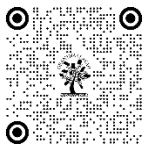# "GIRISH KARNAD'S THEATRICAL VISION: GENDER, POWER, AND IDENTITY IN MODERN INDIAN DRAMA"

Raja Sekhar Patteti [1], G. Yadagiri [2]

[1] Faculty, Acharya Nagarjuna University-GUNTUR-AP
[2] Asst. Professor of English, Govt. Degree College for Women (Autonomous), Nalgonda Dt.

ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the selected plays of Girish Karnad, one of India's most distinguished playwrights, focusing on themes such as gender, identity, power, and social justice. The research delves into Karnad's exploration of traditional and contemporary issues through the lenses of Indian mythology, history, and cultural discourse. Plays like Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, and Tale-Danda are analyzed to highlight Karnad's nuanced portrayal of gender binaries, the complexities of leadership and reform, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the struggle for individual agency in a patriarchal society. In Yayati, the play challenges gender norms, especially through the strong and independent character of Devayani, while Tughlaq offers a critique of post-colonial India's political and social realities. Hayavadana explores gender consciousness and identity, while Naga-Mandala provides a poignant commentary on women's empowerment in a traditional society. Tale-Danda weaves the symbolic tension between modernity and tradition in rural India. Through these plays, Karnad critiques both societal and political structures, offering a complex, multifaceted view of India's historical and contemporary challenges. This research underscores the enduring relevance of Karnad's work in addressing issues of gender, power, and identity within the Indian socio-political context.

Keywords: Girish Karnad, Indian Drama, Gender Binaries, Identity, Power, Social Justice, Mythology, History, Post-Colonial India, Feminist Perspectives, Cultural Critique, Contemporary Issues Etc

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian drama has a rich history and has evolved over centuries. The tradition of drama and theater in India can be traced back to ancient times, with the earliest recorded plays dating back to the 5th century BCE. The Natyashastra, a Sanskrit text on the performing arts, written by Bharata Muni around 200 BCE, lays down the principles of Indian drama and is considered a seminal work in the field. In the early centuries, Indian drama was mostly performed in temples, and its themes were based on religious stories and mythological tales. Sanskrit plays like Shakuntala by Kalidasa and Mricchakatika by Shudraka are some of the finest examples of ancient Indian drama. During the medieval period, Indian drama evolved and became more popular, with the emergence of vernacular languages like Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali. These regional languages gave rise to new forms of drama, such as the Bhavai in Gujarat and the Jatra in Bengal.

In the modern era, Indian drama has become more diverse and dynamic, with the incorporation of various styles and genres. Plays that reflect social issues and contemporary themes have become increasingly popular. The works of playwrights like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and Mahesh Dattani have been widely acclaimed for their originality and relevance. In recent times, Indian drama has also witnessed the emergence of experimental and avant-garde forms, with directors and theater groups exploring new techniques and forms of expression. Plays like Ghashiram Kotwal by

Vijay Tendulkar, and Andha Yug by Dharamvir Bharati, are examples of experimental Indian drama that have gained critical acclaim.

Overall, the development of Indian drama has been a long and varied journey, with different forms and styles evolving over time. The researcher dealt upon how Indian drama continued to flourish and remained as an important medium for artistic expression and social commentary in India today. Girish Karnad was one of the most prominent and celebrated figures in Indian drama. He was an actor, playwright, and director, whose contribution to Indian theatre was immense. Karnad's plays were deeply rooted in Indian history and mythology, and dealt with issues such as identity, language, and cultural conflict. His works were widely performed and admired not only in India, but also internationally. His contribution to Indian drama can be seen in the numerous awards and accolades he received throughout his career, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Jnanpith Award, which is considered the highest literary honour in India. Girish Karnad (1938-2019) was a renowned Indian playwright, actor, and director, who made significant contributions to the Indian theatre scene. He was a multifaceted artist who also excelled in the fields of literature, cinema, and television.

