



The Legacy of Girish Karnad and Renaissance of Indian Arts and Literature

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Abstract

Girish Karnad, the revered Indian playwright, actor, and director, left an indelible mark on the world of arts and literature. His recent demise has sparked widespread discussions about his contributions and the cultural renaissance he spearheaded in India. Karnad was a literary genius who used his creative prowess to challenge societal norms, highlight the struggles faced by the marginalized, and revive the rich cultural heritage of India. His works continue to inspire a new generation of artists and ignite a renaissance in Indian arts and literature. This article explores the legacy of Girish Karnad, a renowned Indian playwright, actor, and director, and its influence on the Renaissance of Indian arts and literature. Karnad's contributions to Indian theatre, films, and literature have left an indelible mark on the artistic and cultural landscape of India. His innovative storytelling, incorporation of folklore, and exploration of socio-political issues have not only captivated audiences but also inspired a new generation of artists and writers. His powerful and thought-provoking plays brought Indian myths and folklore to the forefront and addressed deeply rooted socio-political issues. Karnad's artistic brilliance and his ability to blend tradition with contemporary themes have elevated Indian arts and literature to new heights. This article highlights his pioneering works, the impact he made on Indian theatre, and his enduring legacy.

Keywords: Girish Karnad, Indian Literature, Renaissance, Folklore, Socio-Political Issues.

Introduction

Girish Karnad (1938 - 2019) was a multifaceted personality whose contributions spanned the realms of Indian literature, theatre, cinema, and public service. He is a prominent playwright, actor, film director, and recipient of numerous awards. Karnad was a man of who shaped Renaissance in Indian, leaving a compelling mark in the field of arts, literature, cinema, stage drama and culture. His career is characterized by his multifaceted personality that spans across various mediums in Indian stage dramas. He effortlessly shifted between creative writing, writing plays, scripting films, and even in the sphere of acting. It shows his versatility of talent and artistic wisdom. In the world of theatre, Karnad was a vibrant force to be considered with many laurels. His plays like "Tughlaq," "Hayavadana," and "Nagamandala" and "Fire and the Rain" and other historical and mythological plays challenged the orthodox beliefs, reemployed historical narratives, and incorporated elements of traditional storytelling to expose modern issues. His great ability to interlock mythology, history and contemporary themes and problems political and social made him a pioneer in field of Indian art and theatre.

Karnad's entry into the Indian theatre marked the beginning of his illustrious career. His debut play, "Yayati" (1961), was a reimagining of the epic *Mahabharata* character King



Yayati. This play, along with subsequent historical work like "Tughlaq" (1964) and his mythological play "Hayavadana" (1971) established Karnad as a compelling playwright in Indian theatre. His plays are often blended mythology, history and the contemporary social and psychological issues that reflect the complexity of men and women of the Indian society. His writings were well known for its exploration of conflicting human relationships, corrupted societal norms and acts as an intersection between tradition and modernity. His plays challenged the conventional norms, provoking thought and dialogue on the current critical social issues in India with the mask of drama. For instance, the play "Tughlaq" explored the consequences of political idealism that draw parallels between historical and contemporary political scenarios of young India. In addition to his meritorious accomplishments as a playwright, Girish Karnad was a prolific actor. He worked in various catchy roles in Indian and international films. He gained fame for his impeccable roles in movies like "Manthan" (1976) and "Nishant" (1975) directed by Shyam Benegal. His excellent performances earned him huge accolades and made him as an established actor in cinema in the early times of Indian cinema. Karnad directed films like "Vamsha Vriksha" (1972) and "Utsav" (1984) that received grand welcome from the cine audience. His films like Kadhalan (1994) and Ratchagan (1997) in Tamil received great responses from the majestic villain acting of Karnad in South Indian Cinema. Most probably, his films reflected his commitment to storytelling and acting that address the social issues and human relationships of his times.

