


Girish Karnad

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Born	Girish Raghunath Karnad 19 May 1938 Matheran, British India (present-day Maharashtra, India)
Occupation	Playwright, film director, film actor, poet
Nationality	Indian
Alma mater	University of Oxford
Genres	Fiction
Literary movement	Navya
Notable work(s)	<i>Tughalak 1964</i> <i>Taledanda</i>

Girish Raghunath Karnad (born 19 May 1938) is a contemporary writer, playwright, screenwriter, actor and movie director in Kannada language. His rise as a playwright in 1960s, marked the coming of age of Modern Indian playwriting in Kannada, just as Badal Sarkar did in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi.^[1] He is a recipient^[2] of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India.

For four decades Karnad has been composing plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He has translated his plays into English and has received acclaim.^[3] His plays have been translated into some Indian languages and directed by directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B. V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan and Amal Allana.^[3] He is active in the world of Indian cinema working as an actor, director, and screenwriter, in Hindi and Kannada flicks, earning awards along the way. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India and won four Filmfare Awards where three are Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada and one Filmfare Best Screenplay Award.

Early life and education

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, Maharashtra. His initial schooling was in Marathi. In Sirsi, Karnataka, he was exposed to travelling theatre groups, Natak Mandalis as his parents were deeply interested in their plays.^[4] As a youngster, Karnad was an ardent admirer of Yakshagana and the theater in his village.^[1]

He earned his Bachelors of Arts degree in Mathematics and Statistics, from Karnatak Arts College, Dharwad (Karnataka University), in 1958. Upon graduation Karnad promptly went to England and studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Lincoln and Magdalen colleges in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar (1960–63), earning his Master of Arts degree in philosophy, political science and economics.^[3]

Career

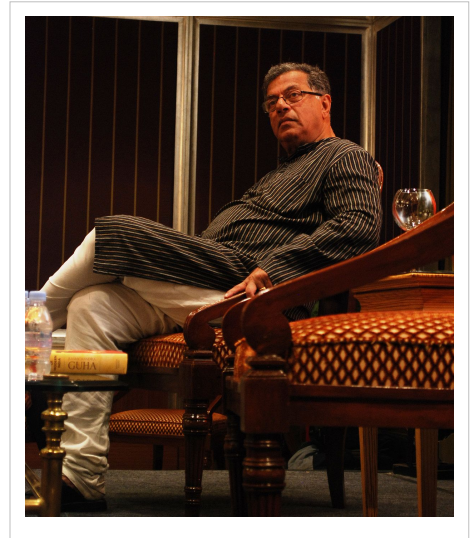
After working with the Oxford University Press, Chennai for seven years (1963–70), he resigned to take to writing full-time.^[3] While in Chennai he got involved with local amateur theatre group, The Madras Players.^[5]

During 1987–88, he was at the University of Chicago as Visiting Professor and Fulbright Playwright-in-Residence.^[3] During his tenure at Chicago *Nagamandala* had its world premiere at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis based on Karnad's English translation of the Kannada original.^[1] Most recently, he served as director of the Nehru Centre and as Minister of Culture, in the Indian High Commission, London (2000–2003).

He served as director of the Film and Television Institute of India (1974–1975) and chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Academy of the Performing Arts (1988–93).

Literature

Karnad is known as a playwright. His plays, written in Kannada, have been translated into English and some Indian languages. Karnad's plays are written neither in English, in which he vainly dreamt of earning international literary fame as a poet, nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannada. Initially, his command on Kannada was so poor that he often failed to distinguish between short and long vowels (laghu and deergha). When Karnad started writing plays, Kannada literature was highly influenced by the renaissance in Western literature. Writers would choose a subject which looked entirely alien to manifestation of native soil. C. Rajagopalachari's version of the *Mahabharat* published in 1951, left a deep impact on him^[6] and soon, sometime in the mid-1950s, one day he experienced a rush of dialogues spoken by characters from the Mahabharata in his adopted language Kannada. "I could actually hear the dialogues being spoken into my ears... I was just the scribe," said Karnad in a later interview. Eventually *Yayati* was published in 1961, when he was 23 years old. It is based on the story of King Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, who was cursed into premature old age by his preceptor, Shukracharya, who was incensed at Yayati's infidelity. Yayati in turn asks his sons to sacrifice their youth for him, and one of them agrees. It ridicules the ironies of life through characters in *Mahabharata*. It became an instant success, immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages.^[1]



