

RESEARCH ARTICLE

POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *A HEAP OF BROKEN IMAGES*MONIKAYADAV¹, Dr GUNJUN AGGARWAL²¹Research scholar, M.M.University, Mullana (Ambala)²Head & Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and social sciences
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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad is one of the twentieth century writers who reshaped Indian theatre as a national institution. He represents India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. He re-energized the Indian English drama by turning back to old roots and showed how myth, folk and history can serve as a powerful medium to dramatize contemporary situations. Through his play *Broken Images*, Karnad tries to point out the literary scene in India today. He says that writers in English are rewarded with acclaim, recognition and money while regional writers have to fight hard for all these. It takes up the debate of the politics of language in Indian literary culture, specifically in relation to the respective claims of modern Indian language and English. The title of the monologue is taken from T.S. Eliot's *Waste land* which also raises question of stable identity. One-Act Monologue, *Broken Images* is a story about Manjula Nayak, who has chosen English language as a way of expression than any other native language. This claim relatively brings many problems as she is accused of infidelity to Indian sensibility which she tries to defend in her interview with her own electronic image. She also indulges into plagiarism and secretly gets published a novel out of Malini's fragments. Karnad raises the radical unequal status of fiction written in two contemporary languages, Kannada and English. Karnad elevates the issue of class system in Indian literary society. The play deals with problems of authenticity and bad faith created by globalization.

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Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is only one and a

half centuries old. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English.

Raja Rao Indian philosopher and writer authored *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* which is Indian in terms of its storytelling qualities. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* where he relates his life experiences and influences. R.K. Narayan is a writer who contributed over many decades. Mulk Raj Anand, was similarly gaining recognition for his writing set in rural India. At the same time, some serious literature has been produced in English by the Indians in recent years. This literature is both an Indian literature and a variation of English literature. This body of writing has been designated as Indo-Anglian literature, which is used to denote the original literary creation in the English language by Indians. In the early eighties the new breed of writers such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitabh Ghosh and Anita Desai started popping upon the international literary map. One of the key issues raised in this context is the superiority/inferiority of Indian Writing in English as opposed to the literary production in the various languages of India. Key polar concepts bandied in this context are superficial/authentic, imitative/creative, critical/uncritical, shallow/deep, and so on. Dharwadker Stated "During the 1950s, the difference between the indigenous tongues and English was routinely cast as a choice between integrity and corruption, wholeness and fragmentation, rootedness and rootlessness, decolonization and recolonization" (xxviii).

Having attained independence from the British in 1947, Indian leaders chose Hindi as the official language of India in the hope that it would facilitate regional communication and encourage national unity. But Hindi and English today still share their status as official languages. English writing became more popular with the rise of Nationalism in the later period of the nineteenth century into the early period of the twentieth century. English Language became a sharp and strong instrument with which to express feelings. Tagore introduced his Bengali poems to English readers in translation while Naidu's romanticism charmed English readers through her poems. Mahatma Gandhi's *An Experiment with Truth* and Jawahar Lal Nehru's *Glimpses of Indian History* and *The Discovery of India* were all established as jewels of Indian English

Writings. These writings were not meant for the British readers at all. Rather, they were written for the Indian readers who felt comfortable with English because the English language had taken a position to communicating different native languages and it was no more with any colonial characteristics. English thus became an Indian language and a fluent and easy medium in which to express one's ideas to a greater mass.

Indian authors who write in English since they have access to larger audiences, greater visibility within India as well as outside it, and the availability of publication outlets that are not confined to India. Within the context of language debate in Indian literary circles the identity of an author is often connected with the medium which he/she uses in representing the Indian reality. This is very much common in the case of English used by non-English speakers. Girish Karnad's *Broken Images*, published in 2010, takes up the debate on the politics of language in Indian literary culture. Karnad takes up issues such as the language debate between Kannada and English. He talks about the anxiety of local language writers over writers writing in English who stand privileged in terms of huge advances and literary limelight they bask in.

Girish Raghunath Karnad, is one of the twentieth century writers who reshaped Indian theatre as a national institution. He has enriched this genre with his talent of an actor, director, producer, poet, playwright, critic and translator. He represents India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. He is a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India. Belonging to the postcolonial group of writers, his plays are rich in Indian sensibility and tradition. He re-energized the Indian English drama by turning back to old roots and showed how myth, folk and history can serve as a powerful medium to dramatize contemporary situations.

