

Influence of Brechtian Theory on Girish Karnad's Dramas

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Abstract:

People often say that drama is the most important part of sacred books. The goal of theatre has been to entertain and please the audience since the beginning of time. Plays have been written by both Indian and Western playwrights to teach and entertain. But how do these plays change the people who watch them? Aristotle is the most well-known theorist who says that the purpose of drama is "catharsis," but many others have also argued for dramatic ends. This study looks at how Brechtian theory, which is different from Aristotelian principles, affected Girish Karnad's plays Hayavadana and Yayati. From a postcolonial point of view, Bertolt Brecht's "Epic Theatre," which describes the purpose of theatre as "anti-cathartic," is more important than Aristotle's "mimetic theory." He says that the purpose of drama is not just to make people feel sad or scared, but also to make them think about where the play came from and what it means. Karnad, who is influenced by Brechtian theatre, changes it to fit the Indian culture and adds new things to it. This paper looks at how Girish Karnad updated old myths and how Brechtian ideas affected the plays listed above.

Keywords: Brechtian theory, Hayavadana, Yayati, Aristotle's mimetic theory, Karnad, theatre etc.,

The Indian English theatre of the 20th century is a mix of eastern and western ideas. It is a result of the British Empire and western education. Great dramatists like Nissim Ezekiel, Asif Currimbhoy, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad gave Indian play a new lease on life. All of these playwrights have made important contributions to modern culture by looking at the myths and history of Indian society. Girish Karnad, one of these great playwrights, is a multitalented artist who has done well as an actor, director, poet, screenwriter, and translator, as well as a writer. He started to develop his dramatic range during a time of direct conflict between the country's cultural past and its colonial past, between the appeal of Western ways of thinking and our own traditions, and between the different futures that became

possible once the common goal of political freedom was reached. He is part of the previous generation of Indian playwrights who worked to change the Indian theatre.

Even though the situation is tragic, the Indian mind looks at it differently than the Western mind. Several of the authors mentioned above have tried on occasion to mix eastern and western theatre styles. For this reason, it is important to look at how the idea of dramaturgy came from Aristotle, how German playwright Bertolt Brecht used facts to argue against it, and how popular Indian English dramatist Girish Karnad used a non-Aristotelian technique in his plays *Hayavadana* and *Yayati*.

Raghunath Karnad is a poet, playwright, actor, director, critic, translator, and cultural administrator. He has been making work in his home country for decades, which is why people call him a "renaissance man" (Kalidas & Merchant, "Renaissance Man"). Dharamveer Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, and Vijay Tendulkar have made a modern Indian national theatre with their work together. Karnad's reputation as a playwright is one of a kind. Several of his plays that were written in Kannad have been translated into English and other Indian languages. Except for a few pieces, none of Karnad's plays are written in English or Konkani, the languages he wanted to become famous for internationally (his native language). Instead, he writes them in Kannad, the language of the people who raised him, and then translates them into English, the language he speaks now as an adult. Because Karnad based the play on myths and fables, it has an immediate appeal. Since the audience already knows about the topic, they are interested to see how the dramatist deals with the audience's point of view and the play's main problems.

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran to a family of Saraswat Konkani in 1938. He grew up in the countryside of Maharashtra, where he saw Yakshagana and the Natak Mandali and was deeply moved by them. In 1958, he got his bachelor's degree from Karnataka College, Dharwad. He then went to Mumbai University to get his master's degree. He applied for and got the Rhodes Scholarship, which paid for his Master of Arts in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Oxford University in England. After he came back from England in 1963, he joined Oxford University Press in Madras because he loved art and culture so much. He was put in charge of the institute in Pune, India, in 1974. In 1987, almost 15 years later, he was named Scholar in Residence at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. Girish Karnad is one of the most important playwrights of our time, and his plays have become shorthand for originality, innovation, and skill. He has won both the Padma Bhushan and the Jnanapith Award, which are India's highest honours. He was also

given the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Prize. Girish Karnad, on the other hand, wanted to write plays and not poems. Most of Karnad's work is for the Kannada theatre.

