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Exploring the Thematic Concerns in the plays of Girish Karnad**Kunwar Sahab Singh**

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Abstract

Girish Karnad, a well-known figure, is one of the popular writers in Indian English Literature. He is known for his dramas and movies as well as acting. His style of writing drama is different from those of other Indian playwrights. He weaves Indian myth and fiction together with his thoughtful fancy in his dramas and writings. He was born on 19th May, 1938, and left the world on 10th June 2019. He was a writer whose major writing is in the Kannada language. He worked mainly in South Indian drama, cinema and Bollywood. In 1960s, he upsurges as a dramatist and acknowledged a high and vigorous rank in the modern era as the best Indian Kannada writer. He was honoured with the Jnanpeth Award of 1998. It is the highest literary honor conferred in India. He was an active personality in the field of cinema and performed his duties as an actor, director, and screen writer. He was awarded with Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and many such awards and accolades.

Keywords: Myth, Indianness, Historical fragments, Dramatic Techniques

The plays of Girish Karnad are based on the themes of myth, history along with several social issues. His famous plays are *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagmandala*, *Wedding Album*, *Tughlaq* and many others. His plays are based on historical themes, Indian myths and the problems prevalent in the contemporary world. Various historical events, incidents and situations have been explored as themes in his dramas. Karnad talks about the existence and freedom of women. Women are always the part of suffering in the male dominating society. His writing techniques of drama are as discussed below.

Tughlaq and *Tale-Danda* are two best examples of historical backgrounding of his plays. Diwan Sing Bajeli carves about the themes and concepts of Karnad's dramatic art and style in the following words "As a playwright, Girish Karnad has left an indelible impact on the history of contemporary Indian dramaturgy. He was rooted in the cultural tradition of his soil with a deep understanding of Western dramatic aesthetics and craft. His two plays—*Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*— have helped redefine the form and structure of drama. The drama *Tughlaq* has

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thirteen scene drama. This drama is basically focuses on the historical incident of 14th Century, Turko-Indian ruler. It is not only historical play but also a political play. It reflects the contemporary politics of 1960s.” (The Hindu, 13, June 2019)

The play *Tale-Danda* is one of Karnad’s popular plays which was written in 1990. He selected the theme of mandir-mandal conflict in this play. The play displays the conflicts between the socio-religious political as well as economic conditions which existed in the 12th century. During Bhakti Movement there were several gruesome practices prevalent those days. Several other aspects of Indian history can be traced in this play. There were also the problems of imagined casteless society which was also one of the causes of the conflicts. The play is based on historical and conventional system and on the life of Basavanna. The play is also remarkable for the theme of political power and other political activities. The play revolves round the demonstration of the politics of power. It has been presented as the constant and human relationship. The play also discloses the conditions of women in a patriarchal society. In India, caste has always been a part of Political structure. *Tale-Danda* explores the problems of caste system in India.

Tughlaq is one of his remarkable plays. It has historical and political themes which are all pervasive motifs. It presents the plight and miserable conditions women, for example Tughlaq’s mother loves him too much and cares him. She is his step mother but in patriarchy, the political power lies in the hands of men. Although women experience sadness and suffering, they do not have the right to speak out against males or take action unless they are not driven by men. We discovered this by using the Sultan and his stepmother as an example. On the one hand, the Sultan’s stepmother is too concerned about the Sultan, and on the other hand, she discovered the criminal mind behind the assassination of the Sultan’s advisor. Sultan punishes her for this offence by having her killed by stones. She killed the Sultan’s advisor primarily out of hunger for power and control over the Sultan, not out of love or concern for the Sultan.

As it is already noted, a male-dominated society forbids women from speaking up in the home, and the same political power is employed in the community, the church, and other institutions. The Sultan blended politics and religion in Tughlaq, continuing the trend. Every Muslim must now pay the Namaz five times per day as per his decree. He thought that Hindus and Muslims should be treated equally. Even yet, he had put an end to Muslim incrimination of Hindus in the form of the previous Jaziya tax.

In the drama *Hayavadana* by Karnad, a couple from the Brahmin group, Devadatta and Padmini, and Kapila, a blacksmith’s son, are two examples of caste and caste discrimination in society. He assists Devadatta and Padmini as a member of the underclass or community. Despite being Devadatta’s friend, he acknowledges that he is inferior to him and starts doing everything that they have instructed him to do.

Girish Karnad’s work focuses on the subject of political power in India, which is connected to discrimination based on class and caste. As a result, his writing reflects this. Devyani and Sharmishta are friends in *Yayati*, but Sharmishta is treated differently because she

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is a member of the Rakshasa Community. Not only the society but also the father of Sharmishta told her to be a slave of Devyani.

The class and caste disparities are at the heart of the play *Tale-Danda*. When the “Mandal Commission” released its report, students became quite agitated. Additionally, Karnad created *Tale-Danda* on this background since the secularism in India was under jeopardy following the Babari Mosque controversy. The main character of *Tale-Danda*, Basavanna, attempts to found a movement and a new sect called Lingayatism in which he expects members of all the groups to embrace and participate. As a result of the movement's success, a Brahmin girl and a cobbler boy are married. But because of this union, orthodox and conformist individuals like Sovideva, the son of King Bijjala, Manchanna Kramita, and Damodara Bhatt reject the movement. Sovideva gives orders to overwhelm the movement of Sharanas.

