



ISSN Print: 2664-8717  
ISSN Online: 2664-8725  
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00  
IJRE 2022; 4(2): 35-38  
[www.englishjournal.net](http://www.englishjournal.net)  
Received: 05-11-2022  
Accepted: 07-12-2022

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## Diachronic approaches to mythology and Indian culture: Reading UR Ananthamurthy and Girish Karnad through the lens of monogenesis and polygenesis

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2022.v4.i2a.137>

### Abstract

Literatures written in various Indian languages are translated into English and other languages. Such translations pave the smooth way for theatre artists of various regions and vernaculars. The present paper assesses and evaluates Girish Karnad's and U R Ananthamurthy's unique contribution in the realm of Indian literature. Both of them have delved deep insight into the contemporary social and political problems and portrayed them effectively by picking historical figures to reflect the contemporary issues. To highlight the Indian classical tradition, Girish Karnad has shown a novel path for playwrights to follow. U R Ananthamurthy has created the historiography of Indian literature. This research aims at reading U R Ananthamurthy and Girish Karnad through Monogenesis and Polygenesis approaches as a part of the Diachronic study of mythical literature and culture studies.

**Keywords:** English translation, Indian drama, monogenesis, polygenesis, diachronic approaches, socio-psychological

### Introduction

Advocates of the myth-ritual hypothesis believe that every myth develops from ritual, which has led to the current diachronic research in Indian academia. A diachronic approach to myth and culture involves studying and analyzing myths and cultural phenomena across different time periods, focusing on their historical development and evolution. This approach is contrasted with a synchronic approach, which examines these subjects at a specific point in time. Diachronic analysis looks at how myths and cultural elements change and develop over time. It explores the origins of myths and how they have evolved as societies, technologies, and worldviews change. It examines how cultural beliefs and values are shaped by historical events, social changes, and interactions with other cultures. This can include tracing the development of religious beliefs, moral codes, and societal norms. Diachronic analysis considers how myths and cultural practices are transmitted from one generation to the next and how they adapt to new contexts. This may involve examining the role of oral traditions, written texts, or digital media in the preservation and modification of cultural elements. It explores how myths and cultural elements spread from one culture to another, often through trade, conquest, or migration. This diffusion can lead to the fusion of different cultural elements and the creation of syncretic belief systems. Diachronic analysis takes into account how major historical events, such as wars, revolutions, and technological advances, influence the development of myths and cultural narratives. These events can lead to the creation of new myths or the reinterpretation of existing ones.

Researchers using a diachronic approach seek to identify both the continuity and the breaks in cultural and mythological traditions. This can help explain how cultures adapt and survive through changing circumstances. Comparative mythology is a significant part of diachronic analysis. By comparing myths from different cultures and time periods, researchers can identify common themes, archetypes, and motifs, as well as differences and unique cultural expressions. A diachronic approach often relies on archaeological findings and historical texts to trace the development of myths and cultural practices. These sources provide valuable insights into the past.

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The study of diachrony also considers how cultures interact with one another, leading to cultural exchanges, syncretism, and the enrichment of mythological and cultural repertoires. An inclusive and a diachronic approach to myth and culture provides a historical perspective that helps researchers and scholars understand how these elements have evolved, adapted, and contributed to the development of human societies over time. It can reveal important insights into the connections between mythology, culture, and history.

Monogenesis and polygenesis theories can be applied in the interpretation of myths and cultures, although in this context, they are used in a more metaphorical or symbolic sense rather than referring to the actual origins of humanity. These theories can help us understand how different cultures explain the diversity of human experiences and beliefs. In the context of myth and culture, monogenesis can symbolize the idea of a shared cultural and spiritual ancestry. Many creation myths from various cultures emphasize the idea of a common origin for all people. For example, the biblical story of Adam and Eve in Christianity is a narrative that underscores the unity of humanity through a common ancestor. Monogenesis can also be applied to interpret cultural homogeneity or the belief that, despite surface differences, all human cultures share fundamental similarities in their beliefs, values, and myths. This perspective can foster a sense of universal human connection and shared human experiences. In the modern context of globalization and increased cultural exchange, monogenesis can be seen as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of cultures. It suggests that all cultures are influenced by and connected to one another, contributing to a global cultural tapestry.

