

## Girish Karnad the Master of Tragic Climax

Ms. M. Vimochana<sup>1</sup> , Dr. M. R. Bindu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai

### Abstract

This study focuses on the similarities observed in the climaxes of Girish Karnad's plays. Girish Karnad has created a monarchy for himself in the field of Indian Drama. He has combined native and western methods in the right proportion to seek new theatrical tactics and has proved successful the same. One important reason for the success of Karnad's plays could be considered as the climax of the plays. Surprisingly, most of his plays have a tragic climax. This study tends to focus on these climaxes and relate the similarities in Karnad's climaxes.

**Keywords: climax, tragedy, tragic hero, turning point, peripeteia, catharsis.**

### Introduction

Shelly in the poem *To a Skylark* rightly says "Our sincerest laughter, with some pain is fraught; Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." Truly in accordance with these words are the climaxes of Girish Karnad's plays. Almost all the plays of Karnad have a tragic climax while some are left open-ended. This strategy may even be considered as the selling point of his plays. Girish Karnad is a major figure in modern Indian English drama who has added a fresh perspective to playwriting. He has not adhered to any specific customs or fashion, instead, he has created a new pattern for himself. Plays of Karnad range from myths, folktales, and history. He has meticulously attempted to connect the past and present to create a compelling fusion of reality and fiction. He has strived to create something new by choosing the best elements from existing sources. Without conveniently copying from his

predecessors, he has lavishly created his own style. He has taken utmost care in changing his plot to fit the necessity of the circumstances.

Tragedy as a genre plays a vital role in literature. Tragedy basically means something sad happening in the storyline. While every play, novel, poetry, or fiction would generally have sad events entwined in the storyline, having a tragic ending gains some special attention. Beyond having a sad ending, a tragedy features a main character known as a tragic hero. According to Aristotle's Poetics, literary tragedies must include the following elements:

1. hamartia - the protagonist's tragic flaw
2. anagnorisis - a tragic hero's change of heart (usually too late)
3. peripeteia - a reversal of the tragic hero's fortune; the turning point toward tragedy
4. catharsis - the release of emotions for the audience of a tragedy

In classical tragedies, this formula is seen in a direct way. Later literary tragedies, including Shakespearean tragedies, use these elements to craft heart-breaking stories in unique ways. In the plays of Girish Karnad, tragedy is seen as an element of building tension during the climax and catching the interest of the audience. Tragedies are not just about unfortunate circumstances. Tragedy is a way to look at how misfortune or terrible decisions affect a tragic hero. A tragedy must affect the life of a character at its very core. Death, murder, illness, suicide, loss of love, and abuse are just a few of the themes that can be used to test the hero and reveal their flaws. These sad occurrences don't have a straightforward resolution, and the hero's efforts to find one frequently result in more sorrow. The protagonist must only be defeated by circumstance for a tragedy to function. A tragic hero must be in danger of losing something.

## Discussion And Findings

*Yayati* (1961) was the first play written by Karnad. The plot has been adapted for the Indian epic "Mahabharata," "Adiparva." Yayati, a King of the Raghuvamsa is powerful, dynamic, and successful in all facets of his life. He has power and charm by which he could marry any women he desired. Deviyani is his present Queen but Yayati develops a desire for Deviyani's slave, Sharmishtha. Enraged by this Deviyani complains to her saint father, who in turn curses Yayati with old age. As the plot develops towards the climax, tragedy too builds up simultaneously. Yayati unwilling to take up old age passes over the curse to his son Pooru

who willingly accepts his father's curse even though he is newly married. The play ends with the most unexpected tragic climax wherein Pooru's wife Chitrlekha demands that Yayati should give her a progeny. She says that Yayati has taken her husband's youth and he is responsible for everything connected with his youth. As Yayati fails to accept, she consumes poison and commits suicide.

*Tughlaq* (1975) is a historic play written as an allegory to emergency rule in India. The play is about the Mughal emperor Mohammed Bin Tughlaq. Throughout the play, Tughlaq is seen as an able tyrant who is a combination of good and bad qualities. Many firm decisions such as changing the capital from Delhi to Daulathpur, minting copper coins, banning public prayers, being benevolent to the non-Muslims, etc earned enmity for Tughlaq. He also had taken too many sudden harsh decisions which affected his family, friends, and ministers. This play portraying a strong and efficient emperor ends with the climax that Tughlaq goes insane at the end.

