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17.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall study

- The introduction to Modern Indian Theatre
- The works of Girish Karnad , his contemporaries and their style of writing
- Cross cultural transformation of the folktale of *Hayavadana*

After completion of the unit, you should be

- Aware of the term Modern Indian Theatre in detail
- Able to understand Karnad's style of writing and technicality in his works
- Aware of Folktale of Hayavadana and its cross cultural connections.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Last two units on Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* mainly deal with brief introduction to Karnad and his works, detailed synopsis of the play *Hayavadana*, how the play deals with various themes and some of the

symbols in the play. This unit is taking you further in the area of Modern Indian Theatre where Karnad stands as a major literary figure. Here we will get brief idea of the term Modern Indian Theatre which incorporates comments from various literary scholars such as Govind Deshpande, Nandi Bhatiya and others. We will also understand how critics receive Karnad's works and their comments upon his literary style. And last but not the least we will study the folktale of *Hayavadana* in comparative framework. Now let us begin with our discussion on the term Modern Indian Theatre.

17.2 BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MODERN INDIAN THEATRE

The term Modern Indian Theatre is a complex term as Nandi Bhatiya in her book *Modern Indian Theatre: A Reader* tries to define the term. She rejects the idea of periodization attached to the Modern Indian Theatre as she says, "modern" Indian theater is not linked to a particular period, but to a style that combines elements of "traditional and European, classical, folk and ritualistic, and rural and urban forms and practices". However, various critics have variety of opinions in this matter as G.P.Deshpande in the introduction of his edited work on Modern Indian Drama argues that the hunt for Authentic Indian Theatre leads to two directions: i) A Comparable Indian Theatre and ii) a notion of theatre which is civilisation-specific. According to him pre modern theatre was highly Sanskritized and highly influenced by European romanticism. We can say that European romanticism made us believe in pre modern Indian theatre as 'the Indian Theatre which is timeless or eternal'. Talking about how in the 19th century our early writers were dealing with this classical heritage Deshpande says, "Michael Madhusudan Dun wrote a play on *Sharmistha* in Bangla in 1856 while Kirloskar narrated the story of *Subhadra* (again from the *Mahabharata*) in Marathi less than a quarter century later. There was a Malayalam adaptation of *Shakuntala* in 1880 and so on. Vishnudas Bhave turned to *Yakshagaan*, *akhyan* and other folk and traditional forms to create modern, proscenium theatre beginning 1843". Colonial time period brought a huge difference in Indian Theatre. According to Nandi Bhatiya, the beginning of modern theatre can be identified in the colonial encounter that resulted in the influence of European models on local theatrical traditions. Further, talking about colonial influence on Indian theatre Deshpande writes, the new theatre came to be written and staged in the shadow of the British rule. The traditional-theatre in India was hardly bound by the text. In the encounter with Europeans, Indian playwrights had come into contact with "theatre of words". Talking about integration of Shakespeare in colonial Indian Theatre, Deshpande states: Colonial theatre writing was greatly influenced by Shakespeare. A new prose style developed—a style which could be described as Anglo-native prose-style. Long, flowing sentences, ornate speech, Sanskritization of speech were some of its specialities. Thus, colonial period according to

Deshpande was marked with new drama which seemed to stand aloof from the drama we had traditionally known.

Talking about post-Independence Theatre, Aparna Dharwadker argues that the initial period of Post-Independence was a period of disjunction from “the commercialism of the Parsi stage (dominant until the 1930s) and the radical populism of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (dominant during the 1940s)” as both of them failed to provide the proper model for the development of urban drama. Talking of this time period, she states: This sense of disconnection from the immediate past led the more ambitious post-independence playwrights to rethink the issues of dramatic form and presentational style, to forge radical connections with an older past as well as the postcolonial present in India, and to put the resources of world theatre (especially modern Euro-American theatre) to novel use. This post-independence period had seen on the one hand establishment of National School of Drama with its goal to set the middle ground between pre-colonial revivalism and imitative Westernization and on the other hand, also witnessed the revival of Sanskrit theatre around 1956-57 with activities like beginning of the Kalidasa Festival in Ujjain. However, the time period from 1960s to 1970s is considered as ‘the ‘Renaissance of Indian Theatre’ as Samik Bandyopadhyay in his 1998 essay “Renaissance of Indian theatre” claims. *Ananta Patha* (multiple texts) is the significant aspect of 1960s theatre which focuses on different productions by different directors of the same play. Talking about this phenomenon, Deshpande states:

Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq*, a Kannada play, was done by Alkazi in Hindi and by Satyadev Dubey in Marathi. These productions were not only in two different languages but also brought us face to face with very different *Tughlaqs*—one *avatara* of a play with another *avatara* of the same play in contention with each other. Such “non-antagonistic contradictions” add charm to theatre.

The theatre during the time period of 1970s witnesses intense experimentation and the collapse of the well-made play on the one hand and engagement with Brechtian theatrical form in combination with local forms and conventions. Playwrights who became an active critique of the nation through its theatrical forms returned to the folk. K.N. Pannikar experimented with traditional dance idioms from Kerala, Habib Tanvir brought folk actors from Chhattisgarh, and Karamh (Karnataka) used Yakshagana in his drama. However, this kind of plays also got failed sometimes to attract the attention of modern, urban Indian audience. In the next section we will discuss the overall scenario of Modern Indian Theatre and Girish Karnad and his style of writing among other playwrights.

- **Check Your Progress : 1**

- **Q.1 Fill in the gaps**

- 1) Colonial Indian Theatre was highly influenced by _____
- 2) Pre Modern Indian Theatre was heavily influenced by _____

3) _____ is the play written by Michael Madhusudan Dun in the year 1856.

Q.2 Answer the following questions.

1) What are the characteristics of Anglo-native prose-style?

2) Who are the major playwrights of post-modern era?

17.3 GIRISH KARNAD AS A MODERN INDIAN PLAYWRIGHT

In the previous units, we have already discussed a brief overview of Girish Karnad's works. In this unit we are trying to understand Karnad and his unique style of writing. But before that we should understand the overall scenario of Modern Indian Drama in general. This category includes the playwrights such as Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Chandrasekhar Kambar, K.N. Panikkar, Satish Alekar, Utpal Dutt, Habib Tanvir, Mahasweta Devi, G. P. Deshpande, Mahesh Elkunchwar, and Girish Karnad.

Deshpande in his essay states that Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sircar changed the concerns of modern drama and introduced a language which was an antithesis of the pseudo-Shakespearean prose that dominated Indian theatre writing for well over a century. Vijay Tendulkar according to Deshpande is known for his 'Tendulkarian modernity'

These playwrights approach playwriting 'as a serious literary activity and drama as a complex verbal art, potentially connected to, but also independent of, theatrical practice'. Thus, their plays neither participate in political performance nor are part of commercial entertainment business. According to Dharwadkar, "Each playwright is committed to an indigenous language (rather than English) as his medium of original composition, and hence to the literary and performative traditions of the region where that language is dominant. But each has also participated actively in the process of interlingual translation that gives his plays national (and often international) visibility, and establishes them as contemporary classics."

Born in the year 1938 in Matheran and brought up in Dharwad, Girish Karnad went to Oxford University with Rhodes scholarship. He returned to India in 1960 and worked for Oxford University Press in Madras for six years. Talking about his first play *Yayati*, Karnad talks about the influence of European playwrights such as Camus and Sartre on Puru who is the central character of *Yayati*. We have already got brief introduction to some of the significant works of Girish Karnad such as *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadatia*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Yayati*, *Bali: The Sacrifice* and others. His one of the masterpieces *Tughlaq* according to Ranjit Hoskote, “is a play about the inevitability of corruption... showing up Tughlaq’s cruel side. The play is full of allusions, resonant with Shakespearan situations and Ibsenian modes. It combines a historical flavour with a contemporary relevance” In praise of Karnad, *The Tribune* writes: .. There have been a galaxy of litterateurs in Indian languages whose works can be classified as the world’s best and translated not only in English but other languages. Girish Karnad is one of them.’ Giving his views on *Naga-Mandala*, Makarand Paranjape writes: “This is a fine play, powerful, gripping, and exciting... It uses tradition creatively and sensitively... It is fast-paced, well plotted, coherent, and controlled. The central conflict is sharply defined and brilliantly executed” In his conversation with Kirtinath Kurtkoti on how his play *Hayavadana* became the ‘theatre-game’ and how with its complex appeals it redefines the form of drama, Karnad talks about his concept of drama:

After writing *Tughlaq*, I participated in many seminars on drama, in Karnataka as well as other States. Wherever I went scholars always discussed the importance and the usefulness of our folk theatre. I did not have a rural background and the only theatre I was acquainted with was urban commercial theatre. I do not have any live contact with folk theatre but I was curious about the folk form of theatre. I had to acquire knowledge of the conventions and technicalities of this theatre. But what I realized at the end of my study was a surprise. Now I am convinced that there is no difference between the theatre conventions of classical drama and those of folk drama. The principles that govern their dramatic aesthetics are the same. For example; the function of the Sutradhara is the same as that of the Bhagavata of a folk play. Discussing the writing style of Karnad, Dharwadkar emphasis how Karnad’s plays use the narrative of myth, history and folklore to evoke an ancient world which gets reflected in contemporary context. Starting from his first play *Yayati* (1961) to *Hittina Hunja* which was rewritten in English as *Bali: The Secrifice* (2002) have conspicuous connection with myth and mythology. She states:

The dominant presence of the ancient and medieval past in Karnad’s drama is a result of both personal and cultural compulsions. He has argued from the beginning that the deep-rooted narratives of myth, oral history, and legend constitute a vital connection between an author and his or her audience, and theatre is a particularly powerful medium for the communication of such culturally resonant fictions. Karnad belongs

perhaps to the last generation of *urban* Indian writers who encountered the ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions of myth, poetry, history, legend, and folklore at first hand in their earliest childhood, and internalized them deeply enough to have their adult authorial selves shaped by them. Such a vibrant culture of orality is no longer available to the Western playwright, and Karnad is fully aware that it is being rapidly eroded in India by the processes of urbanization, Westernized education, and economic development. Orality and print, however, are also carefully balanced in his oeuvre. All his major plays, from *Yayati* to *Agni Mattu Mali* and *Bali*, originate in remembered stories but depend extensively on printed sources for their textual complexity and weight.

Discussing about his play *Hayavadana*, Karnad says, “I remember that the idea of my play *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in my head right in the middle of an argument with B. V. Karanth... about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre’s relationship to music’. In the following section we will discuss about the various versions of the folktale narrated in the play *Hayavadana*.

• **Check your progress : 2**

Q.1 Write whether the given sentences are True or False

- 1) History and myth are important aspects of Girish Karnad’s plays.

- 2) *Bali* is originally written in English and later on translated in Kannada

- 3) The function of the Sutradhara is different from that of Bhagvanta

- 4) *Tughlaq* is a play about the inevitability of corruption _____
- 5) Karnad’s childhood background led him to the use of folk narrative in theatre _____

17.4 REVISITING THE FOLKTALE

We have got the idea of Modern Indian Theatre and Karnad’s position among the modern playwrights in the previous sections. This section focuses the play *Hayavadana* in terms of its folktale. *Hayavadana* combines a twelfth-century folktale about ‘transposed heads’ as our previous units describe in detail. *The Hindu* celebrates this quite popular play which offers ‘a path-breaking model for a quintessentially ‘Indian’ theatre in postcolonial times’ in the following words: ‘*Hayavadana* is full of humour, sly comments on politics, and comic hyperbole... a richly layered play, intersperse[d] [with] typical Indian elements like the folk tale...’. We are aware of the various themes and symbols attached to this one of the most celebrated plays. However, in this section, we are going to understand the cross cultural study of the folktale narrated in *Hayavadana* in a comparative framework.

