

Review of Myth and Symbolism in the Plays of Girish Karnad

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Abstract

"Myth and Symbolism in the Plays of GirishKarnad" offers a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the rich tapestry of mythological elements and symbolism woven throughout the works of the renowned Indian playwright, GirishKarnad. The abstract of this review encapsulates the essence of the book. The book delves into Karnad's plays with meticulous attention to detail, unraveling the intricate layers of myth and symbolism that lie at their core. Karnad's unique ability to seamlessly blend traditional Indian mythology with contemporary themes is examined, shedding light on the profound cultural and historical significance of his works. The author skillfully navigates through each of Karnad's major plays, dissecting the symbolic motifs and archetypal characters that populate them. The review emphasizes how the book serves as a valuable resource for scholars, students, and enthusiasts of Indian theatre and literature. It not only elucidates the significance of myth and symbolism in Karnad's plays but also situates them within the broader context of Indian drama and the global theatrical canon. The book's lucid and engaging prose ensures accessibility to a wide readership, making it an indispensable addition to the study of contemporary Indian theatre.

Keywords:-GirishKarnad, Indian theatre, mythology, symbolism, contemporary themes

Introduction

The plays of GirishKarnad, one of India's most celebrated playwrights and theater personalities, resonate with a unique blend of tradition and modernity. At the heart of his theatrical creations lies a rich tapestry of ancient myths and symbolism that adds layers of depth and complexity to his narratives. Karnad's ability to seamlessly interweave these timeless elements with

contemporary themes has not only made his works critically acclaimed but has also sparked intellectual curiosity about the significance of myth and symbolism in his plays.

This exploration delves into the fascinating world of GirishKarnad's dramatic oeuvre, focusing on the role of myth and symbolism in shaping the essence of his storytelling. Karnad's plays, often rooted in Indian mythology and folklore, transcend cultural boundaries, inviting audiences from diverse backgrounds to embark on a journey through the labyrinth of human experiences, societal complexities, and the interplay of tradition and modernity.

As we delve into the intricate threads of myth and symbolism woven into Karnad's plays, we are confronted with profound questions about the enduring relevance of ancient narratives, the cultural resonance of symbols, and their capacity to shed light on contemporary issues. Karnad's literary and theatrical craftsmanship, characterized by innovative narrative techniques and thought-provoking thematic exploration, presents a unique opportunity for scholars, theater enthusiasts, and cultural connoisseurs to engage with the profound layers of meaning embedded in his works.

Throughout this exploration, we will unravel the multifaceted dimensions of myth and symbolism in GirishKarnad's plays, shedding light on the cultural, literary, and socio-political significance of these elements. From his iconic works like "Tughlaq" and "Hayavadana" to lesser-known gems, Karnad's plays serve as a canvas upon which ancient stories are reimagined, offering fresh perspectives on timeless narratives.

In essence, the study of myth and symbolism in the plays of GirishKarnad is a journey into the heart of India's cultural heritage, an exploration of the universal themes that bind humanity, and an invitation to contemplate the enduring power of storytelling in the ever-evolving tapestry of the world's theatrical traditions.

LIFE AND WORKS OF GIRISH KARNAD

GirishKarnad, a luminary in the world of Indian culture and the arts, left an indelible mark through his multifaceted career spanning theater, film, literature, and social commentary. Born in 1938 in Karnataka, India, Karnad's journey from academia to the stage and screen showcased his intellectual depth and creativity.



Karnad was a visionary playwright who challenged traditional narratives and pioneered a new era of Indian drama. Works like "Tughlaq" and "Yayati" exemplified his ability to blend historical and mythological elements with contemporary themes. His plays provided a fresh perspective on power, identity, and societal complexities, earning him acclaim not only in India but also on the international stage.

Karnad's contributions extended beyond the theater, as he made a significant impact on Indian cinema and television. His performances in films like "Manthan" and "Nissan" demonstrated his versatility as an actor, while his directorial endeavors, such as "VamshaVriksha" and "Utsav," showcased his storytelling prowess.

