

STUDY MATERIALS

UG Sem 3 / (BA / BCom Programme)

SUBJECT : MIL-3 (ENGLISH)

By: PROF. ASHOK KUMAR DASH

Topic : INTRODUCTION TO GIRISH KARNAD

Girish Karnad (19 May 1938 - 10 June 2019) was a Kannada writer, playwright, and an Indian actor and film director. He was a Rhodes Scholar. He predominantly worked in South Indian cinema and Bollywood. His rise as a playwright in the 1960s, marked the coming of age of modern Indian playwriting in Kannada, just as Badal Sircar did in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. He was a recipient of the 1999 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India.

For four decades Karnad composed plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He translated his plays into English and received acclaim. He was conferred with 'Padma Shree' and 'Padma Bhushan' ~~awards~~ by the Govt. of India and won four Filmfare Awards.

Girish Karnad was born at Matheran near Bombay in 1938. He had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford from 1960 to 1963 and a Bhabha Fellow from 1970 to 1972. He was also a visiting Professor and resident Scholar at the Chicago University for sometime.

Karnad originally wanted to be a poet but circumstances made him a dramatist. He was greatly influenced by

Contd... 2

Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Shaw. Another reason for his choosing to be playwright was that there were no good plays in India, as he thought.

Karnad's first play is 'Yayati' and it came out in 1961, when Karnad was only 23 years old. It was written by Karnad on his way to England, and it is very much like 'Antigone'. It is a play about personal responsibility. It was an immediate success on the stage when it was produced in Kannada. His interpretation of the old myth on the exchange of ages between father and son puzzled and angered conventional critics but the enlightened readers and critics appreciated it for its contemporaneity. To them "Karnad's unheroic hero was a great experience." As a reinterpretation of an ancient myth 'Yayati' is a great achievement.

Karnad's second play is 'Tughlaq' (1964). It was originally written in Kannada but was later translated into English by Karnad himself. It was an immediate success, and at once catapulted him to fame, to the first rank of Indo-Anglian dramatists. It is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India. Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan, who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and godless.

Contd... 3

Page 2

~~The~~ Karnad's third play is 'Hayavadana' (1971). It is a bold experiment in the use of folk motifs. The story is taken from the ancient 'Kathasaritsagara', though the immediate source is Thomas Mann's version of it in 'The Transported Heads'. The irony of the transported heads on the bodies of two friends, who stand at opposite poles of personality viz, the intellectual versus the activist is employed here to raise the problem of identity. The sub-plot of the man with a horse's head, who achieves integration when he finally becomes fully equine, brings out the contrast between the fundamental simplicity and the essential complexity of animal and human life respectively.

— x —