



A critical study of Cultural Ethos in the plays of Girish Raghunath Karnad

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Abstract

The playwright believes that some stories are eternally relevant, if interpreted correctly according to the time and place of its interpretation. The same story can mean many different things in different contexts. This is the reason that Karnad has always taken a story from Indian mythology, history or folklore and then interpreted it according to his own purposes. Karnad inserts his own angles, his own characters and changes the characters of those who really did not exist in history.

ISSN : 2454-308X



Key words : Sultan, Jiziya, Kazi-i-Mumalik, Dhobi, Dar-ul-Islam, Darbar – i – Khas, Juxtaposition, Chorus, Deification

Girish Karnad is a contemporary writer, playwright, screenwriter, actor and movie director in Kannada language, who is well-known through his English translations. In the world of literature he is mainly known for writing plays. Some authors and playwrights choose to invent their own stories, even their own universes, thereby going in the realm of fantasy literature. However, some others stick to this very world but invent everything inside to this very world but invent everything inside the confines of time and place. Karnad believes that the Indian culture ethos of our society can only be displayed by our own stories, own metaphors, own paradigms and own syndromes. Though he is not hesitant in borrowing artistic styles from the West, he takes all of his stories from India's own past and its own culture milieu. The prominence of mythology and folktales in the works of Karnad is in contrast to the contemporary literature. Instead of choosing colonial themes and issues that were prevalent in his time, he went for the well-known Indian legends. Though he does come back to the British colonial time in the Dreams of Tipu Sultan, he largely sticks to ancient and medieval history and the mythology of India in order to draw his source material.

Girish' first play Yayati comes across as merely a pleasure monger while in the original; his character is symbolic of a higher ideal - that of striving for truth, and eternal happiness. Yayati's long span of sensual indulgence is a symbol that indicates the futility of chasing happiness in things that have a definite end. Indulgence only increases thirst, it doesn't quench it. Each climax of happiness ends with sorrow that it is over so soon, followed by a craving to renew, to repeat the pleasure once more. Yayati's disillusionment is complete only with saturation. He has had his fill but remains unfulfilled. This is what plods him to seek a non-cyclical happiness. Influenced by existentialist drama, his first play Yayati (1961) explores the complexities of responsibility and expectations within the Indian family. Drawing on a myth