Literature was yet another domain where Karnad shone brightly. His novels and essays, characterized by their depth and social relevance, explored the rich tapestry of Indian culture and mythology while addressing contemporary issues of identity and modernity.

Throughout his illustrious career, Karnad garnered prestigious awards, including the Jnanpith Award, the Padma Shri, and the Padma Bhushan, which recognized his exceptional contributions to the arts.

GirishKarnad's legacy continues to thrive, as his thought-provoking narratives and ability to bridge tradition with modernity resonate with audiences even today. His life and works remain an enduring source of inspiration in the realms of Indian literature, theater, and cinema, ensuring his lasting influence on the cultural landscape of India.

Karnad's Plays

1. Tughlaq
2. Hayavadana
3. Naga - Mandala
4. Bali
5. Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain), First Directed by Prasanna for NSD Rep.
6. OdakaluBimba
7. Yayati
8. Angumalige
9. MaaNishaadha
10. TippuvinaKanasugalu (The Dreams of Tipu Sultan)
11. Tale Danda, in Hindi its known as Rakt-Kalyan deciphered by Slam Gopal Bajaj, first coordinated by E. Alkaji for NSD rep., then, at that point, by Arvind Gaur (1995-2008) for Asmita Theater Gathering, New Delhi.
12. HittinaHunja

Need of the Study

Exploring the use of myth and symbolism in the plays of GirishKarnad is a scholarly endeavor of great significance. Karnad, a prolific playwright, has masterfully woven the threads of ancient

myths and symbols into the fabric of his dramatic narratives, creating a rich tapestry that resonates with audiences across time and culture. This study offers a profound insight into India's cultural heritage, where myths and symbols have long played a central role in storytelling and shaping societal values. Karnad's ability to infuse these ancient narratives with contemporary relevance raises thought-provoking questions about the enduring power of mythology in understanding the complexities of the modern world. By dissecting the mythological elements in Karnad's plays, scholars can unearth the layers of meaning, allegory, and social commentary that lie beneath the surface. His works often serve as mirrors to society, reflecting its values, conflicts, and aspirations. Through myth and symbolism, he skillfully addresses pressing issues such as identity, power dynamics, and the human condition, offering audiences a lens through which to examine their own lives and societies. Furthermore, Karnad's artistic innovation in blending tradition with modernity showcases the evolving landscape of Indian theater. Understanding his narrative techniques, character development, and thematic exploration through the lens of myth and symbolism not only enriches the study of his plays but also contributes to the broader discourse on the transformative potential of theater as a vehicle for cultural expression and social commentary. In an increasingly interconnected world, the universal themes embedded in Karnad's works transcend borders, inviting global audiences to engage with the cultural richness of India. His plays serve as bridges between different cultures, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Exploring myth and symbolism in Girish Karnad's plays is a journey into the heart of Indian cultural heritage, the depths of human experience, and the evolving landscape of contemporary theater. It is a study that not only illuminates the brilliance of one of India's foremost playwrights but also invites us to ponder the timeless relevance of myth and symbolism in our ever-changing world.

Literature Review

Gnanasekaran, T. (2017). In Girish Karnad's play "Tughlaq," the deft use of symbolism, irony, and humor adds depth and complexity to the narrative. Symbolism is woven into the character of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, portraying him as an enigmatic ruler whose erratic decisions symbolize the unpredictability of absolute power. His ill-fated shift of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad serves as a symbolic reflection of his turbulent reign, illustrating the consequences of impulsive leadership. Irony runs through the play, highlighting the stark contrast between Tughlaq's

grandiose ideals and the harsh realities of governance. His well-intentioned reforms often result in unintended and ironic outcomes, underscoring the complexities of leadership and the consequences of decisions made in isolation. Humor, on the other hand, offers moments of relief amidst the political turmoil and philosophical debates. Characters like Aziz and the Sufi mystic inject wit and humor into the narrative, providing a counterbalance to the play's weighty themes and offering the audience moments of amusement and reflection.

