

Karnad's *Hayavadana*: A Study on Incomplete Individuals

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In the present paper I would like to strike a note on the ultimate truth that one man cannot possess all the good qualities and that the world is full of incomplete individuals with ideas suggested by Girish Karnad in his *Hayavadana*, the two-act play published in 1972. Karnad (1938-2019) is a well known personality, a versatile genius and 'one of the foremost prolific writers' in India writing in Kannada. He started his career with a one act play entitled *Maa Nishaadha* and became famous for his plays like *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Tale-Danda* and so on. He was also an actor, director, film-maker, social philosopher and artist. Karnad is the most outstanding personality of Indian drama who experimented and experienced folk theatre, feature films of art and culture, commercial television serials as well as contemporary social and political issues. He was awarded Doctor of Letters, Padmashree, Padma Bhushan by the President of India. In this way, we can say that Karnad is internationally known as a playwright. Apart from it he is also a highly talented film-maker, a noted communicator and a person of wide accomplishments and interests. His creative intellectualism obviously permeated through his views and subjects of his plays which communicated his own independent and original feelings, thoughts and interpretations.

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Girish Karnad is one of India's foremost modern playwrights. He got the highest literary recognition for his contribution to modern Indian drama. Karnad was fascinated by the traditional theme-plays. Therefore, all his plays be the theme mythical, historical or legendary. Nonetheless, he read the western playwrights during his college days. Karnad uses the Indian conventions and folk-art, like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denounces. Towards the conflicts of normal world, Karnad insinuates that each individual person separates from other people possessing his own merits and demerits. Although individuality and individualism are

commonly considered to mature with age and experience, an adult human is being considered by the state of health and mind. The world is indifferent to desires and frustrations, joys and sorrows of human beings. The only possibility for man is to find harmony in disharmony that man has to compromise with the time. The real world is full of sufferings and hatred for one another because God has not gifted him contentment; it is unable to yield satisfaction to the impulses. Art or dissociation of sensibility refers to the cultural phenomenon and reflects the mind of the depressed person. Karnad takes refuse in the Indian myths and legends and uses them as a vehicle for a new vision. By using these myths, he explicitly portrays the absurdity of life with all its demental passions, conflicts and man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection.

I am fascinated by the modern philosophical thoughts of existentialism and that of its exponent. Girish Karnad was also influenced by these modern philosophers like, Ravindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Bharathi Sarabhi who gave a new drama in almost all the Indian languages. It was a drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Symbolism to keep pace with the trends of poetry and fiction. Karnad had experimented the contents of myths, history and folklore in his plays and became a multi-dimensional artist.

Hayavadana is the third play of Girish Karnad. In 1972, he was given Kamaladevi Award for this play. The plot of the play is based on a theme drawn from *Transposed Heads* a 1940 novella of Thomas Mann, which is originally found in the 11th –century ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit text *Kathasaritsagara*. M.K. Naik says, “*Hayavadana* had effectively demonstrated how Indian English drama could revitalize itself by employing experimental models.” He observes that the play has an even more valuable lesson to its roots in rich tradition of ancient Indian drama, both in Sanskrit and folk drama in the Prakrits.¹ Karnad used the folk-art of Yakshagana in order to examine the modern problem of men. In the play, Padmini’s search for a complete man who must have the best attributes of mind and body is frustrated in spite of her best efforts and Padmini realizes that it is the mind that is always supreme and always determines what a man is and will become. However, the mythological examples are immediately drawing favorable attention in full of attraction. For example, Centaur is of half man and half horse, Minotaur is of half man and half bull, and Sphinx is of a half lion’s body and a woman’s head. Such combination reminds us of the three witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Hayavadana in Karnad’s *Hayavadana* as good literary examples. Unlike Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar who delivered into the problems of the middle-class people, Girish Karnad tried to show

the absurdity of life with all mythical and legendary elemental passion and conflicts and man's eternal struggle to achieve freedom. Karnad went back to myths and legends and made them a vehicle of his new passion. In one of his interviews with Meenakshi Raykar he has said that he was acquainted with the family of one woman and two men, one husband and another friend.² The woman loved both of them and used to confuse their names, which is dramatized in the episode of the transposition of heads. The play has a similar tale in the early 17th –century play, *A Woman Killed With Kindness* by Thomas Heywood. The story also concentrated the same theme of female sexuality, the relationship between one woman and two men, one husband, another friend. However, the significant fact is that Karnad's plays have a direct contemporary social relevance. *Hayavadana* too has a personal strain in a humanistic vision that he has related to Meenakshi Raykar.

There is one thing in Karnad's characters that all of them are intelligent. There is hardly one who is less than intelligent. There is also a good characteristic of his art of characterization. There is nothing that really makes them what they individually appear. Aziz and Tughlaq are such characters in his historical play *Tughlaq*. Defect of missing individuality is seen in Devadatta and Kapila also. They lack individuality that is theatrically essential to their characters holding sustained interest. We see them as chess pieces moved to definite purposes by the playwright. Padmini is successfully picturised as the predicament of a modern, free and bold woman who is torn between polarities, a woman who loves her husband as well as someone else for two different aspects of their personalities. Padmini experiences the best of both men after the exchange of heads, but slowly she becomes aware of the reality. The two friends commit suicide and Padmini performs Sati in the end. The prominent shape shifting is the interchange of the bodies of Kapila and Devadatta. Through in reality it is impossible for such exchanges to occur. Karnad through his artistic skill makes the reader feel at ease and entralls them. Shape shifting illuminates the characters in *Hayavadana*.

