

Introduction

The term “postcolonial” refers to the complex phase that politically engages the erstwhile colonies after the cessation of European colonization. Postcolonialism designates the terrain of discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism. It foregrounds the cultural transformation effected by European colonization and the struggles endured by the once colonized subjects to reclaim their cultural identity prior to colonization. It elucidates the dilemmas of the cultural conflict between the two worlds: the colonizing and the colonized. It also points to the socio/cultural formation in the new nation states.

The origins of postcolonialism can be traced back to the natives’ historical resistance to colonial oppression and imperial control. The success of the natives to resist and overthrow the colonial rule empowers them to offer a radical challenge to the political and conceptual structures of the systems on which such domination had been based. It serves to challenge the hegemonic structures of the colonizers that inscribed themselves as the “ideal” and “civilized” and denigrated the natives as “wild, barbarous, and uncivilized.” The postcolonial subjects have recognized the strategy of “cultural Othering” used by the colonizers to domesticate, subordinate and control the colonies. In Edward Said’s phrase, cultural Othering is an Orientalist discourse/practice in which the Orient is constructed as the “cultural Other” of Europe. The colonized began to re-inscribe hegemonic

structures of the Empire that silenced them for ages. Hence, postcolonialism involves an engagement with, and a contestation of, the colonizer's discourses, power structures and social hierarchies. It works through the process of "writing back" to the Empire; "re-writing" and "re-reading" its canonical texts to explore the disparate treatment meted out to the pre-colonial people. It consists of the practice of "de-scribing" the empire in which the canons of imperial discourses are re-written to retrieve the cultural identity lost in the colonial oppression.

The writing back or the de-scribing can be done in many ways. One of the means is to decolonize the landscape: to imaginatively reconstruct a landscape where the residues of colonization are conspicuously absent. Novelist like Chinua Achebe and R.K. Narayan and dramatists like Wole Soyinka and Girish Karnad construct locales emptied of colonial markers with a view to reconstructing their cultural identity. They landscape their resistance to dominant power structures in life and dominating literary forms in writings. This is a way to expurgate both the consciousness and imagination of the ensnaring images of colonization. Rather, it is a spadework to cultivate a postcolonial identity.

Postcolonial studies arise as an alternative to dominant discourses of colonization. It attempts to contest and subvert the colonial assumptions of the colonized world and tends to reconstruct reality from the perspective of the former colonial subjects. It has effected a destabilization of the Western

modes of thinking, thereby creating a space for the subalterns or the marginalized groups, to articulate and construct alternatives to dominant discourses. The colonial subjects realize that their marginality is a consequence of cultural difference and they re-inscribe it as a site of resistance, especially against power structures of neocolonialism and neo-imperialism. Postcolonialism leads to the emergence of derivative discourses. The writers of the colonies adopted and appropriated the dominant colonialist discourses for their politics of resistance. These derivative discourses are appropriated sites for the articulation of resistance to colonial oppression and cultural domination.

As a critical discourse, postcolonialism is an expression of the conflicts experienced by the previously colonized cultures. It acknowledges the fact that the once-colonized world is full of conflicts, and contradictions: the conflict between the nation's colonial past and the postcolonial present, between the pre-colonial identity and colonial legacy, and so on. It acknowledges hybridity as the predominant trait which is the result of the contact and conflict between the colonizers and the natives. The indigenous traditions of the nation's past confronted with the modernizing impulse of the colonizers turn the postcolonial individual into to a cultural hybrid. This has resulted in the grooming of a new generation of populace who find themselves caught between the two conflicting cultures. This "hybridity," as Homi K. Bhabha explains, leads the postcolonial people to an equally

ambiguous condition of “unhomeliness,” a state where the individual is not at home even in himself (Bhabha, 13). The hybridity and unhomeliness in the postcolonial communities induce them for a search for their cultural identity prior to colonization. Thus, they attempt to reconstruct, rediscover or retrieve a cultural identity erased by the hegemonic power structures of colonization.

Hybridity or the mixing of divergent traditions forms the defining feature of any postcolonial writing. Hybridity is effected in the postcolonial writings by the incorporation of the indigenous forms into dominant European traditions. The dominant tradition brought in by the colonizers is thus “contaminated” by the indigenous narratives of the nation like ancient myths, folktales, and history, both modern and pre-modern. Bhabha defines these sites of mixing as a powerful space; he maintains that the postcolonial world should valorize this space as it offers the most reflective challenge to colonialism. It helps in subverting the dominant Eurocentric traditions; it is also instrumental in bringing the indigenous traditions to the centre spot. Hybridity in a way reinforces the fact that colonialism can never be erased completely to restore a pre-colonial purity. But the hybrid space formed by different cultural influences can be re-inscribed as a powerful slot for resistance strategies to the dominant tradition and residual power structures of colonialism that lingers, especially in the postcolonial mindscapes.

