



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THEMES IN THE PLAY OF GIRISH KARNAD: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Karnad's concern is with the life of the modern man that is very complex and lacks in wholeness. The employment of the old tales is to focus on the absurdity of modern life with all its elemental passions and conflicts. In this way the folk tales becomes vehicles for modern living under the impact of western ideologies and systems of knowledge viewing human behaviour from different angles. His outlook towards the present is coloured by prevalent thinking impelled by Marxism, Freudianism and existentialism, symptomatic of a fundamental change in the outlook of the modern man to wars human life and its origin. It cuts man adrift from his metaphysical origin and questions the moral and spiritual values, which hinder human freedom. Man is projected as living in a human society acting and reacting with other fellow beings. In Girish Karnad these modern theories are show operating in the traditional tales. It is under the influence of these ideologies and systems of thought that a sort of Oedipus complex appears to mark all mother-son relationships. All the major characters appear to support from existential alienation to obviate which they indulge in violence and cruelty, and, the idea of god and religion is symptomatic of their helpless condition and neurotic mind only. The historical events in Karnad mirror the current political, religious and social happenings.

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INTRODUCTION

Every play is the story of a new problem of the modern man. Yayati and Puru in Yayati pictures the relationship between every father and son where father expects his son to make sacrifice for him and the younger generations suffers because of the fixations of the old one. Rani of Nagamandala and Padmini of Hayavadana are present in our society. They suffer because of the male chauvinistic attitude and the hard and unbreakable social institutions like marriage. These modern Indian women have become permanent victims because of their failure to break the social laws. Both ways they are the sufferers: whether they abide by these social dictates or violate them. Muhammad Tughlaq in tughlaq and king Bijjala in jale danda hint at the present Indian rulers who use religion for their political gains. Otherwise, they don't believe in any religion and their only religion is 'power'. They are always wearing a mask, which changes according to the situation. This socio-political concern takes the form of socio-religions one in the fire and the rain. The hypocrisy in politics changes into that of religions practices. Karnad's major concern is with the psychological crisis of the modern man. His protagonists always suffer as the root cause of their suffering is complexity of human relationships.

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The socio-religious institutions further add to this complexity. Caught in these intricate relationships, Karnad's characters suffer from alienation: they are alienated from themselves and the people around them. They are always engaged in putting an end to their inner isolations but they fail to do so most of their time. In their mutual relationships, love and sex are of menial importance. These basic passions transcend all types of barriers and hindrances raised in the form of religious beliefs, social conventions and emotional blockages. However, the conflict in the plays of Karnad is not of the traditional type, as between the good and the evil, or vice and virtue or the individual and the society. It is more psychological than physical in nature. If Yayati has conflict between illusion and reality, conflict in Tughlaq is between the ideal and the real. The plot of Hayavadana is of a different sort as the conflict is between the complete and the incomplete. In Nagamandala, the patriarchal and the matriarchal views clash to settle score for the personate in the play. Similarly, in Tale-Danda the orthodoxy and the heterodoxy work havoc in the life of the characters that represent wider social forces of the time. The fire and the rain always oscillate between the sacred and the secular. Karnad's concern for tradition is not confined to the themes only. In his technique too, his relationship with tradition remains intact. Upon the mythological canvas, he draws the contour of contemporary reality. As a modern playwright, the urgency of exploiting the incommensurable and inscrutable impels him to negotiate a dramatic form characterization, organization of incidents and their dramatic

representation. In order to constitute the designed form, he explores devices of his own land and those of these westsas well. He experiments boldly with the folk and classical devices. the use of sutradhara, or bhagavata, of the super natural elements , play-within –the-play, masks , mime , songs, half-curtains fuse with modern devices like light and sound. Because of his experiments with the traditional devices, he is sometimes close to the typical Karnataka theatre and sometimes to Brecht for breaking the illusion of theatre and appealing to reason than to emotions. Use of prologue and epilogue puts Karnad very close to the modern playwrights like Bernard show. In Nagamandala, the prologue introduces a man who is sitting lonely in a temple and is yawning ‘involuntarily’. Turning to the audience, the first sentence he utters on the stage is, “I may be dead within the next few hours”. Then after a long pause he is utters, “ Actually dead. I might die in front of your eyes”. After he sits in the atmosphere of melancholy, flames after being out in the village join him in the temple. They narrate stories of their respective households together that of man which become the precursor of the alienation that is to follow. The flames, introduced in the prologue, play a vital role later in the play. The prologue in the fire and the rain also provides background to the main action of the play.

