

### Introduction

Girish Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. He has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English, and has played leading roles as an actor in Hindi and Kannada art films, commercial movies and television serials. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. His childhood was spent growing up in a small village in Karnataka where he had first-hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. His encounter with the Natak companies at the early stage of his life made a lasting impression on the mind of Girish Karnad. Says he: "It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, called Natak Mandalis or Natak companies, would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on, My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre, though some Mandalis still survive in North Karnataka in a very degenerate state.

But in those days they were good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me." During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between Western and native tradition. It was India of the Fifties and the Sixties that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life-adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. Karnad's position was akin to that of John Dryden, the seventeenth century British dramatist who, while writing his plays, had to choose between the classical tradition and native tradition; In the first, norms had been set rigorously by Aristotle, the second was a more liberal, native approach that was practised by Shakespeare. Dryden evaluated the merits and demerits of both the traditions in his famous critical treatise 'Essay on Dramatic Poesy'. Karnad was fascinated by the traditional plays, nonetheless the Western playwrights that he read during his college days opened up for him "a new world of magical possibilities. " After graduating from Karnatak University, Dharwad, in 1958, Karnad moved to Bombay for further studies. In

the meantime, he received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship and went to England to do his Master's degree. During his stay at Magdalen College, Oxford, Karnad felt immensely interested in art and culture. On his return to India in 1963, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras. This offered him an opportunity to get exposed to various kinds of writing in India and elsewhere. Such influences made an indelible mark on the creative genius of Girish Karnad. In 1974, he received an important assignment and was appointed Director of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. In 1987, he went to the U.S.A. as Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. From 1988 to 1993, he served as Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Academy for the Performing Arts), New Delhi. In 1994, he was awarded Doctor of Letters degree by the Karnataka University, Dharwad. When Karnad was preparing to go to England, amidst the intense emotional turmoil, he found himself writing a play.

One day as he was reading the Mahabharata, just for fun, he read the story of Yayati. It clicked in his mind. He started writing. It came as a play.' He suddenly found he was a playwright and a Kannada playwright at that. This was so sudden and so natural. The play was in Kannada, the language of his childhood. And the theme of the play Yayati was taken from ancient Indian mythology. While the theme and language was typically native, the play owed its form, not to numerous mythological plays he watched, but to Western playwrights whom he had read. While the subject matter was purely native and traditional, the form and structure were essentially western. Karnad's writing of the play Yayati without any premeditation, set things straight. He was to write plays, not poetry, which he aspired to write, and that the source of his inspiration was native stuff, history, mythology and folklore. Even at the age of twenty-two, he realized that he could not be a poet, but only a playwright. Until he wrote this play, Karnad fancied himself a poet. During his teens, he had written poetry and had trained himself to write in English. "The greatest ambition of my life was to be a poet," says Karnad. By the time he was in college, he wanted to write in English, become a novelist and be internationally famous. There have been more poets and more novelists, but there have been very few playwrights and very few good plays. Karnad further realized that the art of a poet or a novelist was easier than that of a dramatist. As he says: The subject that interests most writers is, of course,

themselves and it is easy subject to talk about. But you know it is always easier if you are a poet or a novelist because you are used to talking in your voice. You suspend your whole life talking as writer directly to the audience. The problem in being a playwright is that everything that you write is for someone else to say. A playwright has many problems. What is upsetting for a playwright is the total lack of plays in India, although the company Natak tradition made a major contribution that flourished since the early decades of the eighteenth century. Where does the playwright look for the sources? And why does one write plays at all? --questions Karnad. There is hardly any theatre in the country. Karnad got into films in an effort to find some kind of a living audience. And perhaps to earn his livelihood. Karnad has always found it difficult to find a suitable, rich subject for writing plays. For instance, after writing Yayati, he read all kinds of books in an effort to find a plot, some plot that would truly inspire. He read the history of Kannada literature by Kirtinath Kurtkoti and learnt from him that Indian history has not been handled by any Indian writer the way it has been done by Shakespear or Brecht. Greatly impressed by this statement, Karnad went through a book of Indian history.

