



RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSUES OF GENDER BASED, CASTE, HEREDITY, RELIGION AND SEX IN THE PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

G. Yadagiri

Asst. Professor of English, Govt. Degree College for Women, Nalgonda-Dt

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ABSTRACT



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Girish Karnad was one of the most prominent and celebrated figures in Indian drama. He was an actor, playwright, and director, whose contribution to Indian theatre was immense. Karnad's plays were deeply rooted in Indian history and mythology, and dealt with issues such as identity, language, and cultural conflict. His works were widely performed and admired not only in India, but also internationally. Karnad's contribution to Indian drama can be seen in his numerous awards and accolades throughout his career, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Jnanpith Award, considered the highest literary honour in India. His plays, such as *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, and *Hayavadana*, are regarded as modern classics of Indian theatre. Girish Karnad, the renowned Indian playwright, has addressed various social, cultural, and political issues in his works. While caste, heredity, religion, and sex are themes that occasionally appear in his plays, it is important to note that Karnad's works are not limited to these topics. He explores a wide range of subjects and uses them as a means to reflect upon the complexities of Indian society and human nature. Here are some instances where these themes are present in Karnad's plays. Karnad excelled in multiple fields, including theater, cinema, and literature. He was an accomplished playwright, having written numerous plays in Kannada, his native language, as well as in English. Some of his notable plays include *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, and *Nagamandala*. He also acted in films and directed critically acclaimed movies like *Vamsha Vriksha* and *Utsav*.

Keywords: *Gender base, Religion, Love and Sex, Hereditary etc.*

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Girish Karnad's creative work as a means to engage with and comment on the socio-political issues of his time. His plays often explored themes such as identity, cultural conflicts, and power dynamics. He fearlessly addressed controversial topics, challenging societal norms and raising important questions about tradition, modernity, and the role of individuals within society. Karnad played a significant role in promoting Indian literature and theater globally. His works were translated into several languages and performed worldwide, garnering international acclaim. Through his writing and performances, he showcased the rich cultural heritage of India, exposing global audiences to the diversity and depth of Indian storytelling. He blended myth, history, and contemporary issues, creating narratives that resonated with audiences on multiple levels. His storytelling was layered and thought-provoking, inviting audiences to reflect upon the complexities of human existence. Overall, Girish Karnad's uniqueness lies in his exceptional talent, his ability to bridge different artistic disciplines, his socio-political engagement, and his significant contributions to Indian theater and literature. He left a lasting impact on the Indian cultural landscape and continues to be celebrated as a visionary artist.

In Karnad's play *Tughlaq*, which is based on the historical figure of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, caste discrimination is depicted through the character of the potter. The potter's lower caste status becomes a source of conflict as he desires to marry a woman from an upper caste, leading to tensions and societal backlash.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad explores the concept of identity and the role of heredity. The play

revolves around a love triangle involving two men and a woman. The central conflict arises when a man's head gets exchanged with a horse's head, raising questions about the influence of physical appearance and hereditary traits on identity and relationships. *Naga-Mandala* is a play in which Girish Karnad deals with several themes, including gender, power, and identity. The play revolves around Rani, a woman from a small village in southern India, and her struggles to find her own voice and assert her independence in a patriarchal society. In the play, women are depicted as being trapped in traditional gender roles, with limited agency and autonomy. Rani, for instance, is married off to a much older man, Appanna, who is impotent and neglectful. She feels trapped in her marriage and longs for love and affection. She seeks solace in a local legend about a shape-shifting serpent who can transform into a handsome prince and make women fall in love with him.

When Rani discovers a snake in her house, she takes it in and cares for it, believing that it is the serpent from the legend. The snake eventually transforms into a man, who she names Vasanthaka, and they fall in love. However, Vasanthaka is not what he seems, and Rani must confront the consequences of her actions.

Through the character of Rani, the play explores the plight of women in traditional Indian society, who are often expected to be subservient to men and denied agency over their own lives. Rani's desire for love and freedom is a universal human aspiration, but her choices are limited by the social and cultural expectations placed upon her as a woman.



Overall, Naga-Mandala highlights the struggles and challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, and raises important questions about the nature of power, identity, and gender roles. *Tale-Danda* is a satirical novel by the Nepali writer Laxmi Prasad Devkota, which was published in 1945. The book is considered a masterpiece of Nepali literature and a significant work of the 20th century. Syntagmatic significance refers to the relationships between words or elements in a sequence, or in other words, how words or elements are combined in a meaningful way to create a particular message or effect. In *Tale-Danda*, there are several instances of syntagmatic significance, which help to convey the satirical and critical tone of the book.

One example of syntagmatic significance in *Tale-Danda* is the use of wordplay and puns. Devkota uses puns and wordplay to satirize the political and social conditions of Nepal in the 1940s. For instance, the Religion is a recurring theme in Karnad's plays. In *Nagamandala*, he weaves a story around folk mythology and the ritualistic practices of the community. The play delves into the complexities of religious beliefs, superstitions, and the subjugation of women within traditional societal norms.

Karnad's play *Yayati* explores the themes of desire, sexuality, and the complexities of human relationships. It tells the story of King Yayati, who becomes obsessed with youth and desires to reclaim his lost virility, leading to emotional turmoil within his family.

It is important to approach Karnad's works holistically, as he incorporates multiple layers of meaning and symbolism. While these themes exist in some of his plays, they are often intertwined with

broader social, cultural, and political contexts, and their interpretations may vary depending on the audience and the director's vision.

Yayati is depicted as a powerful king who is driven by his desires and ambitions. He becomes infatuated with Sharmishtha, the daughter of his servant, and eventually marries her. However, Yayati's first wife Devayani, who is also the daughter of a powerful sage, is deeply hurt and humiliated by his actions. She is unable to accept that her husband has taken another wife, and feels that her status as a woman has been diminished by his actions.

Devayani's experience highlights the gender barriers that existed in ancient India. Women were expected to be obedient and subservient to their husbands, and were not allowed to assert their own desires or ambitions. Devayani's inability to accept Yayati's actions reflects the societal expectation that women should always be loyal to their husbands, regardless of their own feelings. Moreover, Sharmishtha, who becomes Yayati's second wife, is also subject to societal expectations and norms. As a woman of lower social status, she is seen as inferior to Yayati's first wife and is constantly reminded of her place in society. Karnad uses Sharmishtha's character to highlight the inequality and discrimination that existed based on social status and gender in ancient India.

In conclusion, *Yayati* by Girish Karnad explores the theme of gender barriers in Indian society through the characters of Yayati, Devayani, and Sharmishtha. The play highlights the societal expectations placed on women, as well as the discrimination and inequality based on social status and gender that existed in ancient India. Karnad's



plays have new directions as compared to other playwrights in Kannada literature. Karnad's studying proposes to show concern as much with the metaphysical image of Indian art tradition as with finding in Karnad's theatre a continuous renewal of form and its representational and philosophical meaning. Karnad's transformation from metaphysical into the contemporary discussion and history into Karnad's importance to Indian Drama is a given. It is significant as he occupies a unique niche in the world of Indian Theatre. This is because, prior to him, or after him for that matter, especially in Postcolonial India, there is no dramatist writing in Kannada and in English, with his kind of hybrid mix, writing the nation with concerns of class, caste and gender, housed within an ever evolving consciousness which he contains in an art that punishes.

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