Karnad's contributions to cinema, Indian drama, arts and literature were recognized with numerous prestigious awards, including the Padma Shri Award (1974), the Padma Bhushan Award (1992) and the Jnanpith Award (1998) given to versatile literary men in India. His legacy never ends through his plays and other writings but reverberate through the impact he focused in shaping the cultural development of India. Karnad was not only an excellent artist but also lived a responsive citizen of India. He participated actively in social and political discourses that advocates for change in the need of time whenever it needs. His stable involvement in dramatic arts led his role to the Chairman of the famous Sangeet Natak Akademi and served as the Director of the Nehru Centre in London for many years. Many scholars have investigated Karnad and have registered their opinions on him as a stalwart who created renaissance in Indian arts and literature. Their witnesses prove true to the life and achievement of Karnad in Indian artistic and literary excellence.

Review of Literature

Natraj, Nandini in the article "Girish Karnad and the Modernist Theatre Movement in India." analyzes Karnad's significance in the modernist theatre movement in India. It elaborates his use of myths and folklore employed in his plays and highlights the impact of his works on the Indian theatre.

Sengupta, Sharmila in the article entitled "Girish Karnad: the Renaissance man of Indian literature." explores Karnad's contributions to Indian literature and his role in the renaissance of Indian art and culture. The article emphasizes his ability to incorporate socio-political issues into his narratives made his works relevant and impactful on the readers.

Sharma, Manju in the article titled "Girish Karnad: A journey through the worlds of theatre, film, and literature." gives widespread view of Karnad's artistic journey from stage plays, theatre, film and literature. The article examines the plot, themes and motifs that recur in his works and highlights his artistic impact on the Indian cultural space.

Khaund, Priyodarshi in the article "From Words to Action: The Socio-Political Theatre of Girish Karnad." examines the socio-political viewpoints of Girish Karnad's plays



and its reception from Indian society. The paper also discusses on how Karnad uses theatre as a medium to raise awareness about the prevalent social issues and his intellectual contribution to the renaissance of Indian fine arts and literature.

Dhanavanti, D., & Banerjee, A. in the article entitled “Girish Karnad: A Pioneer in Modern Indian Theater.” investigates the artistic taste of Girish Karnad and his contributions to modern Indian theatre. It also discusses his influential works, the techniques that he employed to employ Indian myths and folklore on stage. It gives a clear view on his role in creating a revolution in the Indian theatre.

Pabla, N. in the article “Girish Karnad and His Socio-Political Conscience.” studies the socio-political plot and themes present in Karnad's plays and their impact on Indian readers and audiences. It presents a lucid view over Karnad's portrayal of social issues such as the caste system, women's roles and rights and political hegemony and corruption. It displays his keen inspection of contemporary Indian society and the need to reveal to the public sphere.

Ramanathan, S. in the article titled “Traditions and Transformations: Girish Karnad's Contribution to Contemporary Indian Literature.” examines Karnad's writings far beyond theatre and his contribution to contemporary Indian literature. It also explores how Karnad combined mythological elements with modern narrative techniques by creating a idiosyncratic style that influenced the future generation of Indian writers.

Pandey, P., & Kumar, R. in the article entitled “Rediscovering Indian Identity through the Plays of Girish Karnad.” scrutinizes Karnad's plays and aid to rediscover and redefine Indian identity from his plays and characters. It also discusses on Karnad's inspiration from Indian myths and legends to discover the complexities of human identity in personal and national standpoint.

Mazumdar, P. in the article titled “Girish Karnad's Legacy in Contemporary Indian Theater.” discusses on the legacy of Girish Karnad over the developments of contemporary Indian theatre. It examines Karnad's influence on the young Indian playwrights, directors, and actors. It elaborates his legacy as a cultural mark who gave voice to the marginalized communities and challenged the unethical social customs and norms through his artistic works.

