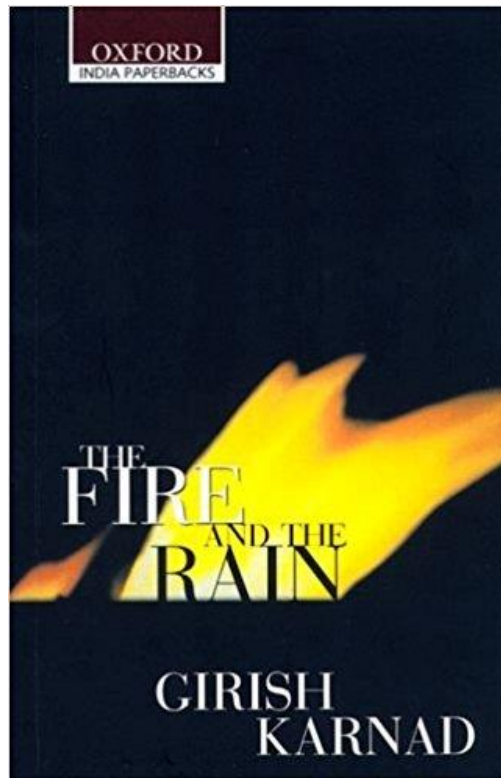


## **The Treatment of Myths, Folklores and History in the Plays of Girish Karnad**

**D. J. Naganatha Durai, M.A. (Eng.), M.Phil., Ph.D. Research Scholar  
Professor Dr. A. Soundrarajan**

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Courtesy: [https://www.amazon.com/Fire-Rain-Girish-Karnad/dp/0195644433/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1522489069&sr=8-3&keywords=Fire+and+the+Rain+Karnad&dpID=41G8Lp%252BtMfL&preST=SY291BO1,204,203,200QL40&dpSrc=srch](https://www.amazon.com/Fire-Rain-Girish-Karnad/dp/0195644433/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1522489069&sr=8-3&keywords=Fire+and+the+Rain+Karnad&dpID=41G8Lp%252BtMfL&preST=SY291BO1,204,203,200QL40&dpSrc=srch)

### **Abstract**

Karnad makes use of Indian myths, legends, and folklores. He employs them a vehicle of new vision. Karnad's creative genius lies in taking up fragments of historical and legendary experience to fuse them into a forceful statement. His childhood exposure to street plays in

Karnataka villages and his familiarity with western staged in Mumbai influenced him in retelling the legends of India to suit the modern context.

### **Girish Karnad**

Western playwrights that he had read during his college days opened up for him ‘a new world of magical possibilities’ (Dhawan 15). When Karnad suddenly flashed on the Kannada stage in the early sixties, he had no established theatrical tradition to begin with. Indian English drama up to the 1960’s had an apologetic existence. The rich heritage of Indian classical drama and the vibrant folk tradition seldom attracted the Indian English dramatists of the earlier phase, whose models were Shakespeare, Ibsen and Shaw.

The Indian English dramatists couldn’t make it a success in the country earlier than Girish Karnad. Soon they were able to use India;s colonial past, assimilate western techniques, and brought out a judicio us mix. Now we have the rich reservoir of myth and complex historical heritage embedded in Indian Writing in English including plays in Indian Writing in English. Karnad is a great example of this process.

Karnad was aware of the problems and challenges that Indian Playwrights had to face after independence. Karnad says in his ‘Introduction’ to Three Plays: “They had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification; tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial Past between the attractions of western modes of thought and our own traditions and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays...” (1)

**Keywords:** Girish Karnad, Contemporary Consciousness, Primitive imagination, Inexhaustible Lore, Pragmatic Character.

### **Introduction**

Girish Karnad is one of the brightest shining stars of Indian English Literature. Born in May19, 1938 in Matheran, Maharashtra, he earned international praise as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, and translator. With his best loved-play, *Tughlaq*, Karnad had established himself as one of the most promising playwright in the country.

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Based on his serious explorations of folklore, mythology and history, the subject of his plays reflect the problems and challenges of contemporary life, and endeavour to forge a link between the past and the present. The creative intellectual that he is obviously views the subjects of his plays from his own perspective, develops them in the crucible of his own imagination and personal experience, and employs them as a medium to communicate his own independent and original feelings, thoughts and interpretations. (Dodiya 89).