His Play *Broken Images* is a psychological thriller that rips the mask off a celebrity. Manjula Nayak is a successful author of short and long fiction in Kannada and long fiction in Kannada and lecture of English at a Bangalore College. She suddenly becomes wealthy and internationally famous by writing a best-seller in English. But the question

haunting Manjula is, whether in opting for the global audience, has she betrayed her own language and identity? Now, without warning, it's her own "image" that decides to play confessor, psychologist and inquisitor. Confrontation between Manjula and her own electronic image soon reveals that she is an imposter who has passed off her dead sister Malini's novel as her own. In the Introduction of *Collected Plays* vol 2, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker "The switch to English, hailed as an inspired act of self-fashioning on the author's part, turns out in reality to be an act of dishonesty, desperation, and cowardice, the implication being that the material lure of English as a medium can only lead the Indian-language author to prostitute herself" (Karnad xxvii). Significantly, the novel – titled *The River Has No Memories*, is a superbly accomplished autobiographical fiction about a lifelong invalid who 'breathed, laughed, dreamt in English' (274). What the play impugns is the opportunism of the Kannada author who tries to cash in on a dead sibling's talent.

Conversely, Indian-English writers such as Nissim Ezekiel, Keki Daruwalla, Arvind Krishana Mehrotra, and P. Lal, claimed that "English was not a deliberately chosen or elitist medium, but simply a natural expression of their private and social experience" (Karnad xxviii). But the Kannada writer U. R. Ananthamurthy is supposed to have burst out against English writers claiming that "English writers were like prostitutes since they wrote with an eye for the money and global reach the language offers" (Rukhaya 7). In *Broken Images*, Manjula also presents the same arguments in her defence when she was asked by the announcer :

After having written in Kannada all your life, why did you choose suddenly- to write in English? Do you see yourself as a Kannada writer or an English writer? What audience do you write for? And variations on that theme. . . . writers who were gurus to me, friends who I thought would pat me on my back and share my delight- they are all suddenly breathing fire. How dare I write in English and betray Kannada! . . . I wrote the novel in English because it burst out in English. (Karnad 263)

But all her justifications are discredited when she is exposed as a plagiarist. She responds to the charge that "I write in English for money would be:

Why not? Isn't that a good enough reason? . . . a meaningful response is better'. Meaningful: Arthapoorna. The Kannada word for Meaning is Artha- which also means! And of course, fame, publicity, glamour . . . power" (265). Here Karnad raises the issue that if one earns one's bread honestly, what is unethical if money comes from creativity? The writer is alleged to have betrayed her tongue as though she has committed a crime because who pen their works in English are termed "prostitutes". In the play, protagonist is trading her creativity for money. Here writer seems to point out that those who write in their mother tongue also do accept royalties and trade their creativity.

If a writer wants to showcase his culture to the world through a widely spoken language, what is illegitimate in it? Manjula argues that "A writer needs audiences where she or he can find them! My British publishers said to me: 'we like your book because it's so Indian'" (Karnad 264). In her interview, Manjula again indicates "A pundit has stated that no Indian writer can express herself—or himself—honestly in English. 'For Indian writers, English is a medium of dishonest' . . . how many Kannada writers are honest in what they write-in Kannada" (264). Here Karnad explains that writer's honesty has no relation with the language. He discarded the claim that no writer can express himself or herself honestly in English.

Karnad also highlights the issue of a class system in contemporary Indian literature involves not only language but genre as well. He relates language to the genre on which the entire debate is dramatized in the monologue and presents the radically unequal status of fiction written in two contemporary languages, Kannada and English within the Indian literary world. Karnad could have chosen to portray a fellow playwright in *Broken Images*, he is well aware that a play in English cannot compete with a novel in English, because of the qualitative differences between novels and plays. Indian plays in English occupy a distinctly subservient position, not only in relation to print genre such as fiction and criticism in English but also in relation to plays in Indian languages such as Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali. Dharwadker stated that "The exclusion of Karnad own lifelong from the discussion is both an acknowledgment of the power

of fiction in English and an imaginative leap into the world of other writers" (Karnad xxx).

Several critics and viewers have said these are issues that have troubled Karnad in his own career as a writer. This is what he said in an interview on the "politics of writing": "It's not just me; it's the whole genre of Indian writers in English who are attacked. It's the money and recognition that English brings which is a point of envy" (Bhatia 13). It is intriguing to consider the character Manjula as a displaced version of Karnad himself. Karnad occupies a special position in the language debate by virtue of writing originally in Kannada as well in English. From the beginning of his career, he has commanded national visibility not in the genre of fiction but in drama also. Karnad's own authorial career seems to counteract the premise in *Broken Images* that English is the necessary bridge to literary and material success for Indian authors.

Karnad was inspired to write the play while listening to Shashi Deshpande talk about how Indian writers in English who are published in India get a step-motherly treatment compared to those published on foreign shores. Karnad, pointing to the literary scene in India today says that writers in English are rewarded with acclaim, recognition and money while regional writers have to fight hard for all these. Through his Play *Broken Images*, he claimed that those who write in their mother tongue also do accept royalties and trade their creativity and he discarded the claim that no writer can express himself or herself honestly in English. This paper does not aim to prove the superiority or inferiority of either English writings or regional writings. Rather, it aims to assimilate English writing into the mainstream of Indian writing with a status of Indian identity. 'Indian-ness' should be a theme constructed only for detecting Indian writings.

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