Hybridity is the direct consequence of the specific nature of culture. No culture is pure and insulated/isolated. Culture is porous with the vulnerable points where cultural contact/invasion is possible. The porous nature of culture leads to intercultural interactions leading to cultural hybridity. So purity of culture is a fallacy propagated by the dominant ethnic groups to continue the subordination of cultural Others. The former colonial powers still try to control cultural communities of the colonized through the structural patterns of neo-colonialism.

The questions of culture and of cultural difference dominate the experiences and writings of the postcolonial people. The western mode of training and the encounter with the revived traditions have made the postcolonial writers identify their cultural difference from their colonizers. The transformation into a cultural hybrid, alienation from indigenous culture, their inherent difference from the received culture, and so on makes the postcolonial individual to search for a unique cultural identity. They attempt for a reclamation of their cultural identity through their writings. In order to give voice to their differences the writers undertake to domesticate the dominant European narrative forms by incorporating native traditional narrative forms. It involves the construction and representation of a cultural identity of the colonized community on the one hand, and the articulation of cultural resistance and attempts at decolonization on the other. Postcolonial literature, which resonates with the cultural conflicts, emerges as a result of

the interaction between Eurocentric narratives and the native/indigenous narrative forms.

Nation and culture become the predominant concern for the postcolonial societies. Both the concepts turn out to be powerful symbols for the postcolonials to inscribe their distinct space in the contemporary world. A nation is built on and strengthened by the myths and memories of the past. It is from these elements of myth, memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation. Hence, nation and nationalism evolve as an inseparable part of postcolonial writings and every writer, in one way or the other, shows his/her adherence to the nation. Literature is in a way formed with the idea of nation in mind and this explains the nation-centredness of the contemporary writings. The ambiguous state of nation, as a sign of modernity and as a historic symbol gains prominence in the postcolonial context.

The ambiguous state of nation is often reflected in postcolonial literature. Nation is a sign that mediates between an object and a concept. In the context of colonization, nation is a historic symbol. But the concept of cultural hybridity is closely related to Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community. Anderson thinks that a psychological geography consolidates a physical geography: the nation has a geography and a psychography. The idea of the nation as one with a metropolitan centre and distant peripheries is conceived on the framework of the empire:

the imperial power ruling the distant colonies with an oppressive state apparatus. The recent acts of terror like 9/11 attack on World Trade Centre deconstructs the structure of the nation: no place is fit to be called the centre. The structure of the nation can be mapped on the language also: the centre is the focal area of the principal dialect and peripheries map other marginalized dialects. So empire, nation and language have analogous structures. As part of the decolonizing project, the postcolonial writer works against the standardization of language.

National and cultural identity gets foregrounded in all postcolonial genres of literature, especially in the drama. As a visual paradigm of cultural identity, theatre forms a prominent genre where cultural differences get a meaningful portrayal. Accordingly, the postcolonial drama exhibits distinctive cultural features which differentiate it from conventional European dramaturgy. The interaction of European dramatic conventions with traditional forms of native oral narratives in the postcolonial drama radically challenges the perspective of the genre with rigid structuring and definite categorizing. The interface of the same has led to alternative readings that enable the writers to conceive new patterns of narrative structures. So, drama in this context becomes neither a European mimetic form nor an indigenous representation; it is a hybrid of both. This hybridity, with its defining cultural difference, represents the paradigm shift in the postcolonial drama.

The dominant feature of the postcolonial literatures – hybridity – forms the central trait of postcolonial drama also. The syncretic or hybrid nature of postcolonial drama is, in most cases, a conscious, programmatic strategy to evolve a new form of theatre in the light of colonial or postcolonial experiences. It employs theatrical codes from quite disparate performance and cultural traditions, utilizing in parts the linguistic and performance codes of western theatrical sensibility while retaining the unmistakable signature of native performance aesthetics. Hybridity is thus a part of the postcolonial dramatist's challenge to resist or to domesticate the techniques of western dramaturgy.