And when he came to Tughlaq, he said, "Oh! Marvellous. That is what I wanted." That was a subject in tune with the times. In those days, existentialism was quite in fashion. Everything about Tughlaq seemed to fit into what Karnad had surmised from Kurtkoti. He felt that in Tughlaq he had hit upon a fantastic character. He realized that he had absorbed this character and it was growing in front of him. Tughlaq was the most extraordinary character to come to the throne of Delhi: in religion, in philosophy, even in calligraphy, in battle, warfield, and all other areas, he was unsurpassable, no other ruler could match his capability. Writing on such a subject seemed challenging and rewarding. Karnad's Tughlaq bears several resemblances with Shakespeare's Richard II. Like King Richard, Muhammad-bin -Tughlaq is temperamental and whimsical. Events in both the plays centre around the eccentricities of their protagonists.

Again, like Shakespeare, Karnad presents the historical events and complexities of the time with perfect objectivity of a true historian, throwing upon them the beautiful colouring of art. He exhibits without concealment the weakness of the king's character but spares no pain to evoke our whole-hearted pity for him in his fall. Tughlaq had a tremendous success with the reading public and it achieved greater popularity on the stage as actors have liked to do the role of the emperor. As opposed to the first play, Karnad wrote this one in the convention of the Company Natakas. For form of the play, Karnad was no more interested in John Anouilh. He divided the play into scenes in the indigenous fashion of the natakas.

The political chaos which Karnad depicts in Tughlaq reminded many readers of the Nehru era in Indian history. Karnad finds this similarity accidental. Says he, "I did not consciously write about the Nehru era. I am always flattered when people tell me that it was about the Nehru era and equally applies to development of politics since then, But, I think, well, that is a compliment that any playwright would be thrilled to get, but it was not intended to be a contemporary play about a contemporary situation." The publication of Yayati in 1961 and especially of Tughlaq in 1964 established Karnad as master dramatist. Subsequently he published Hayavadana (1971), Angumalige (1977), Hittina-Hunja (1980), Naga-Mandala (1988), Tale-Danda (1990) and Agni Matlit (1995). Karnad wrote all his eight plays in Kannada; these have been translated into major Indian languages including the national language Hindi. Five of his plays-Tughlaq, Havavadana, Naga-Mandala, Tale-Danda and The Fire and the Rain-have been translated into English. The first three of these have been published by Oxford University Press in India and the remaining two by Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi.

Karnad is a skilful translator. He writes his plays in Kannada; English is the language of his adulthood. He writes articles, essays, film scripts in English but not plays. When he translates his own work, he has a great advantage. He has a lot of freedom that another translator will not have. A translator has to be faithful to the text and he does not have the freedom to make changes if it is somebody else's text. "My translation," says Karnad, "must therefore, be seen as approximation to the original." (Translation, 218) To begin with, he was quite reluctant to translate his own plays. He realized that translating from Kannada into English required a great deal of rewriting--a kind of transcreation.

He translated Tughlaq when Alyque Padamsee was to stage it and then Hayavadana for the Madras Players. He feels that translating from one regional language to another is easier than translating into English. The basic problem for the translator lies in his search for appropriate cultural equivalents. Besides his own plays, Karnad has translated Badal Sircar's Evam Indrajit which was well-received in literary circles. He found translating the play very enjoyable and rewarding. As a translator, he kept in mind the utterance value of the dialogue. He also conveyed appropriate rhythm and pace of the original language. Karnad has an immense faith in the discipline of translation. It is the only way for creative writers to reach a wider audience. How else, wonders Karnad, should one experience world theatre! Karnad's plays have been performed on stage, directed by eminent directors. The historical play Tughlaq, in particular, has stood the test of time. B.V. Karanth's 1966 Kannada production in Bombay, Om Shivpuri's Hindi production in Delhi the same year and Alyque Padamsee's English production in

Bombay in 1970 are some of the memorable performances of the play. In 1974, the National School of Drama Repertory Company mounted a memorable revival of the play at the Old Fort in Delhi under E. Alkazi's direction. Karnad's plays have received an international recognition. These have been widely performed in Europe and America.