*Hayavadana* (1971) is play based on Kathasaritsagara and Thomas Mann's "Transposed Heads". T Eswar Rao (2018) while explaining the greatness of this plays says:

Karnad's way of storytelling is quite different from other dramatists keeping the soul of his subject matters intact. His play *Hayavadana* begins with stage directions. When the curtain rises, the whole stage is empty except one chair and one table in the back portion of the stage. (p.4)

*Hayavadana* is a triangular love story wherein Padmini falls in love with the well-educated Devadatta and physically well-built Kapila. Padmini marries Devadatta but at the same time has an attraction for his friend Kapila. On their way to Ujjain Devadatta senses the attraction that Padmini has for Kapila and he commits suicide by cutting off his head, following him Kapila too commits suicide the same way. Padmini gets a boon from goddess Kali to refix the heads and give back lives. She takes this opportunity and exchanges the heads to get a perfect combination of the best head on the best body. In the climax of this play, it is seen that Padmini is again dissatisfied with her present husband and goes in search of the man with Kapila's face and Devadatta's body. On seeing Padmini with Kapila again, Devadatta calls

Kapila for a sword fight. As there is no chance that the three could live together, they fight to see who wins. They fight furiously and finally, both die. Padmini commits Sati.

*Nagamandala* (1988) is one of the most popular plays of Karnad and has been a part of the curriculum in many textbooks. The plot is about a newlywed couple Appanna and Rani. Appanna locks Rani inside the house every night and goes to his concubine. Knowing this, Kurudavva a blind old woman gives her a herb to mix in the curry and give to Appanna by which he will get attracted towards Rani. Rani mixes the herb but it looks too reddish so she is scared and throws it away into the anthill where a cobra lives. The cobra now develops an attraction toward Rani. It takes the form of Appanna and starts visiting Rani every night. Rani soon gets pregnant, on knowing this the real Appanna convicts her in front of the village elders. Rani agrees to take the snake ordeal by which she will have to hold the king cobra in her hands and confess the truth. She does so and the snake spreads its hood upon her. This plot has multiple climaxes. The first one is that Rani and Appanna live happily ever after. In a conversation between the flames and Story (a character in the play), there is a question of whether Appanna knowing that he had never touched his wife lived in peace. Also, a question is if Naga could forget Rani and live in peace. So, the story gives another climax. Naga tends to come to visit Rani again, on his visit he sees Rani, Appanna, and the child happy so the snake entangles itself in Rani's hair and dies. There is yet another climax. The Snake hides himself in Rani's hair and lives there ever after. So one of the three climaxes is a tragedy. The version wherein the snake dies.

*Fire and the Rain* (1995) is a play with a rather justifying climax wherein the good find justice and the evil are punished. However, the course of events Nattilai the most humble soul of the play is killed. In the the play *Bali : The Sacrifice* (1980) the climax is again tragic. The Queen is loved by the King so much that he is ready to accept her despite her cheating on him. Yet, the play ends in a tragic way. The Queen who is forced to kill a dough cock to cleanse off her sin is completely upset about the concept of killing. By the end of the play she goes mad and finally kills herself. The play *Wedding Album* (2006) ends with the concept that marriage is sacrificial, nobody in the play gets to marry and live with the person of their desire.

While analysing Karnad's plays it is visible that almost all these plays have a tragic climax. The reason for a tragic climax is the amount of conflict that Karnad builds within the plot. Talking about this conflict, Krishna Kumar Dhar Dubey and Dr. Ganga Nand Singh quote as below

In 'Yayati,' the King, Devayani, and Sharmistha have a strained connection; in 'Hayavadana,' it is between Padmini, Devadutta, and Kapila; in 'Nagamandala,' it is between Rani, the Naga, and Appanna; in 'Broken Images,' it is between Pramod, Manjula, and Malini; and in 'The Fire and the Rain,' Vishakha imagines that after marriage, she will have her children, a well-educated husband, and a happy household with a good social status (p.185)

While discussing that violence as the major cause for violence and grief Amol Ukharkar says:

Her death is the most violent thing in the play. It creates pity and fear in the mind of the audience. Similarly, the violence can also be noticed in Karnad's play Tughlaq (1964). Tughlaq is a political play based on a few years in the life of the Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, better known as Tughlaq - the Mad. The play is packed with murders, violence, horror, bloodshed and deception. (p.134)

## Conclusion

A brief examination of Karnad's plays reveals that Karnad deliberately builds the tension in the plot and keeps his audience at the edge of the seat. To conclude it is noticed that tragedy is the major theme in Karnad's plays. He presents tragedy in the form of violence, emotions, domestic problems, human nature etc., As long as humans possess the basic traits such as lust, jealousy, greed, anger, treachery and so on, tragedy is inevitable.

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