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**Mythology and Folklore in Contemporary Indian English Drama with Special
Reference to the Plays of Girish Karnad**



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ABSTRACT

Myths and folktales have always been a part of human civilization. Many contemporary Indian English playwrights have incorporated this technique into their works, introducing us to this genre. Girish Karnad, for example, was a playwright who used myths and folklore in his works. Karnad finds solace in Indian myths, legends, and folklore, and transforms them into vehicles for new ideas. His creative genius lies in assembling shards of historical and legendary experience into a powerful statement. The purpose of this paper is to look at the myths and folktales that he used in his plays, as well as the influences that shaped him into such a brilliant dramatist.

Key Words: Myths, Folklore, Plays, Drama, Legend, Civilization

Introduction

Girish Karnad is one of the greatest Indian English playwrights of the contemporary period. The subject of his plays reflects the problems and challenges of contemporary life, and attempts to forge a link between the past and the present, based on his serious explorations of folklore, mythology, and history. As a creative intellectual, Karnad clearly sees the subjects of his plays through his own eyes, develops them in the crucible of his own imagination and personal experience, and uses them as a vehicle to express his own unique feelings, thoughts, and interpretations. His plays are widely read and enjoyed, despite his controversial themes, because of his wonderful dramatic techniques, vivid image and symbolism, and outstanding ability to portray some of life's harshest and bitterest realities with forthright simplicity.

Use of Mythology and Folklores

Despite his diverse interests, Karnad has endowed the Kannada Stage with a depth that can only be attributed to his acting and directing abilities. He has demonstrated on the Indian stage how mythical themes



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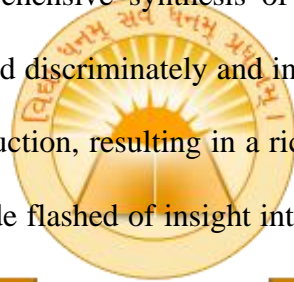
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and folklore can be explored in depth in order to re-create a contemporary consciousness. However, the most difficult problem was figuring out how to incorporate these traditional forms into his work in an urban setting. Bertolt Brecht, a well-known playwright, stepped in to help him at this point. Karnad was profoundly influenced by Brechtian thought, which made him acutely aware of the Indian theatre's inherent inventiveness and power.

Karnad's in-depth understanding of contemporary European theatre, his exposure to Western dramatic literature, and, most importantly, his dramatic sensibility, all contributed to his thorough understanding of the stage. He has demonstrated to the Indian and international theatre communities how our past and present can come together to give our current existence meaning and give theatre activity a direction. Karnad has achieved a comprehensive synthesis of all three traditions – classical, folk, and contemporary Western – which, when used discriminately and intelligently, result in the discovery of a new form and, as a result, a new style of production, resulting in a rich Indianness in his plays. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. As it is stated in VII volume of Encyclopaedia Britannica:



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Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function, it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality, it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization, it is not an idle tale but a hard-worked active force, it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom (58).

Yayati, the first play by Karnad, was written in 1961 and won the 1962 Mysore State Award. It is based on an episode in the Mahabharata, where his father-in-law, Sukracharya, who is incensed by Yayati's



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infidelity, gives Yayati, one of the Pandavas' ancestors, the curse of premature old age. Only if somebody was willing to exchange his youth with him could Yayati redeem this curse. It is his son, Puru, who offers to do this for his father in the end. The play examines the moment of crisis that the decision of Puru sparks, and the dilemma it presents for Yayati, the young wife of Puru and Puru.

Yayati is the common man's typical representative, who is always discontented despite his varied happiness and is always madly running in search of new pleasure and enjoyment. For eternal happiness, he mistakes momentary animal pleasure. The ancient theme is interpreted by Karnad in a modern context. Like Yayati of the Mahabharata, in the darkness of material and sensual pleasures, the common man of today is groping. In a world in which the old spiritual values have been completely swept away and new spiritual values are yet to be discovered, he finds himself. The blind pursuit of enjoyment has become the supreme religion in life and the ultimate goal.

