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TREATMENT OF MYTH IN GRISH KARNAD'S: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Grish Karnad has been creating a rich and vibrant drama in tradition and yet suited to modern stage. He is highly influenced by the folk art forms of India. The growth of Indian theatre has a queer history. Modern Indian theatre emerged under British influence in three cities that were founded by the British and had no previous Indian history.

The major language theatres active during the sixties, seventies and eighties the rejuvenated and consolidated are those of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Kannada. A study of Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Grish Karnad clearly shows that they are the symbols of new resurgence in their own areas and have made bold innovations, fruitful experiments and given new directions which go in the history of Indian drama as a significant mark of achievement.

Key Words : Vibrant Drama, New resurgence, fruitful experiments, Indian Theatre

Introduction

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. Karnad's childhood was spent in a small village in Karnataka where he had first-hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. His encounter with the Natak compaines at the early stage of his made a lasting impression on the mind of Girish karnad.

During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between western and native tradition. It was India of the fifties and the sixties that surfaced two streams of thought all walks of life – adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial role and adherence to the rich cultural past of country. Karnad's position was akin to that of

John Dryden, the seventeenth century British dramatist who while writing his plays. had to choose between the classical tradition and native tradition.

About Girish Karnad

Girish Karnad was born on 19th May, 1938 in Matheran, a town near Mumbai. His childhood was spent growing up in a small village in Karnataka. There he had the first hand experience of watching plays which made a lasting impression on him. Karnad was educated at the Karnataka University, Dharwar. When Karnad was about 25 years of age, he received the Rhodes Scholarship for his higher studies at Oxford. United Kingdom. He had a brilliant academic record at school and at the university. Later, he concentrated on Writing and film –making. Though Karnad is a multi-facted personality, it is essentially as a playwright that he is at his best. He confesses it. He has been fairly lucky in having a multi -

pronged career. He has also been an actor, a publisher and a film - maker. But in none of these fields has he felt quite as much at home as in playwriting.

Karnad has won all India recognition for his plays and received a number of awards and honours. Karnad has held the position as Chairman, Sangeet Natak Academy, National Academy of Performing Arts, New Delhi (1988-93) He is at Present the Chairman of Nehru Centre, London.

During his formative years Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a socio – political scenario where there was a direct clash between Western and native tradition. It was India of the 50's and 60's that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life. adoption of new modernist techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the century . Karnad's position was akin to that of John Dryden, the 17th century dramatist who, while writing his plays, had to choose between the classical tradition and the native tradition.

Treatment of Myth in Girish Karnad's : A critical Study

Myth has been a very important phenomenon in the world literature. Originated from Greek mythos, myth has passed through various stages of explanation and interpretation. To Bronislaw Malinowski myth is “ a narrative resurrection of primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral carvings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements” (78-79) According to Lillion Feder,

Myth is a story involving human limitation and super human stirrings and accomplishment which suggests through action, man's attempt to express and thus control his own anxiety about those features of his physiological and psychological make-up and his external environment which he can not comprehend, accept, or master. (Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry-11)

Like the opinion of other critics and scholars Northrop Frye's definition also associates myth with story, gods or other beings larger in power and prior to ordinary times. Most of the scholars today would agree that in ancient

societies there was considered an essential relationship between myth and ritual practice. Myth clarified the prescribed action of rites, in turn, enacted mythical narrative in stylized dramatic form.

Categories of Myths

Myth could be considered under two categories : true myth, which is known as sacred narrative and defined by its function only, and literary myth, which includes the stories of the ancient Greek and Roman gods and heroes.

Broadly speaking there are four types of myths: Culture myths, Ritual myths, Nature myths and Creation myths. Culture myths deal with the culture hero's bringing to man the arts, foods , drives, inventions and usages beneficial to him. Sometimes like Greek Prometheus who stole fire from Heaven, the hero did this by stealth, theft or mockery and was punished by the Gods for his unauthorized behaviour. Ritual myths are ceremonies, closely associated with primitive forms of religion, in which man sought to win the favour or appease the anger of God. Nature myths, try to explain the origin of natural phenomena. Creation myths, deal with the creation of world, the origin of men and animals and the birth of Gods. Besides these myths there are other myths like philosophical myth, political myth and social of birth, death and re-birth are put into the category of philosophical myth. Political myths try to interpret the rights, duties and responsibilities of the king and subjects. Social myths highlight the merits and demerits of social customs, traditions and restrictions.