Postcolonial drama is a textual paradigm of cultural hybridity. Postcolonial theatre is essentially a hybrid or interfusional theatre with native narrative forms blended with dominant Eurocentric forms. It is a revivalist attempt to resurrect the classical and folk traditions of the erstwhile colony which were marginalized by Western hegemonic discourses of theatre propagated by the colonizers. Postcolonial drama is an attempt to naturalize or domesticate the western dramatic elements to suit the theatrical experiences of the postcolonial generation of the colonized. It creates a sensibility which is neither western nor native, but a blend of the two and helps to make performance a new experience in which the postcolonial identity is visually constructed.

Girish Karnad (b. 1938), is a protean personality. Karnad is an actor, director of films, plays and television serials, script writer, translator and one of the foremost playwrights of the contemporary Indian theatre. Apart from the array of regional awards, he was conferred the prestigious Padma awards, *Padma Shri* in 1974 and *Padmabhushan* in 1992. He is also the recipient of the *Jnanpith*, the country's highest literary recognition, for his contributions to modern Indian drama. Karnad exemplifies himself as a postcolonial writer through the form and structure of his plays. In his theatre European dramatic forms are superimposed with native Indian and Kannada theatrical narrative forms. Karnad's postcoloniality is a result of his innovative application of traditional narrative structures. He effectively domesticates the dominant theatre tradition and moulds it to give a distinct Indian experience. The identity of his theatre is defined in terms of its cultural difference from both modern European theatre and ancient Indian theatre. Karnad's plays are textual paradigms of postcolonial Indian theatre. His theatre functions as an analogue for the performative potential of postcolonial theatrical experience all over the world.

Karnad's theatre is a visual presentation of the resistance to colonialist discourses of theatre. It is a theatre in search of completeness of Indian experience. He has gradually evolved a postcolonial Indian theatre, Indianizing each of the western dramatic elements embedded in it. Karnad's play *Hayavadana* is in fact his understanding of the Indian theatre where

each character seeks a completeness of experience. He has been gradually ridding himself of the western influence he has incorporated in his early plays. Karnad has revived and improvised Indian folk/classical tradition to produce alienation effect in his plays. He has reconstructed the past on the stage and reinvented its meaning in the context of the present. He has contemporized mythologies and mythologized human concerns in his plays. Karnad has developed a new performance aesthetics that resonates with the postcolonial identity of Indian nation.

The critical interest of this study centres round the narrative structure in Girish Karnad's plays, from the perspective of postcolonial dramaturgy. The first chapter of the thesis, **Nation and Narrative**, explores the ambivalence that lingers around the concepts of nation and narrative, and their significance in the postcolonial context. It identifies nation as a complex entity fluctuating between a manifest form and a conceptual form; an entity which can be located between a geography and a psychography. It gives an explanation to the conflicting situation of the modern nation between its apparent "modernity" and its "cultural temporality," and its reflections in the ambivalence of the narratives. Language in the narratives of the nation is often polyphonic, while the narratives of the nation themselves take up a pluralistic hybridized form. This is essential to convey the cultural pluralism of the nation. The chapter also explores the *problematic relationship between the ambivalent existence of the nation and*

the narrative that represents it in the postcolonial space. Hence, it gives an introduction to the genesis, development and the scope of postcolonial literatures in the contemporary world. Postcolonial literature is identified as a political discourse which is anchored on the analogous structures of nation and culture. The chapter links the significance of nation and its narratives in the postcolonial literary space.

The second chapter, entitled **Narrative and Resistance**, elaborates the correlation between narrative and resistance, especially in the postcolonial dramatic space. The chapter focuses on how the postcolonial dramatists use the power invested in the narratives to resonate with their resistance to dominant European forms. They incorporate different kinds of languages, native techniques and styles into the conventional mode and make their narratives powerful tools of resistance. The chapter also gives an introduction to the postcolonial theatrical space and its major practitioners. It includes a detailed discussion of the major features and characteristics of postcolonial theatre: the choice of language among the postcolonial dramatists, the ways of “contaminating” it as a means of resistance, their common urge “to return to roots,” the hybrid nature of their theatre, the politics of the body, its re-inscription as a performative strategy, and the roles of costumes, masks, music, dance are dealt with in detail. The chapter concludes with the identification of postcolonial theatre as a kind of theatrical interculturalism as it holds hybridity as the predominant trait.

Theatrical interculturalism can become a form of resistance against standardization and Europeanization of super productions. It can generate a search for new identities in culture, aesthetics and politics.