Polygenesis, when applied to myths and cultures, can be seen as a way to interpret the diverse origins of belief systems. Different cultures may have unique myths and narratives that explain their distinct cultural identities and worldviews. Polygenesis is used to support the idea of cultural relativism, which emphasizes that each culture is a product of its specific historical, geographical, and social context. In this interpretation, cultures are not compared to a single standard but understood in the context of their unique origins. Polygenesis can highlight the importance of recognizing and respecting cultural pluralism, the coexistence of multiple cultural worldviews and practices. It underscores the idea that different cultures may have equally valid and meaningful interpretations of the world. This research probes into the intertextuality between myth culture and literature and the social mobility thereof, with special reference to the writings of U R Ananthamurthy and Girish Karnad.

The Indian English Drama did not get the respectable place in the history of English literature till 20<sup>th</sup> century. The drama during this period was under the influence of English dramatists, not having its original existence or thought the pre independence era saw some stalwarts – Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, A.S.P. Ayyar, Lobo Prabhu, Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya and Bharti Sarabhai who contributed substantially to the growth and development of India English Drama but it was Rabindra Nath Tagore who firstly invested Indian drama in English with lyrics excellence, symbolic overtones and allegorical significance. One can authenticate this statement by quoting A C Ward: “A play is like a sink in a town, where unto all

the fifth doth runne: or a vile in the body that draweth all the ill humors unto it.” (Ward, 222)

Quite a few post-independence playwrights like Nissim Ezekiel, Lakhan Dev, Gurucharan Das, Gieve Patel, and Pratap Sharma have made a significant contribution to the development of Indian English Drama. Modern Indian Drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosity. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with splendid results. There are some foremost reasons for the lack of dramatic literature in English in India. First, for what of Indian English theatre, the playwrights failed to achieve stage worthiness. Secondly, English being a foreign language is not intelligible to the masses and the playwrights found it difficult to write crisp, natural and graceful dialogues in English and further, the meager extent of experiment in the field of drama.

Girish Reghunath Karnad (1983), a multifaceted personality the stage actor. T.V. artist, film producer, director, script writer, editor and the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Karnad is considered one of the most significant Indian dramatists. He has enriched the Indian literary scene by his contribution to art, culture, theatre and drama. It is most countable that Karnad has been conferred by the President of India, the prestigious awards, Padma Shri in 1974 and Padma Bhushan in 1992. He has been widely acclaimed by both the theatre and drama critics for certain aspects of his plays-plot constructions, characterizations, song spectacle, symbolism, use of myths and folktales, reinterpretation of history, projection of contemporary social and psychological problems especially those of women and children. R.K. Dhawan remarks about his position and contribution to theatre and drama:

Girish Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. He has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor director. His contribution goes beyond theatre. (Dhawan, 13)

Karnad's plays firstly written in Kannada, his mother tongue, and then translated into other languages including English have brought him national and international recognition in various aspects. His translations forged a link between the East and the West and the North and the south. He has also contributed to the growing richness of contemporary creative consciousness. Hence his plays have been and also are being enacted by eminent directors such as E. Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey, Shyamananda Jalan, Amol Alana, V. Karanth and so on.

Girish Karnad made constant efforts to revitalize and reinterpret myths and legends in the context of Indian drama, contributing to the legacy of Indian theater. Karnad's plays draw on Indian mythology and legends, reimagining them in a contemporary context. Interplay of tradition and modernity in Karnad's plays are characterized by their ability to bridge the gap between and Polygenetic approaches. He skilfully incorporates elements of traditional Indian theatre, such as Yakshagana and folk traditions, while also addressing contemporary social and political

issues. His works delve deep into questions of cultural identity and societal norms. *Tughlaq*, for example, examines the life of the 14th-century Indian ruler Muhammad bin *Tughlaq* and serves as a metaphor for contemporary political and social issues. Karnad was known for his use of multiple languages in his plays, reflecting the linguistic diversity of India. This not only added authenticity to his works but also made them more accessible to a wider audience. He experimented with narrative structures, blurring the lines between reality and mythology. His play *Nagamandala* is an excellent example of this, where he weaves a folk tale into the lives of the characters. Karnad's works often feature strong female characters who challenge traditional gender roles. For instance, his play *Nagamandala* explores the themes of female empowerment and liberation. Girish Karnad's constant efforts in reviving and reinterpreting Indian myths and legends for the legacy of Indian drama have left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape. His work remains relevant and continues to inspire new generations of playwrights and artists, making him a central figure in the evolution of Indian theatre and literature.