Theoretical Framework

Girish Karnad's contributions to Indian drama and literature can be estimated within the key concepts of cultural heritage, Indian nationalism, postcolonialism, and identity crisis and identity formation. In the first stance, Karnad's works reflect the cultural heritage through nationalism that emerged in the 20th century. He sought after to restore and highlight indigenous artistic traditions of ancient Indian dramatic techniques in modern forms. It can be seen in his projections on ancient Indian mythology, folklore and history in all of his plays. Secondly, Karnad's works can be a good model for postcolonial dialectics. He criticizes the legacy of colonialism and its dire impact on Indian people and culture in a strong opposition. His exploration of themes such as power dynamics, decolonization and the psychic struggle for individual and collective freedom are recurrent themes found in the writings of the modern writers all over the world. At last, Karnad's works touchstones the formation of identity of individual with connection to collective level of the people of India. His works delve deep into the questions of language, cultural heritage, and Indian identity. Indeed, his works offer a research space to explore the modern themes cultural nationalism, post colonialism, and identity crisis and formation within the framework of Indian arts, drama and literature. Descriptive study has been adopted to study Girish Karnad and his works.



Karnad's Contributions to Indian Arts and Literature

Karnad's influence on society through his works extended far beyond the old customs in vogue. He also ventured into the cinematic world. He worked as a screenwriter and director for many films like "Vamsha Vriksha" (1971), "Utsav." (1984) and "Chidambara Rahasya" (2005) etc. They are exemplary examples of Karnad's genius in films and screenwriting. Through an extraordinary mode of storytelling, he confronted the ongoing social issues like caste discrimination, gender discrimination, and political hegemony and corruption. His plays were thought provoking and created an open space for the voiceless people by bringing them to the limelight. Karnad's works are truly remarkable because of his quest to revive and commemorate the richness of Indian ancient culture hidden in the modern India. He documented the significance of preserving the indigenous art forms of India from myths, fables, folklore, ballads and tradition morals that are slowly fading away in the face of Westernization. John registers in his article on the methods Karnad employed in his works.

Karnad's taking to myth and legend in his plays was more an act of impulse rather than intention. Perhaps it was inevitable for Karnad who was exposed to traditional forms of theatre in childhood. The three kinds of theatre between which he moved, swiveled and wrote plays, were the company Natak, Yakshagana and the western theatre, and he must have been influenced by them, whatever the reason, whether it is the influence of traditional theatre upon him or it is his incapacity to invent new stories as he confesses, he had rightly chosen to use myths and legend for his plays. He feels they are very much relevant today, and hence, seeks to adapt myths and folk forms in his plays. Thus he effects a synthesis between the ancient and the modern to serve his purpose of using the past to illuminate the present. (John P Mathai)

Karnad sought to bridge the gap between the classical and the contemporary, blending ancient mythology with modern narratives. His writings were deeply rooted in Indian history, highlighting the forgotten heroes and the richness of cultural tapestry. The below observations of Mahamad point out the influence of Karnad's plays in Indian dramatic tradition.

Karnad's plays have contributed significantly to Indian English Drama in their unique style. It is possible that the injustices of the world can be brought to light via the medium of his plays. Each play belongs to a specific area of the canon. This is the style of writing that Karnad employs, in which the listener is driven to reflect on the suffering, misery, and anguish that man endures. Karnad is the only one who possesses the intestinal fortitude to recycle a piece of our history with the present world, demonstrating the continuity that exists the eras between the two. He shows via myth and history that nothing has changed but 'the time,' despite what he claims. The people who lived at that time made the same mistakes that people living in our post-modern age continue to make. We are not gaining any wisdom from our experiences and continue to repeat the same errors without even realising how silly they are. (Mahamad Raihan H. Kheera 7-8)

Karnad's contributions to Indian arts and literature did not go unnoticed. He was showered with numerous awards and accolades, including the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary honour. His plays were performed in theatres across the globe, captivating audiences with their universal themes and powerful storytelling. Today, Karnad's legacy is carried forward by a new generation of artists and writers who draw inspiration from his body of work. His ability to question societal norms, challenge the status quo, and explore complex human



emotions have become guiding principles for contemporary Indian arts and literature. The renaissance that Karnad initiated continues to flourish, with artists bringing forth diverse voices and narratives that were previously unheard. It is essential to pay tribute to the extraordinary life and work of Girish Karnad. His contributions to Indian arts and literature have not only laid the foundation for future generations but have also ignited a renaissance in the cultural landscape of India. Karnad's creative genius transcends boundaries and reminds us of the power of art to transcend time, break barriers, and create lasting legacies.

