**Remembering Girish Karnad**

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The beliefs of secularism, societal fairness, and gender parity that Girish Karnad, an Indian actor and author 1938-2019, verbalised without dread are echoed in the dramas he composed. In his absence, we can explore these for a better vision and amusement. When we do so, we furthermore recuperate Karnad’s views on gender, noticeably expressed in the women characters with whom he populated his theatre. Karnad, one of the pioneers in the Kannada theatre and the Theatre of Roots movement, exposes women in an unusual light where the women waver between opposing conscious and unconscious yearnings.

Karnad provided his woman characters not just an opinion but in the core of the plot. The women characters in Karnad’s plays are not only vital for the progress of the storyline but also to what Karnad attempts to inform us about the world in which we reside. And in fact the improved world in which we can dwell. Though transitory their entrances might be, Karnad’s womenfolk are usually free in thinking and action, even when they are positioned inside the repressive limitations of patriarchal configurations. From the rulers of the medieval era in his historic dramas such as Tughlaq (1964) and Tale-Danda (1990) to modern women in A Heap Of Broken Images (2006) and Wedding Album (2006), these characters proceed with an awareness of their individual drive and the lucid intention of realising their desires and wants.

In the dramas which depicted small narrative accounts in the Indian epics, Karnad gives us with another bold option where the women exercise their bodies in order to redress their earlier disgrace, such as Sharmishtha in Yayati (1961). In Hayavadana (1971) and Nagamandala (1988), founded on Indian folk stories, Karnad reaches beyond the apparent struggle against patriarchal prejudice and forefronts female sexual want, rendering it the dominant force behind the drama itself. In both dramas, the love-sex trio concerning two men and one woman surges and dominates for what the woman desires. Scheming Padmini and Rani are stimulated by the equivalent factor: to obtain the sexual gratification they have found with menfolk who are not their spouses. To hold this desire, they will execute whatsoever it takes and employ everything that the gods offer them. Karnad presents Padmini’s and Rani’s sexuality without projecting conviction on his characters, in fact, he confirms that we are understanding to what they fancy and the ways they utilise to acquire it.

In most of Karnad’s dramas, he depicts a woman pursuing both love and physical gratification as she crosses the limits set before her by an Indian patriarchal society

King Yayati’s account in the Sanskrit epic is a piece of the power struggle between the gods and the fiends and Hayavadana (1971) is grounded on one of the puzzles in the Vikrama-Vetala sequence. From each of these, Karnad skilfully digs the bubbling sexuality that reinforces the plot and becomes the fulcrum of his dramas. Furthermore, in the dramas, it is the sexual longing and sexual activity of the female character that drives the narrative and generates the theatrical strain on stage.

In all of the above mentioned dramas, a woman pursues both love and physical gratification, settling these through crossing the limits that were put for her by her Indian patriarchal society. With the youthful and impulsive Padmini in Hayavadana (1971), we have a literal endeavour to fuse the dual male kinds, the intellectual thinker and the physically attractive wrestler. Rani in Nagamandala (1988) strives to settle with her ruthless day-time husband with the man who seems like a complete fantasy lover at night. The drama encourages us to think that no two men make love in a similar way. Therefore, when did Rani understand that she was sleeping with two men and when did she choose that her secret was worth preserving? Karnad leaves it for the audience to decide.

Karnad’s dramas highlight the sorrows of women and their drive to discover their way out of the trappings of the social system that does not let a woman to even breathe without a check. Dialogue or the verbal expression usually influence the relations of power in a social set up. Thus, Karnad endeavoured to ascertain the broad patriarchal customs threatening the existence of a woman held in the trappings of day to day life.

It is not at all a chance that Karnad conveys the volatile subjects of class, gender, and female sexuality so frequently in his dramas. Certainly, he is revealing to us that we will progress only when the most susceptible amongst us are given importance and also empowered. This is the politics that we will recall him with. Nothing would be a better homage to his remembrance than channelling our powers to create that important transformation in our world and also in our hearts.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan there are parents who discourage their daughters from laughing out loud at home, warning that the angels of heavens turn away from a home where they hear the resonance of juvenile girls laughing and satan enters the home instead. However, there are more pressing issues to discourse. Such restrictions and warnings to daughters reveal the established social power interactions that characterise and restrict the lives of women in Pakistan.

Although most of Pakistani theatre dramas are about women and their problems, nonetheless they are composed in a way of light-hearted romantic entertainments. Commercial theatre, with its scandalous comedy, has a direct effect on the sanities of the spectators causing them to be unmindful to the communal evils of the time. Its only purpose is to soothe the theatre crowds to a mental sleep through their exceedingly amusing slapstick humour. These theatrical performances include components of songs and vulgar dance moves where mainly the women are represented as avaricious and whores with the main objective to entice a big number of spectators.

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