The play Tughlaq has been translated into Hungarian and German. The B.B.C., London, broadcast it in 1979 and Hayavadana in 1993. Directed by E. Alkazi, Tughlaq was presented in London by the National School of Drama Repertory Company as part of the Festival of India in 1982. Karnad's mythical play Hayavadana was presented at the Berlin Festival of Drama and Music in Germany in 1985. Directed in German by Vijaya Mehta, it was part of the Repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar, in 1984-86. It was rechristened as "Divided Together" and presented at the Ark Ensemble in New York in 1993. The play Naga-Mandala, directed by Vijaya Mehta in German. Was presented by the Leipziger Schauspielhaus at Leipzig and Berlin for the Festival of India in Germany in 1992. Again, it was performed at the University Theatre at Chicago and subsequently at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis as part of its thirtieth anniversary celebrations in 1993. In the same year, Guthrie Theatre commissioned Karnad's latest play The Fire and the Rain. Karnad has received wide recognition for his plays. He got Mysore State Award for Yayati in 1962; Kataladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the Best Indian Play of the Year for Hayavadana in 1972. For Tale-Danda, he won a number of awards: B.H. Sridhar Award in 1992, Karnataka Nataka Akademi Award for the Best Play of 1990-91 in 1992, Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993 and Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994. He was honoured in 1990 by Granthaloka, Journal of the Book Trade, as "The Writer of the Year" for his play Tale-Danda. In 1992, he received Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989 for Naga-Mandala. He has also received Govt. of Mysore Rajyotsava Award in 1970; Sangeet Natak Akademi's Award for playwriting in 1972; Karnataka Nataka Akademi Award in 1984-, Nandikar, Calcutta, Award for playwriting in 1989; Booksellers' and Publishers' Association of South India Award in 1992. Karnad is an important film-maker and writer of film scripts. He has written the script and dialogues for the film Sainskara (1960) in Kannada based on the novel of the same name by U.R. Anantha Murthy, and played, the lead role in it. With B.V. Karanth, he has co-directed the film Vansha Vriksha (1971) in which he has also acted, and Godhuli (Hindi), Tabbaliyu Ninade Magane (Kannada) in 1977. He has also directed films like Kadu (1973) and Ondanondu Kaladalli (1978) in Kannada, Utsav (1984) and Cheluvi (1992) in Hindi. His roles in Manthan (1976) and Swami (1978) are among his best in Hindi art cinema.

Between 1963 and 1970, Karnad was an active member of an amateur group called "Madras Players." He worked as actor and director, in such plays as Evam Indrajit, Six Characters in search of an Author, Uncle Vanya, The Caretaker, The Crucible and A View from the Bridge in English during 1964-69. He also acted the lead roles in Oedipus Rex and Jokumaraswainy, directed in Kannada by B.V. Karanth, for the Open-Air Festival in Bangalore in 1972. Karnad has also published a number of articles, the most significant being "In Search of a New Theatre" in Contemporary Indian Tradition, ed. Carla Borden (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1988) and "Theatre in India," in Daedalus, Vol. 118, No. 4, pp. 331-52. While Karnad is a multi-faceted personality, it is essentially as a playwright that he is at his best. He confesses, 'I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I've been an actor, a publisher, a film-maker. But in none of these fields have I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting.' In India, unfortunately, the writers cannot live on their writing alone; it does not yield enough royalties for sustenance. Says Karnad, "One can't earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. Take Tughlaq. As you know, it's been enormously successful -critically as well as in performance. Playwrights in the West have been able to retire on such successes--or at least, to devote themselves to that activity entirely. I can't." Today Girish Karnad is considered one of the most significant Indian dramatists. He has enriched the Indian literary scene by his contribution to art, culture, theatre and drama. It is most befitting that Karnad has been conferred by the President of India, the prestigious awards, Padma Shri in 1974 and Padmabhushan in 1992. Also, he received the Gubbi Veeranna Award from the Government of Karnataka in 1997. Karnad is based in Bangalore and lives with his wife, a medico, and his two children-a daughter and a son-both in their teens. He keeps shuttling between Bangalore, Bombay and Delhi as the three metropolitan cities abundantly offer him opportunities for creative writing, acting in films, and directing serials for national television. Karnad is not impulsive by temperament, and does not resort to writing just at the flash of an idea. He follows a golden mean of thought and action when he launches on a new play. Commenting on the character of Horatio, Hamlet says that those persons are indeed blessed in whom "blood and judgement are so well commingled" that they are not treated by fortune as a musical instrument on which Fortune may play at will mid from which Fortune may be able to produce whichever tune she wishes to produce. The classical qualities of balance and restraint are true of the person of Karnad too.

**Reference :-**

Albert c. Baugh Thomas cable, A History of The English language

N. F, A History of The English language

Janardhanan, Introduction to Language and Literature

Prema Nanadkumar, Introduction to the study of English literature

B. Prasad' A background To The Study Of English Literature