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In a situation like that Karnad found a new approach like drawing historical and mythological sources to tackle contemporary themes, and existentialist crisis of modern man, through his characters locked in psychological and philosophical conflicts. His next was *Tughlaq* (1964), about a rashly idealist 14th-century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq, and allegory on the Nehruvian era which started with ambitious idealism and ended up in disillusionment.^[6] This established Karnad, now 26-years old, as a promising playwright in the country. It was staged by the National School of Drama Repertory under the direction of Ebrahim Alkazi, with the actor Manohar Singh, playing the visionary king who later becomes disillusioned and turns bitter, amidst the historic Purana Qila in Delhi. It was later staged in London by the National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1982.^{[3][1]}

Hayavadana (1971) was based on a theme drawn from *The Transposed Heads*, a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, which is originally found in *Kathasaritsagara*. Herein he employed the folk theatre form of *Yakshagana*. A German version of the play was directed by Vijaya Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar. *Naga-Mandala* (Play with Cobra, 1988) was based on a folk tale related to him by A. K. Ramanujam, brought him the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989. It was directed by J. Garland Wright, as part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. The theatre

subsequently commissioned him to write the play, *Agni Mattu Male* (The Fire and the Rain). Though before it came *Taledanda* (Death by Beheading, 1990) which used the backdrop, the rise of Veerashaivism, a radical protest and reform movement in 12th century Karnataka to bring out current issues.^{[3][7]}

Movies

Karnad made his acting as well as screenwriting debut in a Kannada movie, *Samskara* (1970), based on a novel by U.R. Ananthamurthy and directed by Pattabhirama Reddy. That movie won the first President's Golden Lotus Award for Kannada cinema. Over the years he had acted in a number of Hindi and Kannada feature films and worked with directors like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Shyam Benegal.^[3] In television, he played the role of Swami's father in the TV series *Malgudi Days* (1986–1987), based on R. K. Narayan's books.

He made his directorial debut with *Vamsha Vriksha* (1971), based on a Kannada novel by S.L. Bhairappa. It won him National Film Award for Best Direction along with B. V. Karanth, who co-directed the film. Later, Karnad directed several movies in Kannada and Hindi, including *Godhuli* (1977) and *Utsav* (1984). Karnad has made number of documentaries, like one on the Kannada poet D. R. Bendre (1972), *Kanaka-Purandara* (English, 1988) on two medieval Bhakti poets of Karnataka, Kanaka Dasa and Purandara Dasa, and *The Lamp in the Niche* (English, 1989) on Sufism and the Bhakti movement. Many of his films and documentaries have won several national and international awards.

Some of his famous Kannada movies include *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane*, *Ondanondu Kaladalli*, *Cheluvi* and *Kaadu* and most recent film *Kanooru Heggaditi* (1999), based on a novel by Kannada writer Kuvempu.

His Hindi movies include *Nishaant* (1975), *Manthan* (1976), *Swami* (1977) and *Pukar* (2000). He has acted in a number of Nagesh Kukunoor films, starting with *Iqbal* (2005), where Karnad's role of the ruthless cricket coach got him critical acclaim. This was followed by *Dor* (2006), *8 x 10 Tasveer* (2009), with lead actor John Abraham and *Aashayein* (2010).

He came back to Hindi movies after three years. He played a key role in Yash Raj Film's movie *Ek Tha Tiger*.^[8]

Karnad has acted in the Kannada gangster movie *Aa Dinagalu*.

Other notable works

He has been the voice of APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, in the audiobook of Kalam's autobiography by Charkha Audiobooks *Wings of Fire*.

Awards and honors

For literature

- Sangeet Natak Akademi award – 1972
- Padma Shri – 1974
- Padma Bhushan – 1992
- Kannada Sahitya Academy award – 1992
- Sahitya Academy award – 1994
- Jnanpith Award – 1998
- Kalidas Samman – 1998
- Rajyotsava Award
- D. Litt., Karnatak University – 1994^[3]
- Honorary Doctorate, University of Southern California, Los Angeles – 2011^[9]

For Cinema

National Film Awards

- 1972: Best Direction: *Vamsha Vriksha* (with B.V. Karanth)
- 1974: Second Best Feature Film: *Kaadu*
- 1978: Best Screenplay: *Bhumika* (with Shyam Benegal and Satyadev Dubey)
- 1978: Best Feature Film in Kannada: *Ondanondu Kaladalli*
- 1989: Best Non-Feature Film: *Kanaka Purandara*
- 1990: Best Non-feature Film on Social Issues: *The Lamp in the Niche*
- 1993: Best Film on Environment Conservation: *Cheluvi*
- 2000: Best Feature Film in Kannada: *Kaanuru Heggadathi*^[10]