Since the 1980s, the study of drama has made a lot of important steps forward. After playwrights like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, and Badal Sarkar came along, English-language plays written in India started to get noticed around the world. Here are some thoughts on what Girish Karnad's plays are about and how they work.

The great Greek philosopher and theorist Aristotle has been talking about dramaturgical principles for over 2,000 years. His ideas about how a play is made and performed stayed the same. Aristotle thought that tragedy is a better style of theatre than epic because it is more focused and uses less words. It must have a relieving effect on the audience, taking away their sadness and fear. He says that tragedy is "the reproduction of an action that is serious and, because of its size, complete in itself" in a dramatic style instead of a narrative style, with scenes that make you feel sad or scared to get rid of those feelings. This idea of tragedy was questioned by Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright who fought for "non-Aristotelian" theatre. In the end, he decides to use the term "alienation effect" instead of Aristotle's terms "catharsis," "empathy," and "imitation." As a rationalist, Brecht put together different kinds of theatre and came up with the idea of "alienation theatre." He pushed for "Epic Theatre," which he called a type of theatre that encourages critical thinking. In his non-Aristotelian Epic Theatre, pity and fear are replaced by a willingness to help and a desire to understand how things work.

Bertolt Brecht is a character in drama who is hard to understand. His work is worth a lot because he has had a huge effect on theatre around the world. He is well-known for his ground-breaking efforts to improve theatre. He introduced the idea of a "epic-drama" to German theatre. But, as he said, the term "epic drama" was not a new one. It is very similar to the "Neue Sachlichkeit or Sachlich" movement (German for "Matter of Fact"). Brechtian ideas about epic drama were so popular that they had an effect far beyond communist countries. In this case, the word "epic" is misleading; it should be looked at through Brecht's idea of "epic-drama." He came up with the idea of "epic-drama" on his own.

He wanted to show through play how important estrangement or the A-effect is. He has talked about his theory of alienation in terms of "epic-drama" and other new ways of experimenting with drama, even on the stage. It was so powerful and surprising to Europeans that theatres all over the world started using it. However, Marathi theatre in India had been using it for a long time. From the beginning of Marathi theatre, the folk-art form "Tamasha" already had this idea

of epic drama with a "A-effect." It wasn't known or explained as a theory or specific form to get the desired A-effect, and it wasn't studied in depth to give it the importance and value it deserved as the Marathi dramatic arts developed.

Its shocking effect on "World Theatre": By taking the word "epic" from Aristotle, Brecht wanted to show that he had made a new kind of antidrama that went against the history of plays. The word "epic theatre," which was first used in Germany in 1920, is now strongly associated with Brecht. He wrote about his idea of epic theatre in the notes that came with *The Opera Rise and Fall of the Town of Mahogany*. "Modern theatre is epic theatre," he said in 1930. (Brecht 13). "Epic theatre is definitely not Aristotelian because it messes up the time sequence that Aristotle thought was an important part of tragedy" (Heinz 56). Brecht doesn't agree with Aristotle's idea of what an epic is. He doesn't agree with his ideas of coherence and consistency. In the Round Heads and Pointed Heads notes, he wrote that "certain incidents in the play should be treated as self-contained scenes and raised by means of inscriptions." He also said that the goal of epic theatre is to "lead the audience not to feel intensely but to judge critically, to see that the characters are not determined by fate and human nature but by social music and sound effects and the actors' way of playing above the level of the everyday, the obvious, and the expected" (Brecht 221). He didn't agree with Aristotle's theory of catharsis. "According to Brecht, the point of circumstances is to get people to leave the theatre feeling intellectually refreshed and ready to make Marxist changes" (Arthur 77). After Ibsen, Brecht was the one who made people try new things in drama. After a lot of practise, Brecht created "a form of theatre in which men are shown to make themselves and their situations." At its core, this is a dialectical shape, which comes straight from the Marxist theory of history, which says that man makes himself within predetermined limits. (Reymond 1971).