Karnad won the Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972 for his third play Hayavadana. His plot is based on the story of Katha Saritsagar, used by Thomas Mann for his short novel The Transposed Heads. In a world of tangled relationships, it is a play on the search for identity. Devadatta, the intellectual, and Kapila, the man of the body, are friends who are very close. Devadatta marries Padmini, the prettiest girl in Dharampura village. In love with each other, Kapila and Padmini fall in love. Both friends are killing themselves. Padmini transposes their heads in a highly comical scene of great dramatic significance, giving Devadatta Kapila's body and Kapila Devadatta's.

It results in identity confusion, revealing the ambiguous nature of human personality. The situation is becoming complicated. They're fleeing a duel and killing themselves again. Sati performs Padmini. There is a great comic and ironical meaning to the subplot of the play. The horseman's (Hayavadana's) search for completeness at the same time ends pathetically comically. He becomes a complete horse but still remains with him with the human voice! As part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre,



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Weimar, the play was directed in German by Vijaya Mehta.

The Naga-Mandala of Girish Karnad is based on two Kannada folk tales which he heard from K. Ramanujan several years ago. Naga-Mandala was written by Karnad when he was a visiting professor at the University of Chicago. With the help of colleagues and students, it was staged at the university; then Sanket staged it in India. First, Naga-Mandala was published in Kannada and then translated by Karnad himself into English. Naga Mandala, he says, is based on two oral tales from Karnataka which he first heard from Prof. A. K. Ramanujan several years ago. Naga-Mandala was written by Karnad when he was a visiting professor at the University of Chicago. With the help of colleagues and students, it was staged at the university; then Sanket staged it in India.

The play has a prologue and two acts, and the cobra plays an important role in this play, or we can say that the hero plays the role of King Cobra. The play's action has three distinct stories. Yet to produce wonderful dramatic unity, they are brilliantly linked. Karnad informs the audience about the stories of the man before the exposition of the play. In the inner sanctum of a ruined temple, the play opens, where the idol is broken, the moonbeams fall on the man, he yawns and tries to stay awake, and tells the stories of his curse and that in the morning he was going to die. He was a playwright, causing sleepless nights for many people, so if he sleeps, that's the end of his life. He ran away from home, went to the temple and wanted to stay awake in order to escape the curse. Then many flames enter and narrate their own experience in many homes, the flames are presented as living beings and later on the stories comes as a woman. She tells them the story of the unhappy Rani, and how she is mistreated by her husband.

Rani's story is full of miracles, according to the story; the sad heroine is helped by the old blind woman who gave her charms so that her husband would love her. Rani prepared food; but she became full of fear when she put the charm in the food, so she threw the prepared food outside near an anthill.



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King Cobra had consumed it so the Naga came to her like her husband. She was happy, but surprised at the strange behaviour of her husband (the Naga). Then she became pregnant, and the elders of the village organized the trial; but she was saved with the help of the Naga, and then worshipped as a goddess by the crowd. She became a mother to a baby. Everything must be accepted by her husband, and then Naga came and eventually became her long black tress and lived on her head. Thus, with the help of Rani's story, telling the story as a woman pleased the flames and helped the man stay awake. He is saved and, in the end, everybody is happy.

Conclusion

Many modern writers have used myths and legends to express their feelings and perspectives on life. In some ways, this practice resembles myth, and it is a recurring pattern. Myths were used as source material for drama in ancient India and Greece. The universality of the experience embodied in stories is highlighted by re-telling or re-enactment of old myths in modern terms.

Karnad's habit of drawing raw materials for plays from myths and folktales gives his works an immediate appeal. Because the audience is familiar with the source material, it is important to note that their curiosity is to see how the dramatist handles it. With such an open mind about the play they were about to see, they were more likely to notice the artist's departures from the original story. Karnad fully exploits this advantage in his plays, involving the audience in moral or intellectual reflections.



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