Filmfare Awards South

- 1972: Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada - *Vamsha Vriksha*
- 1974: Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada - *Kaadu*
- 1978: Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada - *Ondanondu Kaladalli*

Filmfare Awards

- 1980: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award: *Godhuli* (with B.V. Karanth)
- 1980: Filmfare Best Supporting Actor Award: *Aasha: Nominated*
- 1982: Filmfare Best Supporting Actor Award: *Teri Kasam : Nominated*

Others

- Karnataka State Award for the Best Supporting Actor in "Santa Shishunala Shareef" – 1991
- Mysore State Award for Best Kannada film and the Best Direction for *VamshaVruksha* – 1972
- Gubbi Veeranna Award
- Karnad served as the director of the Film and Television Institute of India from 1974–1975, the Indian co-chairman for the Joint Media Committee of the Indo-US Sub-Commission on Education and Culture from 1984–1993, chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy from 1988–1993, and president of Karnataka Nataka Academy from 1976–1978.
- Honorary Doctorate from University of Southern California, Los Angeles – 2011^[11]

Controversies

At the 2012 TATA Lit Fest held in Mumbai, Karnad was invited to speak about "his life in theater" in an hour-long session. Instead of talking about the subject, he took the opportunity to lash out at VS Naipaul for his "antipathy towards Indian Muslims". VS Naipaul had earlier been conferred the Lifetime achievement award by the festival's organisers. Karnad also criticized the organizers for having honored Naipaul.

The audience which had gathered to hear Karnad speak about his life in theater was taken aback by this unexpected rant against one of the world's finest writers. Later, the festival organizers disapproved of Karnad's vitriol and wondered why he had misused the platform to vent his personal political rage.^[12]

Just a few weeks after this, Karnad again created controversy by claiming that Rabindranath Tagore was a second-rate playwright and that his plays were "unbearable".^{[13][14]}

Personal life

Karnad is married to Dr. Saraswathy Ganapathy and they have two children. He lives in Bangalore.^[3]

Activism

There are some unverifiable claims that he is a proponent of secularism, multi-culturalism and freedom of expression, Girish Karnad has been a critic of religious fundamentalism and Hindutva in India. He publicly condemned the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and later spoke against the attempts to create controversy about the Idgah Maidan in Hubli.^[3]

Quotations

- "I see a legacy of my generation... I am happy to belong to a generation that had a Dharmaveer Bharti, a Mohan Rakesh, a Vijay Tendulkar and I. Together we can claim that we did create a national theatre for modern India."
 - 1999 (On being asked about his lasting legacy) [□]

Bibliography

Plays

- "*Maa Nishaadha*" (One Act Play)
- "*Yayati*" (1961)^[15]
- "*Tughlaq*" (1964) (translated in Hindustani by B.V. Karanth. Major Indian directors who have staged it: Ebrahim Alkazi, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Dinesh Thakur & Shyamanand Jalan (in Bangla).
- "*Hayavadana*" (1972)
- "*Anjulimallige*" (1977)
- "*Hittina Hunja*" aka ""Bali"" (The Sacrifice) (1980)
- "*Nagamandala*" (1988) (Play with Cobra)
- "*Taledanda*" (1990) (Death by Beheading), in Hindi it is known as *Rakt-Kalyan* translated by Ram Gopal Bajaj, first directed by Ebrahim Alkazi for NSD rep., then by Arvind Gaur (1995–2008, still running) for Asmita Theater Group, New Delhi.^[16]
- "*Agni mattu Male*" (1995) (*Agni Aur Varsha*, The Fire and the Rain), first directed by Prasanna for NSD Rep.
- *Tippuvina Kanasugalu* (The Dreams of Tipu Sultan)
- "*Odakalu Bimba*" (2006) (Hindi, *Bikre Bimb*; English, *A heap of Broken Images*)
- "*Maduve Album*" (2006)
- ""Flowers"" (2012)
- ""Benda Kaalu On Toast"" (2012)

