

Echoes of the Past: Mythical and Folkloric Dimensions in Girish Karnad's Plays

Dr. Sunita Mishra*

Abstract

Girish Karnad, a seminal voice in modern Indian theatre, is renowned for his innovative use of myth and folklore to address contemporary issues. His plays masterfully bridge the gap between India's rich traditional heritage and the concerns of modern life. By drawing from classical epics like the Mahabharata, oral tales, and regional folk narratives, Karnad reimagines ancient stories to explore themes of identity, power, gender, duty, and existential crisis. This paper examines the role of myth and folklore in shaping the thematic and structural framework of Karnad's major plays—Yayati, The Fire and The Rain, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, Tughlaq, and Tale-Danda. Each of these works exemplifies his unique ability to contemporize age-old narratives while maintaining their cultural authenticity. Karnad does not merely retell myths; he transforms them into powerful commentaries on social injustice, political disillusionment, and human psychology. His integration of traditional performance styles such as Yakshagana further enhances the theatrical experience, creating a dynamic interplay between the past and present. Through this exploration, the paper highlights how Karnad's dramaturgy reinvigorates Indian theatre and underscores the continued relevance of myth and folklore in understanding and critiquing modern society.

Keywords: Girish Karnad, Indian English Drama, Myth in Literature, Folklore, Modern Indian Theatre, Mythological Adaptation, Cultural Identity, Traditional Narratives, Contemporary Indian Drama

Introduction

Modern Indian theatre reflects a rich confluence of traditional heritage and contemporary concerns. Among its most influential figures, Girish Karnad stands out for his unique ability to blend classical Indian narrative forms with modern dramatic techniques. While many of his contemporaries—such as Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar—focused on social realism and urban issues, Karnad returned time and again to India's ancient myths, epics, legends, and folktales as primary sources for his plays.

*Research Scholar, University of Allahabad, Allahabad