Though known for his controversial themes, his plays are widely read and enjoyed because of his wonderful dramatic techniques, vivid image and symbols and his outstanding ability to portray some of the harshest and bitter most realities of life with forthright simplicity.

### **Treatment of Myths, Folklores and History**

Though Karnad's interests are multifarious, he has given the Kannada Stage a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor - director. He has shown the Indian stage to what depth the mythical themes and folklores could be taken in order to recreate a contemporary consciousness. The greatest problem, however, was how to utilize these traditional forms in order to revitalize his works in the urban Context. It is at this point that the famous playwright Bertolt Brecht came to his help. Brechtian influence on Karnad made him sharply aware of the theatrically imaginativeness and inherent power of the Indian theatre.

### **Folk Imagination**

Folk Imagination is at once mythopoetic being and magical. In the folk mind, one subsumes the other. Folk belief, besides being native, has a touch of poetry about it which works towards a psychic adjustment. He is of the opinion that all folklore is religious, often based on animism because the primitive imagination. It extends its vision from the natural in which it is steeped and with which it is saturated to the supernatural, which to the folk mind is only an extension of the former.

By a deliberate return to the rich tradition and the parallel art forms, popularized by folk theatre, Karnad lights up the rich treasure house that the Indian dramatists can make use of.

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He has illustrated how the inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends offer immense scope for the Indian dramatists like Karnad to link the past and the present, the archetype and the real. Issues of the present-world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy, thus reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery.

### **Karnad and Other Playwrights**

Karnad revives the ancient tradition by the powerful use of archetypal myths that are with meaning for the contemporary world. Myths that are part of the collective consciousness of the people are invoked in Karnad's plays. These playwrights show how modern man's predicament is foreshadowed in the archetypal myths.

T. S. Eliot recognized the power of myth to manipulate, '... a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity' (qtd. in Frye 162) and declared that the use of myth was a step towards making the modern world possible in art.

### **A Vital Ingredient**

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***

Karnad's first play *Yayati* (1961) retells the Hindu myth on the theme of responsibility. The theme of the play is based on the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, where Puru as an obedient son accepts his father's old age. King Yayati is an ancestor of the Kuru Dynasty. The king is cursed to old age as a consequence of an adulterous affair with his queen Devayani's maid, Sharmistha. Yayati's plea for mitigation to the gods results in the communication to exchange of the curse enabling him to be his own son Puru. But his wife Chitrleka unable to bear this ends her life by taking poison. At the end of the play Yayati takes back the old age from his son and Puru has witness the death of his wife.

Karnad departs from the myth in respect of the fact that he chooses not to make Puru and product of Yayati's union with Sharmistha, but of an earlier marriage to an Asura Princess. This

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is in order to emphasize rather Puru's personal choice of self-sacrifice than atonement for his father's sin. The play *Yayati* ends tragically in death and sacrifice.

### **Does Not Take Myths in Their Entirety**

Karnad in his plays, does not take myths in their entirety. He takes only parts of them that are useful to him and the rest, he supplements with his imagination to make his plots original and imaginative. Thus, in *Yayati* (1961), he has taken the myth partially. In the order plays like *Hayavadana* (1972), *Naga Mandala* (1988) and the *Fire and the Rain* (1995), Karnad has elements related him to dramatists like T. P. Kailasam and Rangacharya, the renowned pre-independent Indian dramatists.

### **Audience and the Plays**

Karnak's practice of drawing raw materials for plays from myths and folklore primarily lends his plays an immediate 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 intellectual problem.

### **Conclusion**

Many modern writers have employed myths and legends to convey their sense and view life. In a way this practice itself like myth is a recurrent pattern. In ancient India and Greece myths served as the source material for drama and retelling or the reenactment of old myths in modern terms underline the universality of the experience that is embodied in stories.

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D. J. NAGANATHA DURAI

M.A.(Eng.), M.Phil., M.A.,Hindi., Dip-in-Hindi in Translation, PGDCA, Ph.D. Research Scholar  
Associate Professor and Vice-Principal,  
Mary Matha College of Arts and Science,  
N. K. Patty,  
Periyakulam 625601  
Tamilnadu  
India  
[jkmmceng@gmail.com](mailto:jkmmceng@gmail.com)

Professor Dr. A. SOUNDRARAJAN  
Research and Development Centre  
Bharathiar University  
Coimbatore – 641046  
Tamilnadu  
India

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Professor Dr. A. Soundrarajan

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