Karnad was influenced by key parts of Brechtian theory, like the alienation effect, interruptive devices, complex seeing, and the anti-cathartic effect, but he found them in his own theatrical background. He was very disappointed and unhappy with traditional theatre, so he chose Brecht's epic theatre, which makes the audience feel even more alone. In his plays, he used Brechtian dramaturgy to great effect. Like Brecht, Karnad uses history to create what is called the "alienation effect." Bentley explains how history plays are contradictory: "History plays are not true to history. Karnad has tried to make his themes more modern by using mythological traditions in his plays. In *Hayavadana* and *Yayati*, for example, he focuses on the problem of finding one's identity and being unhappy, respectively. R.K. Dhawan says that a play may be

judged by how well it does onstage. A playwright needs a real theatre to test out his work, see how it affects the audience as a whole, and learn how to make his performance better. And Brecht's epic theatre turned out to be a living stage for Karnad. The audience not only let out feelings they had been holding in, but they also analysed and talked about the tragic characters' situations.

Hayavadana is based on a story from *Vetalpanchavimshika* and is about "searching for wholeness." Even though Karnad thinks *The Transposed Heads* is just a fantasy story, he has relied on Thomas Mann's retelling of the story. The Indian story shows a moral dilemma, while Mann's analysis of the Western worldview shows that the human body is a tool that can help people reach their destiny.

Comparing how the West changed Indian mythology to how the West changed Indian mythology, Karnad says that even switching the heads of the main characters can't free them from their basic psychological needs. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad uses a mix of traditional Indian theatre techniques to show how tragically useless it is for people to try to be perfect. In line with the Brechtian theory of identity crisis, Karnad says that identity confusion shows how uncertain a person's personality is. Both of *Hayavadana's* heroes, Devdatta, who has a smart mind, and Kapila, who has a strong body, are messed up and missing parts. Kapila feels pain, which makes him think about how unhappy people are in general. He asks, "Why should anyone put up with this crazy dance of unfinished business?" As Brecht tried to get the audience to stop identifying with the actors and the actors to stop identifying with their roles, Karnad rewrote an old Indian story in a way that is very different from the originals and shows a brave attempt to give an old story a new meaning. This shows that it is very important from a human and international point of view right now. Brecht's main goal was to get his audience to criticise and fight against what they saw instead of passively accepting it. *Hayavadana's* main character also complains about his situation. The story ends when the main character, who is half horse and half human, completely changes into a horse by following the rule "head over body." He is the child of a princess from Karnataka and an Arabian horse. This is a clear symbol for land and woman. *Hayavadana* (the horse-headed guy) needs to find a way out of his situation. Since God doesn't give him the power to defeat it, he runs to the Bhagavata as fast as he can. Here, the playwright presents the argument to the audience so that they can decide what to think about it. In the play *Hayavadana*, Karnad tried to create a similar emotional distance between the characters and the action on stage so that the audience could understand this level of

intellectual understanding. Brecht's social and political goal as a playwright and the driving force behind his dramaturgy was to make the audience think about and maybe even try to change the world. The audience would be emotionally detached from the action and characters, but intellectually empowered to do so. Many Indian dramatic conventions are used in *Hayavadana*. These include the use of the Bhagavata, the mixing of unrelated stories, and the merging of the human and non-human worlds. He is the link between the other characters and the action in the play. He is also the way to find out what a key character is thinking. Karnad says that they "allow the simultaneous display of multiple viewpoints, of different ways of looking at the main subject." As in Act II, when Padmini finds Kapila in the forest with his head turned upside down, Bhagavata signals the end of the action by saying, "There is a ten-minute break now." Please take a sip of tea, think about the situation, and come back with your ideas. We will keep looking into this." So, *Hayavadana* is a mythological story set in the modern world. The author analyses the situation of the main characters, but this doesn't lead to catharsis. Instead, it makes the reader think about the real reasons for happiness and conflict, changing the tragic ending into a happy one.

