

# Integration of Indian Culture and Myth in Girish Karnad's Plays

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## INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad was a renowned Indian dramatist, actor, and filmmaker. He was one of the most appreciated dramatists of the modern era and contributed remarkably to Indian theatre. By combining traditional Indian narrative with cultural sensibilities, Karnad's plays have examined intricate subjects like myth, history, and troubled identities. Throughout his career, Girish Karnad transcribed several widely recognized plays. His plays demonstrate his extraordinary narrative skills and ability to address various subjects, from history and mythology to social concerns and personal identities. In addition to freshly presenting myths, Karnad's plays often address social issues, exhibiting his in-depth knowledge of human psychology and skill at observing social behaviour.

His works on art, culture, theatre, and drama have made him valuable to the Indian literary landscape. However, his endeavour to capture the rich cultural and mythological heritage of the Indian past is the most significant contribution he has made to Indian English drama. This article will draw emphasize on Karnad's contribution in this regard. He tries to restore the local culture and traditions by going back to their origins in his plays. India is a post-colonial nation with a distinct culture and history of colonization. It is also multi-cultural in that it has brought about indigenous customs, culture, and philosophy that are unfortunately suppressed and defeated.

## Blending of Myth and Culture

With his artistic talent, Karnad combines myth realism, the past and present, and illustrates the interconnected aspects of contemporary life, causing the audience to react to the play's action more intellectually than emotionally. The revival of western literature had a strong influence on Karnad's writing. Karnad experienced a number of things during his early years that greatly influenced his theatrical taste and brilliance. One of the things that happened to him was the fact that he became acquainted to a literary scene in which local and western traditions were directly at odds. Karnad had a specific goal in mind when he took use of Indian mythology.

Ancient folktales serve as the basis for Girish Karnad's works. The term "ancient tales" refers to something that has been passed down or practiced throughout time and is frequently connected to long-standing traditions, beliefs, or practices within a specific culture or civilization. Usually, it suggests consistency and conformity to long-standing customs or conventions. "Traditional" can be used to characterize different facets of life, including traditional values, ceremonies, music, food, and attire. It stands for safeguarding historical significance and associating with the past.

Tutun Mukherjee argues that Karnad has "made available thee rich resources of the great and little tradition, the classical and the folk elements of Indian literature," highlighting his significant contribution to the resurgence of folk theatre. Karnad has attempted to depict modern society and its plight in his numerous plays, but he has also made extensive use of several cliched folktales and folk theater techniques and devices, such as masks, chorus, dolls, curtains, commentators, narrators, story-within-a-story, supernatural elements, etc. Drawing influence from Indian mythology and culture, Karnad is renowned for blending legendary themes and characters into his writing. His plays are based on mythical dramas and are among his best-known works.

## Challenging themes in Karnad's plays

His plays contain significant Indian themes and everyday phrases in Karnad's writings. They display indigenous customs and culture. By tackling contemporary societal challenges, Karnad can make his topics universal even if his plays significantly influence the literary legacy of ancient India. He writes plays that have a proper beginning, middle, and end. He has developed brilliant characters with admirable ideas. His plays use straightforward, aphoristic language that blends contemporary, regional, and local terms. Karnad's playwriting aims to provide Indian heritage with a new worldwide identity.

His plays, *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala*, surpass cultural barriers and speak to audiences of different ages by exploring challenging societal themes and human emotions. By connecting the past and present and enhancing the artistic landscape with his distinctive storylines, Karnad's blending of traditional and modern elements has made a vital contribution to the development of Indian drama. Karnad has explored a wide range of topics and offered literature an alternative viewpoint. In addition to incorporating mythology into his plays, he also used a contemporary method to come up with new concepts. He demonstrates in *Yayati* how a man's desires have the power to ruin everything. In a similar vein, he plays Padmini in *Hayavadana*, a driven lady who disrupts his company's life in pursuit of fulfillment.

In his works, Karnad has given both his male and female characters equal possibilities. Comparatively speaking to the king, both queens in *Bali: The Sacrifice* have a strong stage presence. The young queen represents a contemporary collective attitude, while the elderly queen represents traditional ideals. The challenges of the generational divide are also portrayed in this drama. According to the legendary story, Yayati offered youth in return for his son's youth after being cursed with early old age. Yayati's catastrophic fault resulted from his quest for power and pleasure. By the play's conclusion, he embraces the way of salvation and restores his son's youth.

