

Economic Independence in Indian English Literature: A Study of Girish Karnad

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Abstract

This paper explores the theme of economic independence in Indian English literature with special reference to Girish Karnad. As a prominent dramatist, Karnad presents complex intersections of power, class, gender, and identity through his plays. Though primarily known for mythological and historical narratives, his works subtly reflect socio-economic realities, including class struggle and the quest for autonomy. The study examines how economic independence shapes characters' identities and social positioning, particularly in plays like *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, and *Nagamandala*. The paper highlights Karnad's contribution to understanding economic dimensions within Indian literary discourse.

Keywords: Girish Karnad, Economic Independence, Indian English Literature, Class Struggle, Identity, Women Empowerment

1. Introduction

Indian English literature has evolved as a powerful medium to reflect socio-economic transformations in Indian society. Among its major contributors, Girish Karnad stands out for integrating traditional narratives with modern concerns. His plays, though rooted in history and folklore, reflect contemporary issues such as economic inequality, power dynamics, and individual freedom. Economic independence emerges as a subtle but significant theme influencing character motivations and conflicts.

2. Review of Literature

Scholars have widely analyzed Karnad's works from perspectives such as mythology, postcolonial identity, and gender. Critics like Anantha Murthy and Tutun Mukherjee emphasize his reinterpretation of traditional narratives. However, limited studies directly focus on economic independence. Existing research indirectly touches upon class division and material conditions influencing characters, suggesting the need for deeper analysis of economic aspects in Karnad's plays.

3. Historical Background

Karnad's writing reflects post-independence India, a period marked by socio-economic restructuring and identity formation. The transition from feudal systems to modern democratic frameworks created tensions between classes and individuals. He uses historical settings, such as in *Tughlaq*, to comment on political ambition, economic instability, and governance failures, mirroring contemporary socio-economic realities.

4. Economic Independence and Class Struggle

In Karnad's plays, class divisions often determine access to power and autonomy. In *Tughlaq*, economic mismanagement leads to social unrest, highlighting how financial instability affects governance and public trust. Similarly, in *Taledanda*, caste and class hierarchies restrict economic mobility, reinforcing systemic inequality. He portrays economic independence as a crucial factor in overcoming class oppression.

5. Women and Economic Independence

Karnad presents nuanced female characters whose lack of economic independence limits their agency. In *Nagamandala*, Rani's dependence on her husband reflects the patriarchal control over women's economic and personal lives. However, her eventual assertion of identity symbolizes resistance. He subtly critiques the socio-economic structures that confine women and underscores the importance of economic empowerment for gender equality.

6. Economic Independence and Identity

Economic conditions significantly influence identity formation in Karnad's works. In *Hayavadana*, characters struggle with incomplete identities, symbolically linked to their social and economic conditions. Economic dependence often results in loss of individuality, while autonomy enables self-realization. Karnad suggests that identity is not only cultural but also deeply tied to economic freedom.

7. Contemporary Perspectives

Karnad's themes remain relevant in modern India, where economic disparities and gender inequalities persist. His works resonate with contemporary discussions on financial independence, especially in the context of globalization and changing social structures. The struggle for economic autonomy continues to shape individual and collective identities.

8. Discussion

The analysis reveals that economic independence in Karnad's plays operates as an underlying force influencing class relations, gender roles, and identity. While not always explicitly addressed, economic factors shape character trajectories and conflicts. Karnad's ability to embed these themes within myth and history makes his work both timeless and socially relevant.

9. Conclusion

Girish Karnad's contribution to Indian English literature extends beyond storytelling to a profound exploration of socio-economic realities. His plays highlight the importance of economic independence in achieving personal freedom and social equality. By portraying the struggles of individuals within restrictive systems, Karnad emphasizes the need for structural change to ensure equitable opportunities.

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