Filmography

Movies

1. Yaare Koogadali (2012)
2. Mugamoodi (2012)
3. Ek Tha Tiger (2012)
4. Kempe Gowda (2011) as Gowda (Kavya's father)
5. Komaram Puli (2010) Telugu
6. Life Goes On (2009) as Sanjay
7. Aashayein (2009) (completed) as Parthasarthi
8. 8 x 10 Tasveer (2009) as Anil Sharma
9. Aa dinagalu Kannada (2007) as Girish nayak
10. Dor (2006) as Randhir Singh
11. Iqbal (2005) as Guruji
12. Shankar Dada MBBS (Telugu) (2004) as Satya Prasad
13. Chellamae (Tamil) (2004) as Rajasekhar
14. Hey Ram (Tamil) (2000) as Uppilli Iyengar
15. Pukar (2000) as Mr. Rajvansh
16. Prathyartha (1999) as Home Minister of India
17. Aakrosh: Cyclone of Anger (1998) as Rajwansh Shashtri
18. China Gate (1998) as Forest Officer Sunder Rajan
19. Minsaara Kanavu (Tamil) (1997) as Amal Raj
20. Ratchagan (Tamil) (1997) as Sriram
21. The Prince (1996) as Vishwanath. Malayalam film
22. Aatank (1996) as Inspector Khan
23. Aaghata (Kannada) (1994) as Psychiatrist
24. Kadhalan (Tamil) (1994) as Kakarla
25. Praana Daata (1993)
26. Cheluvi (1992) as Village Headman
27. Guna (1991)
28. Antarnaad (1991)
29. Brahma (1991)
30. Chaithanya (1991)
31. AK-47 (film) (1990)
32. Nehru: The Jewel of India (1990)
33. Santha Shishunala Sharif (Kannada) (1990) as Govindabhatta
34. Mil Gayee Manzil Mujhe (1989)
35. Akarshan (1988)
36. Sutradhar (1987) as Zamindar
37. Naan Adimai Illai (1986) as Rajinikanth's Father-in-law
38. Nilakurinhi Poothappol (Malyalam) (1986) as Appu Menon
39. Sur Sangam (1985) as Pandit Shivshankar Shastri
40. Meri Jung (1985) as Deepak Verma
41. Zamana (1985) as Satish Kumar
42. Nee Thanda Kanike (Kannada) (1985)
43. Divorce (1984) as Jayant Oswal
44. Tarang (1984) as Dinesh

45. Ek Baar Chale Aao (1983) as Din Dayal
46. Ananda Bhairavi' (1983) as Narayana Sarma
47. Teri Kasam (1982) as Rakesh
48. Aparoopaa (Assamese) (1982)
49. Umbartha (Marathi) (1982) as Advocate Subhash Mahajan
50. Shama (1981) as Nawab Yusuf Khan
51. Apne Paraye (1980) as Harish
52. Man Pasand (1980) as Kashinath
53. Aasha (1980) as Deepak
54. Anveshane (Kannada) (1980)
55. Beqasoor (1980) as Dr. Anand Bhatnagar
56. Ratnadeep (1979)
57. Sampark (1979) as Heera
58. Jeevan Mukta (1977) as Amarjeet
59. Swami (1977) as Ghanshyam
60. Manthan (1976) as Dr.Rao
61. Nishaant (1975) as Schoolmaster
62. Jadu Ka Shankh (1974)
63. Vamsha Vriksha (1971)
64. Samskara (1970) as Praneshacharya

Movies directed

1. *Vamsha Vriksha* (1971, Kannada)
2. *D.R. Bendre* (1972, documentary)
3. *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane in Kannada*
4. *Godhuli* (1977, Hindi)
5. *Ondanondu Kaladalli* (1978) in Kannada
6. *Kanooru Heggadathi* in Kannada
7. *Kaadu* (1973, Kannada)
8. *Durga* in Mahendar
9. *Utsav* in Hindi
10. *Woh Ghar* (1984, Hindi), based on Kirtinath Kurtakoti's Kannada play *Aa Mani*
11. *The Lamp in the Niche* (1990) (documentary)
12. *Cheluvi* (1992, Kannada and Hindi (Dubbed))
13. *Chidambara Rahasya* (2005, Kannada) (tele film for DD1)

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- [4] Kumar, p.115
- [5] Sachindananda, p. 57
- [6] Sachindananda, p. 58
- [8] <http://informationmadness.com/entertainment/bollywood/4640-ek-tha-tiger-theatrical-trailer-with-salman-a-katrina.html>
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