Ghanshyam, G. A. (2009). GirishKarnad's plays are a tapestry of myths and legends that breathe life into his narratives. Drawing from India's rich cultural heritage, Karnad skillfully weaves ancient stories and legends into contemporary contexts. His works, such as "Hayavadana" and "Nagamandala," are steeped in mythological themes, exploring the complexities of human existence, identity, and desire. These myths serve as allegorical frameworks through which Karnad delves into profound philosophical questions and societal issues. They offer a timeless backdrop against which characters grapple with their destinies and dilemmas. Karnad's use of myths and legends not only connects audiences with India's cultural roots but also transcends geographical boundaries, resonating with universal themes and human experiences. His plays stand as a testament to the enduring power of ancient narratives to illuminate the human condition in ever-evolving contexts.

Annasaheb, L. K. (2019). The critical study titled "Reinterpretation of Myth, History, and Folklore in the Select Plays of GirishKarnad" delves into the transformative power of GirishKarnad's dramatic works. Karnad, a prolific playwright, masterfully reimagines traditional myths, historical events, and folklore within the contemporary context of his plays. This study embarks on an exploration of Karnad's innovative narrative techniques, which breathe new life into ancient narratives. Through plays like "Hayavadana" and "Nagamandala," Karnad challenges conventional interpretations of these tales, inviting audiences to engage with profound questions of identity, desire, and societal norms. This critical study delves into the socio-political and cultural implications of Karnad's reinterpretations. It examines how his works shed light on issues of power, justice, and human nature, transcending time and place to offer insights into the complexities of the human condition. This study celebrates the enduring relevance of myth, history, and folklore in the hands of a visionary playwright like GirishKarnad. It underscores the transformative potential of storytelling to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity,

inviting readers and scholars to explore the multifaceted dimensions of his literary and theatrical contributions.

Mangaiyarkarasi, K. (2013). GirishKarnad's profound engagement with myths, folklores, and history serves as a refuge for his creative genius. In his plays, Karnad reimagines, deconstructs, and reconstructs these narratives, offering audiences a captivating and thought-provoking journey through time and culture. Myths, with their timeless narratives and archetypal characters, provide Karnad with a rich tapestry upon which to weave contemporary tales. His works, such as "Hayavadana" and "Nagamandala," breathe new life into ancient stories, raising questions about identity, desire, and human nature in the modern world. Folklores become a wellspring of inspiration, allowing Karnad to delve into the cultural fabric of India. He uses these tales to explore the intricacies of society, superstitions, and the human psyche, offering fresh perspectives on age-old legends. History, too, serves as a canvas for Karnad's narratives. His plays often transport audiences to pivotal moments in history, questioning the established truths and presenting alternative interpretations of events. "Tughlaq" is a prime example, where Karnad reimagines the rule of a historical figure with contemporary relevance. Karnad's refuge in myths, folklores, and history is a testament to his storytelling prowess. It showcases his ability to bridge the past and the present, inviting us to explore the complexities of the human experience while preserving the cultural heritage that shapes our identities. Through his works, he invites us to find solace, enlightenment, and inspiration in the rich tapestry of our collective narratives.

Sing, D. K. (2011). GirishKarnad, a towering figure in Indian literature and theater, epitomized the evolution of a man and artist whose dramatic genius left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of India. His journey from a small town in Karnataka to the world stage is a testament to his unwavering passion for storytelling and his artistic evolution. As a man, Karnad's intellectual curiosity and deep-rooted cultural heritage were the cornerstones of his artistic pursuits. His academic prowess, which saw him graduate from Oxford University, enriched his understanding of literature and philosophy, providing a strong foundation for his creative endeavors. As an artist, Karnad's evolution was characterized by a relentless exploration of themes, genres, and narrative techniques. His early works, marked by experimental narratives like "Yayati," paved the way for ground-breaking plays like "Tughlaq" and "Hayavadana." These works showcased his ability to seamlessly blend myth, history, and contemporary issues, pushing

the boundaries of Indian theater. Karnad's legacy as a man and artist lies in his ability to bridge tradition with modernity, and his commitment to using the stage as a platform for social commentary and cultural reflection. His dramatic genius continues to inspire generations of artists, and his legacy endures as a testament to the power of storytelling in illuminating the human condition.