The play Yayati explored how various themes, including the concept of gender binaries, although the cultural and historical context of the play is different from contemporary times. In Yayati, gender binaries are depicted in traditional Hindu beliefs, where men are expected to be the breadwinners and protectors of the family, while women are expected to be obedient wives and caretakers of the household. This is reflected in the characters of Yayati's sons, who are portrayed as dutiful and obedient, while their wives are portrayed as submissive and loyal to their husbands. However, the play also challenges these traditional gender roles through the character of Devayani, who is depicted as a strong and independent woman. Devayani is the daughter of Shukracharya, a powerful sage, and she is shown as intelligent, courageous, and skilled in martial arts. She defies traditional gender expectations by pursuing a romantic relationship with Kacha, a male student of her father, and later by marrying Yayati, a king who is much older than her. In conclusion, Yayati reflects the traditional gender binaries prevalent in ancient Indian society but also challenges them by presenting strong and independent female characters and exploring the concept of gender fluidity.

The researcher further explained from the play Tughlaq and explored the life of the 14th century Indian ruler, Muhammad bin Tughlaq. The play used the historical figure of Tughlaq to critique the post-colonial condition of India. Through the play, Karnad examines the themes of power, corruption, and the struggle for liberation. He uses the character of Tughlaq to represent the colonial rulers who controlled India for centuries, and the play is a commentary on the state of the nation after independence. Karnad portrayed Tughlaq as a complex figure, one who is both idealistic and flawed. Tughlaq's attempts to reform the society around him are often misguided, and his actions ultimately lead to chaos and destruction. The play highlights the challenges that leaders face in trying to effect change in a society that is resistant to it. In addition to exploring the post-colonial condition, Karnad also highlights the tensions between religion and politics in India. Tughlaq's desire to create a new, inclusive society is undermined by the deep-seated religious divisions that exist in the country. The play is a powerful reminder of the challenges that India faces in its ongoing struggle for unity and progress.

Overall, the researcher viewed Tughlaq is a powerful representation of the post-colonial condition in India. Karnad used the character of Tughlaq to explore the complexities of power and the challenges of reform in a society that is still grappling with its colonial legacy. Through his portrayal of Tughlaq, Karnad offered a powerful commentary on the ongoing struggles of post-colonial nations around the world. Hayavadana is a play written by the Indian playwright Girish Karnad, which explores various themes such as identity, love, and the complexities of human relationships. One of the significant themes that the researcher paid attention was how the play addressed gender consciousness. In the play, the character Padmini is torn between her love for two men, Devadatta and Kapila. Devadatta is a brilliant intellectual, but he lacks physical attributes, while Kapila is a well-built warrior, but he lacks intellect. Padmini is unable to choose between the two men because she desires both intellectual and physical perfection in her partner. The play highlights the societal norms that dictate the importance of physical attributes in men and intellectual abilities in women. The play also addresses gender roles and expectations within the society. One of the most striking examples of gender consciousness in the play is the character of Hayavadana, who is a horse's head on a human body. Hayavadana struggles with his identity as a creature that is neither fully human nor fully animal. He represents the societal expectations placed upon individuals to conform to a particular gender identity.

Through Hayavadana's character, the play highlights the need to break free from societal norms and expectations of gender roles. Karnad challenges the traditional gender roles and expectations placed upon individuals and highlights the

importance of individual freedom to define one's gender identity. In conclusion, Hayavadana addresses the theme of gender consciousness through its portrayal of societal expectations and the struggle to break free from them was beautifully showcased by the researcher. The play encourages individuals to question and challenge traditional gender roles and expectations and advocates for individual freedom to define one's gender identity.