Karnad was deeply fascinated by the mythological, legendary and historical characters as well. The great scriptural sources as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Puranas and legendary stories of *Kathasaritasagara*, left an indelible impression on his mind to recreate these tales and characters in modern context. History has nurtured in Karnad dominant desire for social justice, a sincere obsession for the socially oppressed. It is worth paying attention that as a playwright, Girish Karnad transforms the metaphysics into the contemporary dimensions and history into trans-historical perspective. Girish Karnad handled myths brilliantly in *Yayati*, (1961), *Hayavadana*, (1971), *Naga-Mandala*, (1988), *The Fire and the Rain*, (1995), and *Bali: The Sacrifice*, (2002). Karnad's handling of myths and history throws light on mystery of the process of his artistic creation. He ruminates over myths and comes across in his reading of ancient literature. Karnad almost in his all plays makes use of ancient myths, histories and traditions interpret the psycho-socio-cultural study and age old humans' situation with reference to contemporary experience. He leads as deep into traditional mythology to reveal the conflict that tears man's mind.

Similarly, as in mythological plays, Girish Karnad has given a new meaning and dimensions to Indian history through his historical plays-*Tughlaq*, (1964), *Tale-Danda*, (1990), and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, (1997). In post-colonial India, where the past now appears to be largely an orientalist construction, fictions involving in history must be inevitably draw attention to the inherited problems of historical presentation, even as they represent history and invert it with new meanings.

Girish Karnad, amongst the contemporary Indian dramatists, shares a significant place with Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar. While Sircar and Tendulkar deal with the problems of the middle class, Karnad takes a departure and has turned to myths and history for the depiction of eternal reality i.e. man's futile struggle for perfection. His protagonists have a strong urge to attain perfection in the imperfect world. Karnad has the superb talent to project modern man's dilemma and his sorry state of confusion. Due to his interaction with the traditional as well as western forms, he makes a subtle synthesis of both to invent a new theatre of his own. His dramatic techniques and devices give him a

distinct place in contemporary arena of dramaturgy and term is coined for his plays – Karnadian. R.S. Sharma aptly writes:

Karnad is equally important in his contribution to the dramatic art and here also he is distinguished for his Indianness. His main stay is in the age-old tradition of India drama which goes back to many centuries. (Sharma, 223)

Karnad's plays, broadly speaking, are hybrid- a cross-breed between traditional Indian Natak and Western drama from past to present. In his plays, we have Western Chorus- The Sutradhar, significant character in Natak since its beginnings and Bharat vakyas, and a happy ending in the tradition of Indian Drama. Karnad employs myths and histories for his dramatic works and presents the characteristics of Indian setting. He observes the Natyashastra tradition, which is evident form of choice of his plots. His protagonists are from mythical and historical backgrounds. The influence of Yakshaghana plays, which Karnad used to watch in his childhood, is also reflected in his use of buffoonery and horseplay. He represents the best tradition of the Kannada drama, which is entirely rich with romantic plays, tragedies, comedies, poetic and blank verse plays. Karnad uses distinctive forms for all his plays. He explores major contemporary social issues with the use of myths, histories and legends. Karnad's plays show their own innovative style with these combinations. The original material of his plays always belongs to India's ideological past. M.K. Choudhary is of the view:

Karnad has helped to change the direction of Indian drama from mimicking of the Western dramatic themes and forms to the traditional Indian folk theatre of which myth constitutes a major idiom. (Chaudhary, 234)