Saroj, S. K. (2018). Girish Karnad's "Hayavadana" offers a captivating blend of mythology and theater, providing audiences with a unique and thought-provoking perspective. The play, inspired by Thomas Mann's novella "The Transposed Heads," explores themes of identity, desire, and the human condition through a mythical lens. Where two friends find their heads accidentally exchanged, leading to a complex web of identity crises and existential questions. Karnad infuses this myth with theatrical brilliance, using humor, music, and a non-linear narrative to create a multidimensional experience. The play's mythical perspective allows for a profound exploration of human nature and societal norms. Karnad uses the absurdity of the situation to comment on the fragility of human identity and the eternal quest for completeness. "Hayavadana" serves as a testament to Karnad's mastery of storytelling and his ability to seamlessly blend tradition with modernity. Through this mythical and theatrical lens, he invites audiences to engage with timeless questions about the self and the complexity of human relationships. Power of theater to reimagine ancient myths and offer fresh insights into the human experience. It showcases Girish Karnad's artistic brilliance and his enduring contribution to the world of literature and drama.

Budholia, O. P. (2009). In Girish Karnad's "Yayati," myth serves as the fundamental structure of meanings, offering a profound interpretation of the human condition through the lens of ancient Indian narratives. The play draws inspiration from the Mahabharata, reimagining the story of King Yayati and his unquenchable desire for youth. Myth in "Yayati" functions as a rich tapestry that weaves together timeless themes such as ambition, mortality, and the consequences of one's actions. Karnad skillfully employs the mythological backdrop to delve into the complexities of human desires and the pursuit of power and pleasure. Through the characters of Yayati and his descendants, the play explores the cyclical nature of human existence, where the pursuit of desires often leads to suffering and disillusionment. It serves as a commentary on the eternal human struggle for meaning and fulfillment. Karnad's interpretation of the myth not only

preserves the cultural heritage of India but also offers a universal narrative that resonates with audiences across cultures. The structure of meanings embedded in the myth invites reflection on the human experience and the choices individuals make in their quest for happiness and immortality. "Yayati" is a testament to Karnad's ability to breathe new life into ancient narratives, using myth as a vehicle to convey profound insights into the human psyche and the eternal quest for meaning in a world marked by desire and mortality.

DURAI, D. N. (2017). A critical study of GirishKarnad's treatment of myth reveals the depth and complexity with which he engages with ancient narratives in his dramatic works. Karnad's approach to myth is characterized by reinterpretation, deconstruction, and exploration, offering fresh perspectives on timeless stories. Karnad often takes familiar myths and places them in contemporary contexts, highlighting their enduring relevance. His plays, such as "Hayavadana" and "Nagamandala," employ myth as a means to delve into complex themes of identity, desire, and societal norms. These narratives serve as allegorical frameworks through which Karnad scrutinizes the human condition. Karnad's treatment of myth challenges established interpretations and questions traditional narratives. He invites audiences to reexamine the moral and ethical dimensions of these stories, prompting critical reflection. His incorporation of humor and wit within mythological contexts adds layers of complexity to his treatment of ancient narratives. Karnad's plays often balance the gravity of myth with moments of levity, inviting audiences to engage with these stories on multiple levels. critical study of GirishKarnad's treatment of myth underscores his mastery in using ancient narratives as a canvas to explore contemporary issues, question societal norms, and shed light on the intricacies of the human psyche. His unique approach to myth enriches the world of literature and theater, offering a dynamic and thought-provoking perspective on the enduring power of these age-old stories.