Karnad's Contributions to Indian Arts and Literature

Girish Karnad, the renowned playwright, actor, and film director, was an icon of Indian arts and literature. With his enthralling works, he not only left an indelible mark on Indian theatre but also contributed significantly to literature, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the country. Karnad's achievements and contributions have played a crucial role in shaping modern Indian art and literature. One of Karnad's notable contributions is his unique style of writing, which seamlessly blends elements of traditional Indian storytelling with contemporary themes and techniques. His plays explore the deep-rooted social and cultural issues prevalent in Indian society while providing a fresh perspective on them. In regard to the employment of myths, folklore and history in Karnad's plays, Mangaiyarkarasi points out the natural tendency of such adaptations done by Karnad in his works.

Karnad's practice of drawing raw materials for plays from myths and folktales primarily lends his plays an immediately of appeal. It is an important fact that since the audience has a pre-knowledge of the source material, their curiosity is to see how it is worked upon by the dramatist. Such an initial attitude to the play they are going to watch ensured their notice of the freshness of approach and the artist's deviations from the original story. Karnad in his plays exploits this advantage fully and involves the audience in the reflections of a moral or intellectual problem. (Mangaiyarkarasi 6-7)

Karnad's works often gyrate around myths, fables, folklore, historical events or ancient Indian mythological characters by unravelling the complexities of India's cultural past. It also shed light on the contemporary relevance of age-old tales to the modern dramatic techniques. His ability to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity made Karnad's writing suitable to the people all types. Sujatha registers,

Karnad places the individuals at the center of his picture of the world and shows that each man is what he chooses to be or marks himself. In his psychological exploration, the playwright shows an impressive insight and introduces concepts, which greatly extend the area of moral self-knowledge and self-awareness. This goes to prove that Karnad has indeed read wisely Sartre, Camus and others. Girish Karnad has given this traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today. (Sujatha 1986)

Karnad's plays captivated the audiences for moments in all of his plays and transformed the way Indian theatre was perceived in the world arena. He used his works with thought provoking ideas backup with dialogues that contain powerful inner meanings with powerful performances. His techniques offer a new narrative structure to the traditional stories of Sanskrit Literature. Karnad often challenged social norms and questioned the taboos, prejudices and oppressions through the world of theatre. His works, such as "Yayati", "Tughlaq" and "Hayavadana", "Nagamandala", "The Fire and The Rain", Bali: The Sacrifice, and "Tale Danda" are celebrated for their artistic brilliance stuffed with social themes in the mask of myths, legends and histories. Karnad's contributions to Indian literature are



numerous. He authored several essays and screenplays. His versatility as a writer depicts the ins and outs of human relationships that reflect larger social issues. His writings also explored the themes of identity crisis, power dynamics and the clash between ancient tradition and modernity. In recognition of his contributions to arts and literature, he was awarded with an array of prestigious awards for his outstanding contributions to Indian literature. He was conferred with the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Jnanpith Award and Sahitya Akademi Award. These recognitions serve as a testament to his influence on the modern Indian arts and literature. Karnad's legacy will be forever and be spoken as an artistic renaissance in the annals of Indian art and literature.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad's life and works stand as a witness to the transforming power of art and literature in Indian cultural setup. As a successful playwright, actor and filmmaker, he broke a record by challenging the stereotypic norms with his sparking dialogues and conversations over important social issues. His contributions hoist the renaissance of art and literature in Indian dramatic scenario. Karnad's legacy continues to inspire aspiring young artists, writers and intellectuals of the 21st century. His memories make him a stalwart in the pantheon of Indian artists.

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