The devices of irony and super natural elements are introduced in the prologue itself. It presents some the main characters like Paravasu, Arvasu, Nittilai; the king Karnad’s concern for tradition is not confined to the themes only. In his technique too, his relationship with tradition remains intact. Upon the mythological canvas, he draws the contour of contemporary reality. As a modern playwright, the urgency of exploiting the incommensurable and inscrutable impels him to negotiate a dramatic form characterization, organization of incidents and their dramatic representation. In order to constitute the designed form, he explores devices of his own land and those of these westsas well. He experiments boldly with the folk and classical devices. the use of sutradhara, or bhagavata, of the super natural elements , play-within –the-play, masks, mime, songs, half-curtains fuse with modern devices like light and sound. Because of his experiments with the traditional devices, he is sometimes close to the typical Karnataka theatre and sometimes to Brecht for breaking the illusion of theatre and appealing to reason than to emotions. Use of prologue and epilogue puts Karnad very close to the modern playwrights like Bernard show. In Nagamandala, the prologue introduces a man who is sitting lonely in a temple and is yawning ‘involuntarily’. Turning to the audience, the first sentence he utters on the stage is, “I may be dead within the next few hours”. Then after a long pause he is utters, “Actually dead. I might die in front of your eyes”. After he sits in the atmosphere of melancholy, flames after being out in the village join him in the temple. They narrate stories of their respective households together that of man which become the precursor of the alienation that is to follow. The flames, introduced in the prologue, play a vital role later in the play.

The prologue in the fire and the rain also provides background to the main action of the play. The devices of irony and super natural elements are introduced in the prologue itself. It presents some the main characters like Paravasu, Arvasu, and Nittilai, the king, the actor and his brother in the beginning. An important issue in the play fair sacrifice verses theatre comes under focus in the prologue itself. If we put prologue and epilogue together, an independent plot emerges that attains

added meaning being related to the rest of the play. If Hayavadana is an innovative experiment in fusing together the traditional and the modern theatrical devices, the fire and the rain is perfect fusion of music and light along with the use of mask. In the prologue, after Paravasu permits the theatre troop to perform a play, we see Arvasu carrying a mask. The actor-manager and his limping brother are accompanied by a couple of women who are to provide music. The moment the actor-manager starts singing benedictory verse, the stage darkens and only Arvasu is left in a "pool of light". After the scene between Arvasu, Nittilai and Andhika is over, the stage darkens again for a contrasting effect. Now the light comes up in another part of the stage representing the hermitage of Raibya. Vishakha is seen filling water. The long scene between Vishakha and Yavakri when he woos her standing in her way is also enacted in the light. But when Brahaman-Rakshasa, summoned by Raibya, runs in the direction of Yavakri, the lights fade out. It is complete dark on the stage when the Brahaman-Rakshasa kills Yavakri and Andhika cries over her dead body. As the epilogue starts and Arvasu wears the mask, there is roar of drums in the background. Similarly, light and music sometimes collectively used. Indra appears on the stage, it is preceded by melodious music and "soft and gentle light". This selective use of light and dark creates special impact on the stage. The modern devices like sound-light effect and music remain essential Devices in the hands of the play-wright. Yayati starts with the slow lighting up of the stage.

As darkness begins to fadeout, slow music is heard in the background and gradually becomes louder. The music goes on for two minutes before Sutradhara appears. As he raises his hands to introduce himself and the action of the plot to the audience, the music begins to subside away and finally comes to an end. Similarly at the end of his speech before he leaves the stage, the stage darkens up slowly. Again it is lighted up gradually and we see Devyani sitting on a bed with Swarnalata by her bedpost. Thus apart from suggesting change of scene, the use of light enhances the over. Use of light, miming, freezing and quick shifts of scenes remains special features of Nagamandala. As the play starts, it is night and moonlight sleeps in through cracks in the roof and in the walls. On the moonlight stage, we see the man and the flames talking. The stage is lighted. Up to show that it is the daytime. But as Appanna leaves Rani alone talking to herself, her words become distinct “as the lights dim” again, it is dark on the stage. The scene shifts into night and Rani is found dreaming of her parents. As she gets up, “it gets light”. She mimes splashing water on her eyes. Appanna also arrives and he mimes taking a bath in the bathroom. Taking bath is always staged through miming. The use of spectacular remains a special feature of Karnad’s plays. Spectacle refers to all visual aspects of produced scenery, lighting, costumes, make-ups and movement of the action. If father’s youth and son’s old age act as a major spectacle in Yayati, Appanna’s double role in Nagamandala and mutual killing by Devadatta and Kapila and then their coming back to life again in Hayavadana, the death scene of Bijjala in Tale-Danda and the play-within-the play in the fire and the rain are Spectacle-creating elements. Tughlaq is typical example of the device of spectacular the persona of Muhammad in striking costumes, announcement of the shifting of capital, call for banning prayer and the revival of it, the march of amirs towards Delhi and especially the sudden shift of scenes create a spectacular effect (26 paise). In Karnad’s first play Yayati, the major events upon which the whole action is based grow on ironic grounds. The king readily