In his article “Switching Heads and Cultures: Transformation of an Indian Myth by Thomas Mann and Girish Karnad” Anand Mahadevan

argues that the Indian myth provide huge source of folktales or narratives of switching the heads. He strengthen his arguments by giving examples of lord Ganesha, the elephant headed god who was beheaded by his own father and when the father Lord Shiva realized his mistake, restores his son to life by attaching the head of an elephant. Another example that he gives is from *Kathasaritsagar* written around AD 1070 where the story of King Vikramaditya, who is asked to fetch a corpse and this corpse is possessed by demon in between and demon every time narrates a story with a puzzle at the end and the moment king answers the puzzle he flies away. The last story is *The Heads That Got Switched* where “a washerman, Dhavala, falls in love with Madanasundari, the beautiful daughter of another washerman, and marries her. While he is enjoying the fruits of a happy marriage, Madanasundari's brother visits them and requests that all three make a trip to the festival of the goddess Parvati. Dhavala enters the great temple of Parvati empty-handed and in a fit of religious excess beheads himself with the sacrificial sword as an offering to the goddess. Madanasundari's brother discovers the beheaded corpse and in his grief beheads himself with the same sword. Madanasundari becomes anxious when both men fail to return and enters the temple. Confronted by the horrific sight before her, she too decides to end her life and fashions a noose from vines in order to hang herself. However, the goddess, pleased with their devotion, stops Madanasundari from committing suicide and allows her to bring the two men back to life by reattaching their heads to their bodies. Unfortunately, in her haste and excitement Madanasundari puts her brother's head on the husband's body and vice versa. The story ends with a puzzle the king must answer correctly: "Which of these two mixed up people is now her husband?" The king replies, "The one with the husband's head is her husband because the head rules the limbs and personal identity depends on the head;" thus affirming the superiority of intellect (verstand) over emotion (gefiihle) and spirit (geist) over body”. Thomas Mann in his novella with the similar plot where Brahmin Schridaman falls for Sita and Nanda, a cowherd and very good friend of Schridaman arranges their marriage. The story follows the Indian myth and Sita transposes the head and starts her life with head of Schridaman and body of Nanda. Unlike Vikarm’s story Mann’s novella does not end here. It is continue with the second episode where after having a child called Samadhi, Sita runs back to Nanda and finally both Nanda and Schridaman kills each other and Sita immolates herself on their burning pyre (sati). This plot which resembles to the plot of *Hayavadana* and which we have studied in detail in the previous units is actually Thomas Mann’s own imagination and creativity. The significant aspect of this folktale which was not available in *Kathasaritsagar* and which is conspicuous in Karnad’s play is class, caste and race distinction. Both Mann and Karnad uses the power of myth, in words of Madhvan to show how the social differences created by castes and class are amplified by modern economic and political structures in a deeply segmented post-colonial Indian society”.

• **Check your progress 3:**

Q.1 Fill in the blanks.

- 1) *Kathasaritsagar* was written around _____ AD
- 2) _____ is the son of Sita.
- 3) Dhavala, falls in love with _____
- 4) After transposes the head, Sita begins her new life with _____
- 5) Karnad's story reflects the issue of _____ and _____

17.5 LET US SUM UP

Overall, this unit provides the insight into Modern Indian Theatre with specific understanding of Karnad and his play *Hayavadana*. We have also understood how being a modern playwright; Karnad subverts a traditional folk deeply rooted in ancient Indian culture to showcase the social problem of the present Indian society.

17.6 KEY WORDS

Folklore	the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth
Performative	relating to or of the nature of dramatic or artistic performance
Post-colonial	occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule.

17.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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❖ Answers:

Check your progress 1:

- 1) Shakespeare
- 2) Western Romanticism
- 3) *Sharmistha*

Check Your Progress 2:

Q.1 Write whether the given sentences are *True* or *False*

- 1) True
- 2) False
- 3) False
- 4) True
- 5) False

Check Your Progress 3:

- 1) *1070*
- 2) Samadhi
- 3) Madanasundari
- 4) Dhavala's head and brother's body
- 5) caste and class