

Obituary

G P Ramachandran

The Fearless Fighter



Girish Karnad (19 May 1938 – 10 June 2019)

Girish Karnad was equivalent to India itself. The diversity of language and culture, the medley of urban and rural, the depth of tradition and modern, the density and emptiness of writing with an infinite horizon of freedom to express.

Girish Karanad revisited India from up, down, and sides through his artistic-political individualities by joining his narratives which are

denser in historical outcry and directives like in epics and a wide acceptance beyond the elite-folk-popular divisions of art.

Girish Karand was a playwright, actor, poet, director, critic and a teacher. He was born in Marathwada, in a sense the heart of India (in fact all places are the heart of India!). So, he got three mother tongues - Konkani, Marathi and Kannada. He was attracted to the field of plays through the influence of Natakamandali, a moving theatre group.

He gained his bachelor degree in science from Karnataka University, Dharwad. Since he was determined to become an international artist by then itself, he finished his masters from Oxford University and he worked in Oxford University press as well, by writing in the English language.

This can be understood as his hard work to become an international citizen through a modernized internalization. He would have undergone the influence of Tagore and Nehru, who defined the patriotism and freedom of 20th century India. Since he is a creator as well as a critic, he did not hesitate to even criticize Nehru and Tagore.

Tuglak, a play wrote in 1964 after *Yayathi*, which a play based on Mahabharata, is based on the controversial life of Sultan of Delhi. His first works are known for the efforts which develop history and epics into the contemporary concepts with the existential crisis. He recreated the characters as modern humans who are bounded within the mental and philosophical crisis. When *Tuglak* was presented by Karnad, in reality, Nehru was under the focus. India was confused to find the successor after Nehru on the first half 1960s and Karnad mocked at this situation through his characterizations. He pointed out that democracy and politics are not supposed to be bounded in a particular center. Karnad would have in the same determination of freedom when he criticized Tagore as well. Girish Karnad reproduced the idea of Modern India through criticizing the Nehruvian National and International

policies by performing plays around the globe. Similarly, if 21st century India was critically represented at present, that would be shocking and we would be rethinking the changes occurred in past and power centers.

He translated *Yayathi* into English himself. He became famous around the world by performing *Tuglak* in National School of Drama. His other famous plays are *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadhana*.

As Ramachandra Guha opined, '*Girish Karnad should be remembered for his art, his genius and his scholarship. While all of us can wave banners and shout, he did it in a quiet way, in a dignified manner right till the end. Even when he was ailing, he would come out to speak for peace and cultural harmony. But let's not reduce him to an activist. Girish Karnad should be remembered for the depth of his contributions*'.

Girish Karnad started his film career by acting and penning the script for *Samskara*, a movie directed by Pattabhi Ramareddy based on the novel authored by U R Anantha Murthy. *Samskara* created controversial waves since it opened up about the brahministic hierarchical caste system in India.

Samsakara was the first Kannada movie to win the Golden Lotus Award of President for best film. *Samskara* is a milestone in Indian cinema during the new wave-cinema movement in the 1970s. It was jointly directed by Kanad and B V Karanth. They won the Golden Lotus Award of President for Best Directors. Kanooru Heggadithi, based on the work by Koovempu, who is a Jnanapith Award winner, political poet and famously known as Karnataka Ratna (The gem of Karnataka), is also a famous movie directed by Karanad.

He directed several movies in Hindi and Kannada and acted in popular movies as important and unimportant characters. A villain character named Kakkariya Sathyanarayana Moorthy, who has various shades of power fatherly and affection, portrayed by Karnad in *Kathalan*, a popular Tamil movie directed by Shakar and produced by K T

Kunjumon. He showcased his talent in television as well by portraying the protagonist of *Malgudi Days*, a serial based on the story authored by R K Narayan.

Girish Karnad won several awards including Jnanpith, Padma Shree, Padma Bhushan, Sangeetha Academy and Sahithya Academy awards and The Kalidasa Samman. He has worked as the director of Pune Film and Television Institution of India and the president of Sangeetha Nataka Academy. He was a beneficiary of the Nehruvian policy of art-patronage-national development even though he criticized The Nehruvian Era.

The Kempegowda airport was established in the name Kempe Gowda, who is known as the founder of Bangalore City. No opposition was marked regarding this decision except Karnad. He proposed that the name of Tipu Sultan is more suitable for the airport since Tipu had done several modern advancements for the development of Karnataka. He was determined to point out the communalism behind the decision.

Karnad was also disturbed like any other artist due to the sabotage on the nation's cultural-democratic-historical views which started at the 1990s and which still continues. He criticized the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition openly. He also opposed the notorious attempt to make communal riots in the name of a ground in Hubli which is used to conduct EidGah. He was disappointed in the wide saffronisation in India and kept on telling that secularism is India's great ideology ever. He also tried his best foot forward with the people who opposed the chain of murders, from Kalburgi to GauriLankesh. U R Anantha Moorthy left us when Narendra Modi was sworn in as Prime Minister in 2014. Girish Karnad also left us in the same historical context. His artistic memory reminds us that India will exist through its beauty of diversity after every act of cessation.

G P Ramchandran is the Treasurer of Fipresci-India.