiger Tiger Zinda Hai

Recognition

Girish Karnad was a recipient of the prestigious awards. He was awarded for his outstanding performance in the films. He was a talented scriptwriter and his script was unique compared to the other writers. He presented his ideas based on the realistic approach towards contemporary issues. His stories spread the message of Nationalism, Equality, Justice, Fraternity, Ethical Values and Secularism. His stories deal with social issues, women's rights, search for identity and quest for completeness. His works and films gained national and international recognition.

Karnad's ideas, style, and performance have a significant contribution in the field of films and literature.

Awards

- Sahitya Academy Award
- Padma shri Award
- Padma Bhushan Award
- Jnanpith Award
- National Film Award for Best Screenplay
- National Film Award for Best Direction

- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award
- Kalidas Samman for Theatre

Conclusion

Girish Karnad was a prolific writer, actor, film director and a critical thinker. He used the tools effectively in his plays for a realistic approach. His writings were simple and the themes had greatly influenced Indian society. His works reflect the contemporary issues of the society with excellent dramatic techniques. Karnad was an outstanding dramatist India has ever produced.

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