
THE USE OF MYTH IN KARNAD'S HAYAVADANA

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Abstract: Karnad says that the use of myths and folk techniques allow for 'complex seeing'. Although the myths have traditional and religious sanction, they pave the way for the questioning of human values. In Hayavadana, the elements of the supernatural play a significant role. The dramatist employs the conventions of folktales and motifs of folk theatre - masks, curtains, mime, songs, the narrator, dolls, horseman, the story within a story, facilitating a mixture of the human and non-human to create a magical world. It is a realm of incomplete individuals, magnanimous gods, vocal dolls and mute children, a world apathetic to the longings and frustrate ions, ecstasies and miseries of human beings.

Introduction: In Indian literary history, myth and folklore have always kept prominent positions. The two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata as well as the Purana have been an unending resource for literature as well as plays. But after the advent of British rule, the themes of Indian Drama changed due to increased knowledge of the option of use of themes other than myth, and drama moved its concentration towards social and political themes. There was a reversal in this trend in a kind of secondary renaissance period when Indian dramatists turned once more to myth. In her essay "Folk Theatre Strategies in Hayavadana"

Indian drama written in English and translated in English by Indian playwrights has registered a remarkable growth recent decades. Contemporary Indian drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuositities. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with splendid results.

Generally, a myth is a tale or a narrative with a symbolic meaning. Human, non - human and super-human characters appear in myths. And the presence of these super-natural agencies endows myth with a numinous character. Likewise, as these characters are transcendent, they raise „awe and fear“ in us.

Myths are considered to be pre-historical, and, therefore, they belong to no specific author. They have a social or collective authorship. The most remarkable characteristic of myth is its normative nature. It sets down rules which specifically apply to the moral realm.

Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar have remained the most representative of the contemporary Indian drama not only in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada respectively but also on the pan-Indian level. Among the major dramatists mentioned above, Girish Karnad has been regarded as the leading dramatist so far as the use of myth and history is concerned and his plays vividly represent this trend.

Girish Karnad has written eight plays in Kannada and translated four of them into English. Girish Karnad has written eight plays in Kannada and translated four of them into English. He makes uses of Yakshagana bayalata, a Kannada folk-theatre, in Hayavadana. In all his plays- be mythical, historical or legendary - Karnad's approach is modern. In his play, Hayavadana, he reinforces the central problem of human existence in a world of tangled relationships.

Man's search for his own self among a web of complex elationships, Girish Karnad's Hayavadana was influenced by Thomas Mann's The Transposed Heads, which in turn is borrowed from one of the Sanskrit Kathasaritasagara stories. While the Sanskrit tale poses a moral iddle, Mann uses it to question the logic that holds the head superior to the body. Karnad builds on Mann's line to explore the theme of identity in a world of confused relationships. The play aims at demystification of traditional values and concepts and presents multiple viewpoints that promote a dialogue on the basic accepted tenets of life. This is enhanced by the merging of three levels of experience - the divine, human and animal and the bringing together of the animate and the inanimate on a common plane.

Now let us know how Karnad employs elements of folk theatre in the play. In order to emphasize the central theme of the play i.e. the problem of identity and search for incompleteness, the playwright has introduced the subplot of Hayavadana and the play is written in the folk drama tradition. It is observed that Karnad also follows the same story as narrated in The Transposed Heads. However, he makes some significant changes in the names of characters and other details and introduces a subplot of Hayavadana to reinforce the human predicament. Shridaman, Nanda and Sita of Mann's story become Devadatta, Kapila and Padmina respectively. These are, in fact, archetypal names and stand for every man/ woman. In other words, they are representatives therefore their story could be a story of any person.

As is the practice in other dramatic forms in India,

every Yakshagana performance too begins with a host of preliminary rites. The play *Hayavadana* begins with the invocation of Lord Ganesha in the folk drama tradition. A mask of Ganesha is placed on a chair in the centre of the stage. While Pooja is done, the Bhagavata sings the benedictory verse in praise of Ganesha with musical accompaniment: In Karnad this ritual invocation seems rich in connotations most appropriate to the thematic and structural unity of the play. Ganesha is established at the presiding deity not just as per convention, he is, in fact, the embodiment of the very ideal the play chooses to discuss. Ganesha symbolizes the concepts of completeness and incompleteness. There is also the suggestion thrown in at the very beginning that the idea of totally of being is best left to the gods, it is a goal beyond human comprehension and knowledge.

After the introduction of the sub-plot, the Bhagavata once again picks up the thread of the main story. He reveals the love triangle even before the three characters are presented on stage: "Two friends there were – one mind, one heart.