develops physical relations with his attendants but is adamant not to accept chitralkha's hand. At the risk of his life, he shares the bed with her but refuses to accept chitralkha as his wife, which involves no physical risk at all. Moreover he shows more concern for his subjects but when his real daughter-in-law exhorts to have pity on her youth, he retreats and does not care for her. The encounter between Yayati and Sharmishtha is ironic: Sharmishtha starts as Yayati's attendant but ends up as his Queen. In the beginning, she begs Yayati for help to end her suffering. As her suffering comes to an end, that of Yayati sets in. Soon after, he accepts her as his queen, he turns old: the end of an attendant's suffering results in that of her master. Sharmishtha's journey from Devyani's friend to her attendant and from Devyani's attendant to her rival in love is highly ironic. On the other hand, Yayati's fall from being the Saviour of Devyani to the seducer of Sharmishtha along with his longing to remain young is deeply ironic. In Nagamandala, as the play starts, the man a playwright who is supposed to keep the audience awake is himself trying hard to open his eyelids to avoid sleep. Sitting in a ruined temple and swearing by the "absent god" he presents an ironic picture of life. Like the goddess Kali in Hayavadana, Naga plays an ironic role in this play. If Kali complicates Padmini's problems, Naga, the god of fertility, deceives Rani by disguising as her husband. The play starts on a note of dramatic irony when the audience knows the man who spends nights with Rani is not actually her husband. Ironically, the god of fertility seduces an innocent namely welded by acting as her husband at night. It not only makes her pregnant but also guides her to pass out successfully the parity test with the super human Naga; the adulterous Rani emerges as a goddess.

The snake ordeal, which Rani undergoes to prove her marital purity, provides the irony of situations. Naga the seducer of Rani for whom she has been labelled 'adulterous' acts as her guide. Rani's love also starts detecting her like Appanna; now do as you are told. When I come and go at night, don't go out of this room, don't look out of the window whatever the reason and don't ask why. Ultimately with his 'kind' help the Adulterous Rani becomes the "divine being". With the illegitimate child in her womb, she becomes goddess and Appanna cuts a sorry figure in the court. This ironic tale does not end here. Naga feels jealous and angry like the goddess Kali. Then he finds Appanna and Rani sleeping together and starts cursing himself for not being able to enjoy the privilege of Appanna as a human being. Entering into Rani's tresses is the last possible effort made by him to be an integral of a human being. The wish fulfilment of Rani, as of Padmini, is the handiwork of the irony of fate. Padmini mixes up the heads unintentionally and goes with the much desired body of Kapila. Similarly Rani pours out the root-mixture on the anthill and gets the much desired nights through Naga.

It is the goddess Kali in Hayavadana and blind Kurudavva in Nagamandala who become instrumental in changing the fate of the two women. The basic irony in the play is that man behaves like an animal, and animal behaves like a man. Furthermore, the blind act as a guide and Rani is treated as a slave. In the tale Danda springs from comparison and contrast Jagadeva and Sovideva, both belonging to the new generation; provide ironic contrast to each other. Both have to fight and struggle but their goals are different. Jagadeva fights for a social cause and for this he leaves his home. He revolts against his orthodox parents who believe cast system. Sovideva on the other hand, fights for his personal gain. He wishes to be the natural heir of Bijjala. So both the characters are poles apart as regards their views of life. If Jagadeva cannot attend his ailing father it is because of his commitment to the cause of sharanas. As we regard his respect for parents, it cannot be questioned. But Sovideva is an arrogant son. His only aim in life is to be in control of power. He desperately motivates his mother against Bijjala. When Sovideva accompanied by the priest surrounds the king in his own palace, Damodar's words speak of the actual villain in him. The language used for Bankamma, to indicate that the letter is sycophant of the king, proves that the cast feeling has killed the man in him. He looks a button: Bankamma accompanies the king on his way to the fields in the morning. Carries the part of water to wash in his majesty's behalf. The king has constipation and his bowls tighten, he responds benignly to every suggestion. So this snapper has virtually ruled the king. When Kallapa is killed he justifies his killing saying that the reason of his death is that he could not be corrupted. Siding with Sovideva he argues the king to crown his son with his own hands, but denies meaning any treason against the king. The king has no doubt about the rule. The priest is playing. He clearly points it out; this game is yours I concede that. Thus, his character is in complete contrast to that of Basavanna who is transparent and truthful in action.

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