## Meditation of Human aspiration in *Hayavadana*

*Hayavadana* explores the intricate mysteries of human nature, love, and identity. Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini are the three main protagonists in the myth. Both Devadatta and Kapila love Padmini, an enchanting and moral woman; Devadatta is a scholar renowned for his knowledge; while Kapila is a warrior renowned for his physical prowess. When Kapila and Devadatta become close friends but each feels weak in one way—Kapila thinks he lacks intelligence, while Devadatta thinks he lacks physical strength—a conflict arises. They encounter a horse's head in their attempt to overcome their supposed shortcomings, and it fulfills their desires. Whereas Devadatta, who longs for physical power, connects the horse's head to his body, Kapila, who longs for wisdom, attaches the horse's body to his head, Kapila, who longs for intelligence, attaches the horse's head to his body. But because Padmini is caught between the two changed people, this body part exchange creates a complicated love triangle. Padmini's mental state is described with a blend of sadness and humour with suitable symbolism. The characters' names and themes of the play are symbolic.

His imagination is provided with adequate space by the identity crisis challenge. Karnad also depicts the plight of Padmini, a strong, contemporary lady. A woman who adores both her spouse and his friend for two different sides of their personalities, she finds herself caught between two polarities. Padmini gets the best of both men after the head-to-head exchange, but she gradually comes to terms with reality. Her love is only a craving for sensual pleasure; it lacks any spirituality. As Satish Kumar notes in response to Padmini's longing for Kapila, "Padmini lives for herself; for the satiation of her sensuality" (30). It has become pointless for her to try to find fulfillment in her partner.

She eventually realizes a basic truth that since there are so many imperfect people in the world, perfection is unattainable. Similarly, the Goddess transforms the horse-headed man, Hayavadana, into a complete horse rather than a complete man. The tale dives into themes of the nature of wholeness, the limitations of physical and intellectual attributes, and the illusive search of perfection. It acts as a meditation on the complexity of human aspirations and the fallout that results from attempting to satisfy them. On the other hand, Karnad based his theme in this drama on traditional myth. The ambitious nature of the Padmini female character and her pursuit of wholeness demonstrate the playwright's modern outlook.

Karnad makes an excellent use of the contemporary woman who refused to sacrifice her desires for the sake of duty and society. Padmini never lost her sense of self. Karnad is "modern and the conventions and motifs of folk art and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties, and unpredictable denouement," claims K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (736). They encounter a horse's head in their attempt to overcome their perceived shortcomings, and it fulfills their desires. Whereas Devadatta, who longs for physical strength, attaches the horse's body to his head, Kapila, who longs for intelligence, attaches the horse's head to his body. But because Padmini is caught between the two changed people, this body part exchange creates a complicated love triangle.

### **Intricacies of Human Impulses in *Nagamandala***

Karnad's next play *Nagamandala* examines themes of desire, suppression, belonging, and the power of narrative by fusing an oral tradition with interior reality within a gender hierarchy. The play revolves around several topics, including power dynamics in relationships, modernity, and social constraints. *Nagamandala* explores the struggle between tradition and advancement and women's freedom and liberation in an evolving society. It offers a contemporary viewpoint on love, desire, and social conventions while exploring the intricacies of human impulses and the effects of repressing them. The female lead in this drama, Rani, demonstrates Karnad's liberal outlook.

In his plays, Karnad expresses meaning for modern life through myth. The importance of myth, in his opinion, never fades. In a time of globalization and postmodernism, he sees people's obsession with materialism and imitation of western culture. He elevated myths, parables, stories, and folklore in his plays. In his plays, he rewrites them because they offer a great deal of room for living. In his plays, he employs mythical scenes, but he primarily seeks to use them for philosophical, religious, and social ends. He introduces certain mythical scenes from the Mahabharata and places them in the perspective of modern-day human affairs. Karnad addresses mythical events and applies a modern interpretation to them. In his plays, he connects the natural and mystical occurrences in human conditions with the ancient and the contemporary dramatic heritage.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the field of dramatic literature, Girish Karnad's plays recreate an intricate weaving of cultural fusion. Indian mythology, tradition, history, and modern society are just a few of the cultures that Karnad expertly combines to produce stories that appeal to a wide range of viewers. Themes of one's cultural identity, tradition, modernization, and the clash of many belief systems are all explored in his writings. Karnad's plays honor variety and foster greater comprehension of the subtleties and complexity of human lives by fusing many cultural influences. Karnad's plays combine aspects of individualism and universalism. He has revitalized ancient themes. His contributions to art, culture, theatre, and drama have enhanced the Indian literary landscape (Dhawan 19).

Karnad connects the archetype and the real, the past and the present. The myths and stories of the past provide new insights and meaning through analogy, strengthening the topic of contemporary issues. Myths offer glimpses of life and its enigma by extending beyond temporal and spatial boundaries. Their multi-layers of meaning, ageless nature, and relevance to current events make them essential components of the land's cultural awareness.

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