The other play being thought about is called "*Yayati*." It uses the Indian mythical ruler Yayati as a symbol for the modern man as he is shown in modern literature. Karnad took the story from the famous Indian epic Mahabharata and from other Puranas. He is a person whose wants hurt and trouble him. This seems to be the biggest mystery in the world, since he has had his son's youth for a long time even though he has lived in terrible poverty. He is the perfect example of a modern man who feels alone in the world. The play starts with the wedding of Yayati and Devayani, who is the daughter of Shukracharya, the leader of the demons. Karnad is said to have been a good example of Yayati's excitement about life, which later turns into coldness and apathy. When he asks his sons to trade their youth for his old age so he can enjoy physical pleasures again, his lust is at its worst. After spending years trying to satisfy his wants through indulgence but failing, Karnad reveals Yayati's love for life's pleasures, which eventually turns into aloofness and detachment. Yayati is a great example of the modern common man, who has many good things in his life but is still impatient and unhappy. He gives the boy to Pooru, his youngest son, but soon realises that his behaviour isn't good enough. He feels like an outcast commoner because of this. When Yayati's disenchantment reaches saturation, it is full. Even though he has eaten his fill, he still feels empty and unhappy. He came to his senses in the end. He went back to Puru and told him, "Son, giving in to sensual

needs will never satisfy them, just like pouring oil on a fire won't put it out. Get your old age back and run the kingdom with wisdom and skill."

Yayati went back to the forest and spent the rest of his life thinking about Brahman, which is the ultimate reality. In the end, he got to paradise. In the play, he also feels let down by life and has lost faith in it. Yayati has everything that anyone could want. He was born a prince in the strongest kingdom of his time, and he grew up to be the best warrior of his time. He married the daughter of the most powerful sage, had another princess as his wife, and had many sons, but he was never able to live a happy life because of his never-ending sensual urges, which made him a sad figure in the end. His long-time of sexual pleasure shows how silly it is to look for happiness in things that won't last long. Indulgence makes thirst worse instead of making it go away. At the end of each peak of happiness, you feel sad that it was over so quickly, and then you want to relive the pleasure. Instead of feeling sorry for him, people could see what was wrong with his life and feel how alone he was. So, Yayati also believes in what Brechtian theory calls the "alienation effect" and "complex seeing," which "keeps the audience from losing itself completely and passively in the character created by the actor and, as a result, makes the audience a conscious, critical observer."

Even though the main characters in these plays get what they want, they still feel incomplete and alone. In both of his plays, Karnad tries to make even myths more modern and pull the audience away from the usual rules of theatre to get them to think more critically. Karnad's plays have a romantic feel to them because he uses mythology and traditional stories to keep India's rich cultural history alive. Even though his plays are full of old Indian traditions, myths, folklore, and history, they deal with modern issues like identity crises and how the common man feels left out. In Aristotelian theatre, the playwright gets the effect he or she wants by putting the audience into a "trance-like" state. The focus is on what is going to happen. But in Brechtian theatre, the focus is on why the event happened, what caused it, and how it can be stopped from happening again." He thought that a theatre of illusion and identification was dirty, and he also thought that identifying with the characters on stage was also dirty. The theatre shouldn't try to make an illusion of how things are right now. The epic theatre is all about the past, and it keeps reminding the audience that they are just hearing about things that happened in the past. Brecht didn't let the audience connect with any of the characters so that he could keep a critical distance. Instead, they should stay separate by keeping their identities different, foreign, and alien.

One can't ignore the effects of western dramatic theatre because it inspires local dramatists to focus on being unique and effective. Karnad's need for realism led him to use a lot of Brechtian ideas in his plays. "Epic Theatre" by Brechtian is different from "Theatre of Illusion" by Aristotle. Karnad has focused on the emotional release of the audience in their individualised states, in addition to recreating existing norms and customs. Karnad uses mythology from the past in a deep way to talk about the mental pain and problems of modern man. He doesn't use the myths as a whole. Instead, he picks out the parts that interest him and fills in the rest with his own ideas to make interesting stories.

Karnad's skill is at its highest when he imagines his father and son switching places in age in *Yayati* and when he mixes up the heads and bodies of his friends in *Hayavadana*. But these unlikely events aren't taken into account because they are looked at through the lens of modern psychology. Both Brecht and Karnad looked into the depths of modern problems by making constant comparisons between the past and the present. By doing this, they showed and explained how modern people relate to the past. In addition to getting rid of "pity and terror," the audience is also able to figure out what's going on in a dramatic situation. As he walks the path that Brecht made, Karnad rejects the classical ideas of pity and terror in favour of the alienation of the modern man.

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