They saw a girl and forgot themselves. We come to know that *Devdatta* is mesmerized by the bewitching beauty of a girl. He, at once, falls in love with her. He marries *Padmini*, the daughter of the leading merchant in *Dharampura*. But *Kapila* also falls in love with *Padmini*. Their relations get tangled. He goes to the temple of *Kali* and slices off his head with a sword. After waiting for some time, *Kapila* goes in search of *Devdatta* and, finding his friend dead and fearing that he might be accused of killing *Devdatta* for the sake of *Padmini's* hand, he too beheds himself.

Padmini then reaches the temple in search of *Devdatta* and *Kapila*. Terrified at the sight of the two beheaded bodies, she appeals to the goddess *Kali* for help. The goddess appears, She grants to the entreating *Padmini* the two men's lives after faulting the men for their foolish lies and false sacrifices. And she asks *Padmini* to rejoin the heads with the bodies. Unable in the darkness to identify the heads correctly, *Padmini* accidentally transposes the heads, giving to *Devdatta's* body *Kapila's* head and to *Kapila's* body *Devdatta's* head. The question now arises, "Who of the two is her husband?" The three find the answer in the words of a sage who proclaims that since the head is the supreme organ of the body, the man bearing *Devdatta's* head should be her husband.

Initially, *Devdatta* or the head of *Devdatta* on *Kapila's* body behaves differently from the way he did before. But gradually he changes to his former self. So does *Kapila*. But there is a difference: *Devdatta* stops writing poetry, while *Kapila* is troubled by the memories that lie deposited in *Devdatta's* body.

Padmini, who had felt after the exchange of heads that she had the best of both men, is slowly disillusioned. The story comes to an end with her self-immolation that follows the death of both the friends who kill each other in a duel.

The head-body conflict, as it has been put to superb use by Karnad, throws light on the conflict between the self and the other by means of the rejoined bodies of *Kapila* and *Devdatta*. If the old head symbolises the self, the new body symbolises the other. The self is opposed to the other, but it has to assimilate the other by bringing about a transformation in the other so that it becomes one with the self. As a result, over a period of time, the body of *Kapila* attached to the head of *Devdatta* transforms into the likeness of *Devdatta's* old body and vice versa. But despite this transformation *Padmini* remains unsatisfied. Her effort to find completeness in her mate fails. She is the one who really suffers in this war between head and body, intellect and emotion. Her unhappiness suggests that it is impossible to reconcile the dualities perfectly, that one has to live with these dualities, and that the ideal state of harmony is practically unattainable.

The play also explores the obscure and unreliable nature of self. In the liberal humanist tradition, the self has long been treated as something essentially and self-evidently given. But Karnad's play contests the notion of an essential self and its givenness. The play shows how the self may be (re)created and modified, since it is not a definite, coherent and fixed construction but a malleable structure open to moulding and remoulding. Individual identity is not an entirely free consciousness or a stable universal essence but a situated construction.

The old self dissolves and a new self gradually replaces it after the transposition of heads. *Kali's* temple is significant as the place where the process begins. When the three characters reach the temple in the midst of a dark and dense forest, they have left their previous selves behind.

Kali is the female embodiment of primordial time. She is also the goddess of obscurity and her passivity in the play challenges the popular myth, as the sanctity of her conventional representations is exposed to ironic and critical observation erasing the difference between the modern and the mythical consciousness. *Kali* may also be seen as signifying Mother India, with *Kapila*, *Padmini* and *Devdatta* deriving their identities from her. However, the identities so derived are inescapably caught in dualities. Indeed, a postcolonial reading of *Hayavadana* cannot fail to notice here a central conflict between pre-colonial and colonised strands of subjectivity.

Hayavadana, the horse-man, embodies the duality at

the heart of contemporary Indian subjectivity. Here lies the special significance of the opening scene: the horse-man theme anticipates the entire range of dualities which the play subsequently explores, but it also embodies the constituent duality of the human being, that is the duality between the animal and the human.

It can be said that the head and body conflict has been used by Karnad to explore the central dilemma faced by a contemporary Indian between various contradictory constituents of subjectivity such as the spiritual and the materialist, the mental and the bodily, the rural and the urban, the pre-colonial and the colonised, the traditional and the modern. Thus, Hayavadana lays bare various layers of duality present at the centre of contemporary Indian subjectivity.

Karnad thus tries to explore in this play the problematic identity of the contemporary Indian subject. Through the use of various devices, he seems to be even consciously aiming to bring home the complexity of the problem. As he states in the Introduction to Three Plays: The chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem.

The play succeeds in dramatizing the situation successfully though it does not point to any clear answers. It confronts the dualities and contradictions, without suggesting the possibility of any easy reconciliation.

References:

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