The third chapter of the thesis, **Mythologizing Human Concerns**, is a thematic analysis of Karnad's plays from the theoretical positions already discussed. It begins with a brief profile of Karnad as an essential introduction for a comprehensive investigation into his dramatic art. Karnad has maintained his uniqueness through the exploration of the world of mythology, folktales and history to evoke an ancient or premodern world that resonates with the contemporary contexts. The chapter gives a thematic analysis of Karnad's plays based on myths and folktales. Hence, his plays based on myths like *Yayati* (2008), *Bali: The Sacrifice*, (2004), *The Fire and The Rain*, (1998) and those based on folktales like *Hayavadana*, (1975), *Naga-Mandala*, (1990), and *Flowers: A Monologue* (2005) are critically evaluated in meticulous details. As a true ambassador of the postcolonial age, Karnad essays the major concerns of the times in his plays. He explores the conflicting themes like the existential questions and conflicts of modern man, incompleteness, hybridity, unhomeliness, alienation, search for identity, gender placement, metaphysical dualism, and so on. He impressively exposes and subverts the hegemonic structures of the nation like casteism, racism and patriarchy in the plays.

The fourth chapter, **Contemporizing History**, is a thematic analysis of Karnad's plays based on history and contemporary issues. Karnad engages the pre-modern and modern history through the plays *Tughlaq* (1972), *Tale-Danda*, (1993) and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004). In *Anjumallige* (Frightened Jasmine), (1977) and in his recent monologue *Broken Images* (2005) and the latest play *Wedding Album* (2009), Karnad has used contemporary issues; *Anjumallige* depicts Britain during the early 1960s and the remaining other are set in the technologically advanced present day India. In these plays too Karnad effectively handles the alienation and identity crisis that individuals experience in the postcolonial world. These concerns echo in the words and deeds of his characters. Karnad also throws light on the internal conflicts in India as a nation like, casteism, classism, inter-religious conflict, intra-religious conflict, and so on. He makes a perfect technique of dealing with the present through the narratives of the past. He overcomes his adherence to the past and deals with the contemporary India through the recent plays like *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*. The chapter provides critical insights into the postcolonial concerns in Karnad's plays, how he encounters them and tries to resolve them in the context of illustrations drawn from history.

The final chapter of the thesis, **Karnad's Dramaturgy: In Search of an Indian Theatre**, is an analysis of the dramatic techniques and devices used in Karnad's plays. The politics of a writer manifests itself not only in

the content but also in the techniques he explores to represent the content. The chapter focuses in bringing out the politics of Karnad's postcoloniality. Karnad's employment of retrospective narratives of the nations - myths, folktales and history- can be seen as his strategy to bring in the elements of native culture to the dominant Eurocentric theatrical tradition. His theatre is essentially a syncretic or interfusional theatre which serves as tool of resistance. Karnad makes use of the techniques of the traditional enactments like rituals, the designs of *Yakshagana*, the folk theatre of Karnataka, the puppet theatre of ancient India, folk conventions like half-curtains, songs and dancing, oral style of narration, and so on. The plays also highlight the western influences on him: masks, miming, chorus, Brechtian, Shakespearean and Greek elements. He carefully incorporates indigenous narrative elements into to the Eurocentric dramatic form. These blending of different forms make Karnad's theatre truly syncretic. Karnad's textual sources are all Indian, but he uses variant theatrical practices for his artistic purpose: to connect the present with the past and to construct a meaning for the past in the present.

The complex narrative structures of Karnad's plays gain prominence in the context of their postcoloniality. The narrative structure of the play is a manifestation of the ideology of the playwright. His plays are textual/visual paradigms of the politics of cultural difference he partakes in the theatrical space. The collective unconscious of Karnad is an amalgamation of two

cultures: Indian and Western. This split and blend are evident in the narrative structures and themes of the plays. The plays reveal that the postcoloniality in Karnad's theatre is the direct result of the tension between the East and West in his unconscious. It is a textual/visual paradigm of postcolonial Indian theatre.

The hybrid nature of Karnad's theatre is symbolic of the hybrid existence the individuals have in a postcolonial society. An investigation into the relevance of Karnad's syncretic theatre gains gravity as it is the replica of human existence in postcolonial world. His theatre sets an example to show how a skilful incorporation of indigenous forms helps to transfigure the experience of European theatre. Karnad's theatre becomes a new experience of visual culture in which new experiences of postcoloniality emerges through a participatory discourse of events and figurations. His plays evolve a new semiotics of theatre which stagescape resistance through their performative potentials. They are examples of alternative and counter-hegemonic explorations of theatrical space to construct the postcolonial Indian identity.