

JUXTAPOSITION OF MYTH AND *THE MODERN*: A STUDY ON KARNAD'S USE OF MYTH IN HAYAVADANA

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Myth is a shared culture and common understanding used by the primitive people for their amusement and unity in the society which were mainly based on their imaginary stories. These myths exist in every society from the primordial times and in modern times there is a growing tendency to reserve these myths realizing their values and the symbolic meanings. Now they are also considered as the identity of a society and as souvenir of its past. And in India they are valued as much as of religions which are preserved in the form of books like *Veda*, *Purana* and so on. Several modern Indian writers have made use of these myths in their writing assimilating them in the modern context and showing their affinity with the modern way life. Girish Karnad is also one of such writers in whose writing myth is the most important thing per se. For him, myth is not just a device to look back into the past, but it is also an instrument to analyze the present and contemplate about the future. He has taken myth as his dominant theme in his most of the plays and partially in all the plays. He has done so to present myth in the modern ways of life and he often inter weaves them with the modern life. This paper intends to show how Karnad has made use of these myths in the modern context with reference to few of his play having special importance on the *Hayavadana*.

The play *Hayavadana* is basically based on myth having taken from the stories in Kathasaritsagara and also from Mann's *The Transposed Head* which he himself admits as

The central episode in the play – the story of Devadatta and Kapila – is based on a tale from the Kathasaritsagara but I have drawn heavily on Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in *The Transposed Head* and I am grateful to Mrs Mann for permission to do so. (Karnad, Note to *Hayavadana*, oxford publication.)

The play is about two 'one mind one heart' friends namely Kapila and Devadatta and their affair with Padmini who marries Devadatta but at the same time keeps relationship with Kapila. And then there is out of context of the basic story 'Hayavadana' a half man half horse that Karnad

relates through his notion of identity. These characters and stories of them are interwoven masterfully by Karnad through various processes. These are no doubt characters taken from Indian myth's and provides additional spices in it through the appearance of Kali another figure from the myth who turns the play in a different shape. It is she who changes the head of Kapila and Devadatta although she was aware of the mistake made by Padmini which makes the life of the three characters unusual and much more complex to tolerate. After that Padmini had to live with the head of Devadatta and the body Kapila who towards the end kills each other making Padmini to sacrifice her life choosing sati while Hayavadana remains unchanged. However from the outside of the story it looks like a mere representation of some mythical stories but in fact it is not so. Rather Karnad through this story appropriates the mythical story in the modern context and also gives expression to the Indian imagination with profound meaning.

What is Karnad's most important take in the play are the crisis of identity and the duality of human life and also the complexity of bearing it. Hayavadana when first appears then we find that he is bearing the head of a horse and the body of a man suggesting the theme of the play and the crisis of his identity. He wants to be a complete man or a horse but he can be neither. To be a complete whole he goes to Kali who makes him a complete horse with human voice. So the complexity remains suggesting that completeness is impossible ideal for human being. After him we are introduced with the two main characters who towards middle of the play come across a similar situation. Their head is intermingled by a mistake of their beloved and the ignorance of Kali. But head is the identity of human being but they do not have their own head and thus the complexity of identity begins and the question that arises is with whom Padmini is going to live. Padmini loved the body of Kapila and the intellect of Devadatta and she is going to have both as the traditional norm of head as the identity of human being finally works here and since Devadatta had the body of Kapila so she is going have both but not a complete man. Hayavadana here serves as a counterpart of Padmini feelings. She wanted a complete man just like everyone but like Hayavadana she to fails. So also the son of Padmini suffers from identity crisis and Padmini tells Bhagavata:

Take him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in the forest and tell them it's Kapila's son. They loved Kapila and will bring up the child. Let the child grow up in the forest with rivers and the trees. When he is five take him to the revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharamputra. Tell him it's Devadutta's son."

(Karnad, p. 62)

That is, he is going to live with the identity of two father. He also lacks the natural joy and laughter, fails to communicate with anyone and is passionately attached with the dolls.

However, somehow the dispute between head and the body is solved but the question of society is always there and this is a tough conundrum to be solved. Devadatta was a Brahmin cum poet but Kapila was the son of ironsmith and thus their entire business is different from each other but they have to live in the society. And due to this puzzlement Kapila(the new form) opted to stay in the jungle itself alienating from the society. Alienation is also typical in our modern society. While Devadatta practices much to be like the earlier one. And now they are living with two different identities which is also a very peculiar trait to be found in modern society. The use of the masks in the play also suggests the double identity of human being. When we use mask we become not what we in real are but someone whom we choose. This question of modern identity problem he manages perfectly through this use of mythological story.

The question of woman's suffering also runs with this exchange of head by them. Each times both them acts according to their own volitions irrespective of their beloved Padimini who always comes next. They fight with each other without caring about her and her future. She realizes that without them she is nothing so she chooses to kill herself when they cut their head in front of Kali. Here again myth works. Kali arises and prohibits her from suicide and also promises to rejoin them. The appearance of Kali again is very modern. She is shown as sleepy and yawning again and again and asks Padmini to do soon because she is sleepy. This is because in the pujas or other ceremonies we find that in front Kali the drum and other forms of music are played and this Karnad takes as Kali sleeps all the time and in order to wake her up we do so. However at the end we see that Padmini commits sati which was banned many years ago. This revival of sati by Karnad is shown not as it was but as an act of own volition. She herself chooses to do so in order to be with them. By this he is also giving a chance to the women to act according to their own. And also he attempts to create a space for them and their likes as-

“Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?... I have neither regret nor shame”

(Karnad, Hayavadana p. 64).

Women are not supposed have poly-relationship but here Karnad made use of this. Like padmini there are many modern emancipated women who have the desire to love their husband for one thing while admire other man for another thing. She is just this representation of modern women. He is also showing that the sati was done not always by force but there were some example when women did so according to their own wish.

Furthermore, the very concept of modern tendency of reading the psyche is also made used in the play. Since this is a play to be performed so he adopted the method of using certain other device and here in the play the dolls serves this purpose. The dolls are used to read the mind of Padmini

and Devadatta. They are used as an omnipresent phenomenon who even can intrude into ones dream. Doll I and Doll II comment on her psyche reverie reactions—dreams, phantasies and reveries in which Kapila figures “climbing a tree!” “Dived into a river” symbolically let loose Padmini’s suppressed sexual desire and hunger for Kapila.

Apart from all these the three characters- Padmini, Kapila and Devadutta are existential sufferers. Their death emphasizes the ‘meaninglessness’ of death. Modern man’s frustration, God’s indifference, quest for identity, eagerness to achieve completeness and human joys and sorrows are well depicted in the play. Girish Karnad has meticulously used myths and folktales to touch upon all significant issues of modern era which makes the play a postcolonial one.

Thus by using a mythical background Karnad in the play has brought up certain issues which are very relevant to our modern times. From the surface level it is no doubt a mythical story but beneath it lays the deeper truth of modern life. In fact Karnad has used the myth as mask to use modern issue. This also makes him one of the prominent Indian postcolonial playwrights.

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