U.R. Ananthamurthy was an equally celebrated Indian writer. He was known for his exploration of various themes in his works, including mythology and Indian knowledge systems. His literature probed into the complexities of Indian culture, society, and identity. Ananthamurthy's works frequently draw upon Indian mythology to explore and critique contemporary issues. He skilfully weaves ancient myths and legends into his narratives to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural and social fabric of India. For example, his novel *Samskara* explores the conflict between tradition and modernity through the lens of a Brahmin community's response to a dead body that disrupts their rituals. This novel is often considered a classic in Indian literature for its portrayal of the tensions between traditional values and changing social norms. Various schools of thought that have shaped Indian intellectual traditions, looking at Ananthamurthy's works with a diachronic approach, making the research lucid. He examines the tensions and intersections between these knowledge systems and the challenges they pose to individuals and society. In his novel *Bharathipura*, he explores the impact of Indian philosophical ideas on the protagonist's life and actions. Ananthamurthy's literature serves as a platform for critiquing contemporary issues within the Indian society, such as caste, gender, and religious conflicts. He uses mythology and Indian knowledge systems to highlight these issues and provoke discussions on how traditional beliefs

and practices influence modern life. Ananthamurthy's characters embody the complexities of Indian culture and its deep-rooted belief systems. They struggle with their identities, values, and belief systems, making his works a reflection of the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity in India. Ananthamurthy's writing style incorporates elements of the Indian literary tradition, including symbolism, allegory, and philosophical depth. His narratives are often multi-layered, inviting readers to delve deeper into the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of his stories.

U.R. Ananthamurthy's literature is a rich exploration of mythology and Indian knowledge systems, using these elements to shed light on contemporary Indian society, its cultural conflicts, and the evolving identity of the Indian people. His novel *Samskara* is a significant work of Indian literature that can be analyzed as a part of Indian knowledge systems in several ways. The novel seeks into the complexities of traditional Indian society, morality, religious beliefs, and the clash between ancient wisdom and modernity. The novel revolves around the conflict faced by its protagonist, Praneshacharya, when he comes across the dead body of an outcaste (untouchable) in his orthodox Brahmin village. Praneshacharya is torn between his rigid adherence to dharma (duty) and societal norms and his growing moral dilemma. The novel raises questions about the interpretation of dharma within the context of Indian moral and ethical systems. *Samskara* explores Hindu philosophy and rituals deeply embedded in Indian culture. It looks into the rituals, customs, and religious beliefs of the Brahmin community, offering a glimpse into the complex needlepoin of Indian spirituality and religious practices. The novel grapples with the caste system, a significant aspect of Indian social structure. It highlights the deep-rooted inequalities and prejudices within the caste system and how these affect the lives of individuals. Ananthamurthy uses the narrative to critique the rigidity of the caste system and its impact on people's lives. *Samskara* illustrates the clash between traditional Indian knowledge systems and the emerging ideas of modernity. Praneshacharya's internal struggle mirrors the broader societal shift happening in India during the period when the novel is set, where traditional values are being challenged by more contemporary and secular perspectives. Ananthamurthy's novel provides deep insights into the psyche of his characters. The psychological complexities of the characters are intertwined with their cultural and philosophical beliefs, reflecting the intricacies of the human mind within the context of Indian knowledge systems. The novel explores existential themes related to identity, particularly through Praneshacharya's crisis. His quest for identity and purpose is linked to his understanding of the world and his place within it, reflecting the philosophical exploration of self and existence found in Indian thought.

In *Samskara*, U.R. Ananthamurthy offers a thought-provoking exploration of Indian knowledge systems by digging into the moral, philosophical, and cultural dilemmas faced by his characters; the novel is a social satire. The novel serves as a commentary on the intersection of tradition and modernity in Indian society, and it raises questions about the interpretation of age-old beliefs in a changing world. This makes it a significant work within the broader context of Indian literature and its engagement with Indian knowledge systems.

## Conclusion

Karnad's and Ananthamurthy's writings raise human nature and psychology and pave a novel path for the writers of future generations, and a Diachronic approach to the study of their literature give hints of intertextuality between literature and mythology. In the interpretation of myth and culture, it is crucial to use the theories of Monogenesis and Polygenesis in a deferential and non-discriminatory manner. The application of Monogenesis and Polygenesis are sensitive to the cultural and historical contexts of any narrative and they need not be used to justify or perpetuate harmful stereotypes or biases. Both theories do provide valuable insights into how cultures perceive their own origins and the interconnectedness or diversity of human experience, and no better instance can be queried in this context than reading U R Ananthamurthy and Girish Karnad through the Diachronic lens.

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