Paul, A. (2018). The exploration of evil in the major plays of GirishKarnad and Mahesh Dattani is a fascinating journey into the complex dimensions of human nature and society. These renowned playwrights employ diverse narratives, themes, and settings to dissect the concept of evil from multiple angles. GirishKarnad's works, deeply rooted in Indian mythology and history, illuminate the mythological, existential, and societal dimensions of evil. His plays like "Tughlaq" and "Hayavadana" confront the abuse of power, moral dilemmas, and gender discrimination, showcasing the enduring relevance of these issues. Mahesh Dattani, on the other hand, focuses on

contemporary and personal dimensions of evil. His plays, such as "Final Solutions" and "30 Days in September," tackle issues like communalism, sexual abuse, and inner conflicts, reflecting the evolving social landscape of India. Together, these playwrights offer a comprehensive examination of evil, shedding light on its presence in various aspects of human existence. Their works challenge audiences to confront uncomfortable truths, fostering critical reflection on the complex tapestry of good and evil in society.

Research Problem

The exploration of myth and symbolism in the plays of GirishKarnad presents a compelling research problem that offers insights into the rich tapestry of Indian drama and culture. GirishKarnad, a renowned Indian playwright and actor, is celebrated for his ability to blend traditional Indian mythology and symbolism with contemporary themes and narratives in his works. This research problem seeks to delve into the intricate layers of Karnad's plays, aiming to understand how he employs ancient Indian myths and symbols to address contemporary societal issues, political concerns, and human emotions. It raises questions about the transformative power of myth and symbolism in his plays, as well as their role in connecting the past with the present and transcending cultural boundaries. Key aspects of this research problem may include examining the specific myths and symbols used by Karnad, their contextual significance, and the ways in which they resonate with a global audience. Additionally, it may explore how Karnad's unique interpretation of mythology and symbolism contributes to a broader discourse on postcolonial literature and identity. This research problem offers an exciting opportunity to explore the multifaceted nature of GirishKarnad's work, shedding light on the enduring relevance of myth and symbolism in contemporary Indian theater and literature.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study's contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of GirishKarnad's works, some of the most significant and well-known playwrights in modern Indian theatre, is what gives it its relevance. By studying the life and works of Karnad, this study offers insights into the historical, mythological, political, and cultural context that shaped his creative vision and thematic concerns.

Moreover, this study sheds light on the artistic techniques and stylistic innovations that Karnad employed in his plays, such as the use of power politics, indeterminacy, invisibility, and silence. It also explores the role of women in Karnad's plays and the importance of multilingualism in his work.

This study is significant as it offers a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of Karnad's plays, highlighting the themes and issues that he tackled, such as postcolonialism, nationalism, identity, and gender. Additionally, this study evaluates the relevance and impact of Karnad's plays in contemporary Indian theatre, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on the evolution and future of Indian theatre.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "Myth and Symbolism in the Plays of GirishKarnad" stands as a remarkable contribution to the study of Indian theatre and literature. Through its meticulous exploration of Karnad's plays, it highlights the profound depth of symbolism and myth woven into the fabric of his works. This review underscores the book's significance in bridging the gap between tradition and modernity in Indian drama. The book adeptly showcases how GirishKarnad's plays serve as a cultural reservoir, offering a window into India's rich mythological heritage while addressing contemporary themes and concerns. It underscores the enduring relevance of these myths and symbols in the context of modern Indian society, reinforcing Karnad's stature as a playwright of profound insight. The review emphasizes the book's accessibility, making it a valuable resource for both academics and enthusiasts. It not only enriches our understanding of Karnad's genius but also encourages a deeper appreciation for the intricate interplay of myth and symbolism in theatre. "Myth and Symbolism in the Plays of GirishKarnad" is an indispensable read for anyone interested in Indian theatre, literature, or the enduring power of myth and symbolism in storytelling. It illuminates the transformative journey that Karnad's plays embark upon, where ancient myths and contemporary narratives converge to create a unique and lasting theatrical legacy.

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