Naga-Mandala is a play by playwright Girish Karnad, which deals with several themes, including gender, power, and identity. The play revolves around Rani, a woman from a small village in southern India, and her struggles to find her own voice and assert her independence in a patriarchal society. In the play, women are depicted as being trapped in traditional gender roles, with limited agency and autonomy. Rani, for instance, is married off to a much older man, Appanna, who is impotent and neglectful. She feels trapped in her marriage and longs for love and affection. She seeks solace in a local legend about a shape-shifting serpent who can transform into a handsome prince and make women fall in love with him. When Rani discovers a snake in her house, she takes it in and cares for it, believing that it is the serpent from the legend. The snake eventually transforms into a man, who she names Vasanthaka, and they fall in love. However, Vasanthaka is not what he seems, and Rani must confront the consequences of her actions. Through the character of Rani, the play explores the plight of women in traditional Indian society, who are often expected to be subservient to men and denied agency over their own lives. Rani's desire for love and freedom is a universal human aspiration, but her choices are limited by the social and cultural expectations placed upon her as a woman. Overall, Naga-Mandala highlights the struggles and challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, and raises important questions about the nature of power, identity, and gender roles.

Tale-Danda is a play dealt with issues of power, politics, and social justice, and it is set in the context of a rural Indian village. The term 'syntagmatic significance' refers to the meaning that arises from the combination of words or symbols in a particular sequence or order. In the context of Tale-Danda, the researcher viewed that the term can be applied to the various elements of the play, such as its plot, characters, themes, and symbolism. One way in which the play has syntagmatic significance is through its use of symbolism. For example, the title of the play itself is symbolic, with Tale referring to the telegraph system that is introduced in the village, and Danda meaning 'stick' or 'rod.' The use of these two symbols together highlights the tension between tradition and modernity that is central to the play's themes.

Another way in which the play has syntagmatic significance is through its use of language. Karnad uses a mix of English and Indian languages (Kannada and Hindi) in the play, which reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of India. This linguistic diversity is important to the play's themes of power and politics, as language is often used as a tool of oppression and control. The plot of Tale-Danda also has syntagmatic significance, as it revolves around the struggle for power between various characters in the village. The introduction of the telegraph system serves as a catalyst for this struggle, as it allows for new forms of communication and information exchange. The plot's various twists and turns reflect the complex and unpredictable nature of power dynamics.In summary, Tale-Danda has syntagmatic significance in the way that its various elements - symbolism, language, and plot - combine to create a complex and nuanced portrayal of power, politics, and social justice in rural India.

For four decades, Karnad has continued to write top-notch plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary themes. He restored the mythical and historical dimension to Indian Literary consciousness. The study of Karnad's theatre counters all those narrow perspectives which conceive our literature of the post-Independence period as nationalist allegories or that saying categories of post-colonial or the third world to it. Images of Hayavadana, Padmini, Devadutta, Kapila, Yavakri, Paravasu, Arvasu, Nittilai, Yayati, and Puru and so on evoke in the philosophical and metaphorical terms several aspects of the ethos of India through many centuries leaving an indelible impact on the readers.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Karnad, G. (1990). Three Plays: Yayati, Tughlaq, and Hayavadana. Oxford University Press. 1990.

Karnad, G. (2005). The Best of Karnad: Plays and Films. Oxford University Press.

Sudarshan, M. (2002). Girish Karnad: A Study of His Plays. Prestige Books.

Rajadhyaksha, A., & Willemen, P. (1999). Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema. British Film Institute.

Awasthi, K. (2016). Girish Karnad's Theatre: Tradition, Modernity, and Beyond. Rawat Publications.

Parameswaran, M. (2004). Theatre and Performance in Contemporary India: Indian Theatre in the Post-Colonial Era. Routledge.

Radhakrishnan, S. (1994). The Concept of Man in Indian Philosophy. Princeton University Press. 2004.

Bharucha, R. (1993). Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture. Routledge.

Chaudhuri, A. (2001). Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

"Gender and Identity in the Plays of Girish Karnad" in Theatre Journal (2009).

"Reform and Power in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq" in Indian Literature (2005).

"A Critical Reading of Karnad's Naga-Mandala and the Empowerment of Women" in Women's Studies Quarterly (2013).