A vigorous vitality that combs the past for apt myths, legends and folklores to analyse the present has been the hallmark of Girish Karnad, the pre-eminent Indian playwright in Kannada and English languages. Girish Karnad is regarded as one of the three great writers of contemporary Indian drama, the other two being Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar. While Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar deal with the problems of the middle class, Karnad takes refuge in Indian myths, legends, folklores, and makes them a vehicle of new vision.

Before analyzing how Girish Karnad in his plays reinterprets and myths to convey the contemporary reality, it is important to look at the formative influences that groomed the dramatist in him.

As Karnad is a multi – faceted personality, he has stamped his mark in the field of films too. He has acted in several Hindi, Kannada and Tamil feature films, television films and serials like *Malgudi Days*, He has also anchored the television programme, *Turning point*.

Karnad's advantages were many. His expert knowledge of contemporary European theatre, his exposure to the Western dramatic literature and more importantly his dramatic sensibility, all these certainly sharpened his thorough knowledge of the stage. He has shown to the Indian theatre community and to the world theatre community how our past and present can cohere to give to our present day existence meaning and to theatre activity, a direction. Karnad has achieved a thorough synthesis of all the three traditions – classical, folk and contemporary Western, which when used discriminatingly in intelligently lead to the discovery of new form and as a result a new style of production leading to a rich Indianness in his plays.

Karnad as a playwright is preoccupied with the retelling of Indian myths, legends folklores and history. Of his eleven plays, seven are based on myths and legends and three on history, and only one on contemporary experience.

Myths and legends embody themselves in the form of motifs and symbols, certain recurring patterns of collective human behavior and certain archetypal human experience. Myths express certain archetypal social relationships. These relationships could be of the father and son, husband and wife, or of brothers. Secondly myths have the power to affect us even without our being aware of it (qtd. in Mukherjee 57).

Myths may be false, fictitious and far removed from reality and history. Northrop Frye in his "Myth, Fiction and Displacement" says,

Myth 'is a drive towards a verbal circumference of human experience'. Myth and

Magic are closely allied : both are psychic phenomena.(165).

Conclusion

Karnad turns to tradition and history in order to seek an answer there for the failures of the present. In plays like *Yayati*, *Hayavadhana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad has skillfully reinterpreted myths, folklore and legends to give a contemporary colouring, Karnad has produced 14 plays still date. They are:

Tughlaq
Hayavadana
AnjuMalige
HittinaHunja
Naga- Mandala
Tale- Danda
The Fire and the Rain
The Dreams of Tipu Sultan
Bali : The Sacrifices
Two Monologues
Flowers
A Heap of Broken Images

Of all his plays, three plays *Tughlaq*, *The Danda* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* are based on history. The other three plays *Yayati*, *The Fire and the Rain* and *Bali : The Sacrifices* are drawn from Indian myths and two plays *Hayavadhana* and *Naga- Mandala* have folktales as their origin. Only one play *Anju Mallige* has London as its setting. Unlike his predecessors, Karnad's plays are not mere costume plays or masks, but they are invested with contemporary relevances. Karnad himself said in an interview.

I had never fancied myself a dramatist. In fact, I had tried my hand at writing poetry. When I was at Dharwar which was the cultural capital of Karnataka having produced writers like Bendre, Gokak and so on, I would very often pass by the famous Kannada publishing house *Manohara Granthmala* and wonder if my work would ever be published by them! During the weeks of preparation for my departure to England – which were as I said quite stressful for various reasons – I found myself writing a play. This was *Yayati*. Though I had trained myself to write in English, I

found myself writing the play in Kannada. (qtd. in Mukerjee 30)

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