However, *Hayavadana* tells the story of incomplete love between Padmini and Devadatta and that of Padmini and Kapila. She requires a fabulous body as well as a fabulous mind. The play suggests that mind is excellent which is superior to body. The quest of completeness is an interesting part of the play. Karnad gives his fullest expression to a woman's innermost feelings in *Hayavadana* through Padmini. A man can keep as many wives or mistress as he likes but a woman is denied such privileges. Kapila proposed his idea to Padmini and Devadatta which is noteworthy;

“Devadatta, could not we all three like together- like the Pandavas and Draupadi” ³

Padmini does not show her agreement but shows her disagreement. The question arises, in this way, whether a woman does not have desire to have more husband than one. The play answers the question affirmatively. Karnad accepts that a woman has her desire but cannot live like a Draupadi of the Mahabharata in the contemporary society. In the context of freedom of modern women this problem is contemporary and becoming more serious and dangerous. They find out their soul mates outside marriage and family. Tired with a life in such oppressive patriarchal society when Padmini rushes to the forest Devadatta follows her with a sword in hand. Misbehaviour domination of male gender over female gender is shown in Karnad’s other play like, *Fire and The Rain* which is also perceptible in the character of Nittilai and Vishakha. Nittilai is also killed by her husband when she walks out on him. The concept of Pativarta is applicable to the woman like Padmini who sacrificed her life for two husbands. Thus Karnad’s plays are relevant to the contemporary society.

Hayavadana covers three worlds of experience: the human, the animal and the Devine. Within the human, the play includes the experiences of men, women and children as well as of the city and the wilderness. Second, the play presents the archetypal mother earth, teeming with desires for life and flowering the lotus love for perfection and completeness. Third, Karnad’s provision of the child in the modern world is commendable. It is clear that the contemporary Indian drama is dominated by a host of great playwrights like, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. All of them are regional dramatists in the sense that they write their plays in the regional languages like, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada respectively. They together have produced. “The best plays on the last thousand Years.”⁴ as Karnad himself has uttered. They are like the Irish Playwright Samuel Buckett who wrote his immortal plays like, *Waiting For Godot* and *Endgame*. In short, *Hayavadana* includes the very birth, growth and death of imagination to Indian drama, especially for the development of Indian drama what James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is the first best novel of 20th –century to the western world, so is *Hayavadana* the first best drama of this century to India.

Girish Karnad employs dramatic techniques-non-rational events, social euphemism, continual self-deception, imaginative cruelty and threat in *Hayavadana*. They lead up to an effective undermining of all rational structures of human intercourse. Devadatta and Kapila, the two intimate friends, face an existential crisis when Padmini falls in love with Kapila. Devadatta feels alienated and

estranged both from Kapila and Padmini. When they go to the temple of Rudra, Devadatta in a fit of sheer frustration and anguish goes to the temple of Kali and cuts off his head. Kapila too reaches there searching Devadatta and beheads himself. Padmini comes to grief by her wrong choice of action and an existential concern only for herself. She is lost in great anguish:

“They’ll say the two fought and died for this whore. They’re bound to say it. Then what will happen to me?”⁵

She worships goddess Kali who grants her boon to adjust their heads on their bodies and they would come to life. In utter confusion, she transposes their heads and, thus, creates an entirely absurdist situation for Devadatta, Kapila and for herself. This chaotic state creates the problem of identity and her serious deliberations. Therefore, it is decided that ‘the head is the sign of a man’. Bhagavata solves this problem:

“As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta and his is the rightful husband of Padmini.”⁶

Devadatta and Padmini return to Darmpura and Kapila goes to the forest.

Myths and legends serve as a surrogate for Karnad’s play. One of the reasons for the invention of tales and myth is that they act as vehicle for relieving boredom. They are sought by people all over the world, all times in modern western culture too. Myths are anonymous tales, rooted in primitive beliefs that have become traditional. Girish Krnad had given this traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today. The symbolic theme of *Yayati*’s attachment to life and its pleasure and also his final renunciation are rational. In *Mahabharata*, *Yayati* recognizes the nature of desire itself and realizes that fulfilment does not diminish or quench the sexual desires. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad combines the western techniques with Indian folk psyche, socio cultural and political reality. The entire play is cast in the form of traditional Indian folk drama, combines several features of ancient Sanskrit drama. Karnad strikes a significant note by exploring the dramatic potential of the ancient Indian myths, legends and folk traditions. One of the striking features of *Hayavadana* is the introduction of the device of making inanimate objects animate. Thus the

playwright takes liberty with the original myths and invents some relationship to make it acceptable to modern sensibilities.

Karnad suggests that the world is full of incomplete individuals and man craves for wholeness through dissatisfaction and longing for infinite satisfaction. The unrealistic plot of *Hayavadana* is that a woman follows a man for pleasure without violating traditional sanctions. But prompted by remorse in their dealing with each other, the two friends commit sacrificial suicide in Kali's temple. Though immensely desirable, such wholeness is seldom possible for human beings. Padmini's dissatisfaction of sexual life is designed as Devadatta's wife, but she tries to change her destiny. Karnad significantly projects the myth of Ganesha, who, in spite of himself being an embodiment of imperfection and incompleteness is worshipped as the destroyer of incompleteness.

References:

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