Karnad also emphasizes the caste structure in the drama *The Fire and the Rain*. Arvasu enjoys acting out dramatic situations. But his brother Parvasu forbids him. It is believed that only members of lower caste communities should take part in dramatic events. The actor-manager asks Parvasu to permit Arvasu to perform the play in the prologue of *The Fire and the Rain* because he is short on actors. He informs Parvasu that the first actors in theatre history were the sons of the Bharata. They were Brahmins who, as a result of their occupation, lost their caste.

The play's main character, Arvasu, has a romantic relationship with the hunter girl Nittilai, but they never get married. Nittilai is compelled to wed a member of her neighborhood. Nittilai's brother and husband murder her when she flees with Arvasu. Rain-related yagnas are organised, but only Brahmins are permitted entry.

Sometimes the oppressed people in Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar's plays tolerate the long-standing custom, but in other plays they react and reject the caste system. Devayani is thrown into a well by Sharmishta in *Yayati* as payback for her wrongdoing, and *Yayati* is later molested by Sharmishta. Both members of the cobbler and Brahmin communities of *Tale-Danda* join the campaign. A Brahmin girl is willing to live her life with a cobbler lad. Arvasu is prepared to accept a hunter girl as his wife in *The Fire and the Rain*. Nittilai leaves her husband behind and flees with Arvasu, disregarding the laws and customs of her village. Karnad chose the force of politics, political rank in society, and the caste system in social structure as his dramatic topics.

In his many dramas, Karnad featured several kinds of female characters. Even though they come from varied socio-economic backgrounds, the female characters in *Tughlaq* are often seen as the victims of power. For instance, two of them—the Mother and the Lady—are defeated mothers who must be inconsolable over their lost kids. They both go unnamed.

Through his dramatic world, Karnad has demonstrated how a mother and son can have an incestuous relationship in *Tughlaq*, a wife is permitted to have an extramarital affair in *Hayavadana* if her husband is physically frail, and an already-married woman has all the rights and permission to offer herself to her former lover if her husband spends a significant amount of time away from her. The reason why *Tughlaq*'s stepmother killed his advisor was because of

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her lust for him. Padmini develops feelings for both her husband Devdatta and his friend Kapila in *Hayavadana*. Despite being married to Devdatta, she wants to satisfy her sexual need with Kapila's powerful body. Devyani does not reprimand Sharmistha and Yayati for having an affair. However, they get married.

Rani's husband Appanna treats her horribly in *Nagmandala*. Rani was married when she was a young child in accordance with the traditional social system of India. Appanna brings her to his house after the normal maturation time. Despite the fact that they are married, Appanna does not grant her the privileges of a wife. When he leaves the house to see the concubine, she is constantly confined inside the house. He only returns home to take a bath and eat dinner. Rani is a victim of the harsh conventions and traditions of Indian society, where men treat women cruelly. On the other hand, Karnad, the son of Kurudavva, is constantly engaged taking care of his blind mother in the same play as *Nagmandala* Appanna.

The two main themes that Karnad uses in his play are history and myth. Lord Ganesh's appearance in *Hayavadana*, the Indian myth theme in *Yayati*, and the *Nagmandala* itself all allude to the Indian myth in the title. The usage of myth are the most effective instances of his drama.

The psychology of people is concerned with each person's dreams. Karnad in *Tughlaq* discusses the psyche of the Sultan together with his accomplishments to show the discrepancy between his aspirations and reality. Even he did not consider the relationship of the family, neither of brother nor of father, just to become a Sultan (as he dreams). While they were doing the Namaz, he killed his father and brother. Although his mother felt awful about it, he values political power above family ties. For his lust and political dominance, he even killed a religious figure like Sheikh Imam-ud-din. Due to his desire for political prominence and his subsequent busy schedule, he was unable to find a spouse and remained single.

Karnad chose the themes of love, sex, and the modern world for his dramas as well. Because of his mother's affection for horses, *Hayavadana* was born as a man with a horse's body and head. The horse belonged to the celestial being Gandharvaa. The sexual and romantic union of a woman and a celestial being, Gandharvaa, gave birth to the horse with a man's head, *Hayavadana*.

Another instance of love, sex, and want is depicted in *Hayavadana* by Karnad's character Padmini, who desires Devdatta, her husband's academic mind and Kapila, a friend of her husband's muscular body build up. Behind her spouse Devdatta, she has a sexual inclination for Kapila as well. She is left alone at the end of the drama because of her need for love, sex, and lust.

The concept for the drama *Yayati* was inspired from V.S. Khandekar's Marathi novel *Yayati*, which was based on Indian mythology. The primary subject of the drama *Yayati* is the eternal yearning for sex and passion, lost all humanity, and human relationships. *Yayati*, the King, has an extreme sex addiction and seeks out fresh women to satiate his hunger. At the conclusion of the play, he realised that the want for the body grows swiftly as we strive to satiate it, but that if we can manage it, we may successfully break free from the need and desire for the

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body. The only way to satisfy the body's sexual needs is to control indriyas. Thus, Karnad openly spoke about the love, lust, sex and human psychology.

Thus, Karnad's drama portrays socio-economical discrimination that exists in Indian society in the forms of gender discrimination, traditional and modern society, the use of mythology, the choice of drama's plot and characters from history, love, sex, desire, and dreams as well as how important political power is to family relationships as its main themes.

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