



EXPLORING MYTH AND TRADITION IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *HAYAVADANA AND TALE-DANDE*

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ABSTRACT

Myth is primarily a certain type of story in which some of the chief characters are gods or other beings larger in power than humanity. Very seldom it is located in history: its action takes place in a world above or prior to ordinary time. Hence, like the folk tale, it is an abstract story pattern. The characters can do what they like, which means what the storyteller likes. There is no need to be plausible or logical in motivation. The things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories; they are in a self-contained literary world.

Myths are stories of unascertainable origin or authorship accompanying or helping to explain religious beliefs. Often (though not necessarily) their subject is the exploits of a god or hero, which may be of a fabulous or a superhuman nature and which may have instituted a change in the working of the universe or in the conditions of social life.

In this paper, I have discussed how Girish Karnad has brought out tradition and culture in his plays.

Keywords: *Myth, Human Identity, Culture, Tradition.*


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**GIRISH KARNAD'S LIFE AND EARLY INFLUENCES**

Girish Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. He belongs to semi-Marathi and semi-Kannada Saraswathi community of Dharwar. He grew up in a small village in Karnataka. He had a firsthand experience of folk theatre and Natak companies which visited his village as a result these made a lasting impression on his mind.

Karnad developed interest in native drama because of his parent's interest which shaped him as a dramatist. He wanted to become a poet but he realized that he could not become a poet but only a playwright. His father took the entire family to see plays staged by different groups.

Girish Karnad is considered as one of the three great writers of India the only two are Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar. Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar dealt with the problems of middle class where as Karnad deals with myth culture and tradition and makes them a vehicle of a new vision. By using these he shows may life and his external struggle for perfection. His characters are revolutionary especially all his woman characters are empowered and enlightened ones.

Karnad has written *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Anugumalinge* (1977), *Hittina Hunja* (1980), *Nagumandala* (1988), *Tale Dande* (1990), and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995). Out of these eight plays, only five plays *Hayavadana*, *Nagumandala*, *Tale Dande*, *The Fire and the Rain* and *Tughlaq* have been translated into English.

The story of *Hayavadana* was partly taken from Thomas Mann's story "Transposed Heads" through this play Karnad tries to bring out the human identity in a world of tangled relationship. The story begins with a simple love triangle and ends in a comic and confusing twist of fate. In Karnad's *Hayavadana* Devadatta and his beautiful wife Padmini find themselves traveling with their faithful friend Kapila. Devalatha convinced of his wife's love for Kapila, beheads himself. Coming to know the act of his friend Kapila too takes away his own head. Seeing the two bodies' Padmini prays to goddess. Goddess asks her to keep their heads on their bodies. In confusion she places the head of Kapila on Devadatta's body and the head of Devadatta on Kapila's body. The real dilemma is who should be considered the real

husband of Padmini after this transmutation of head and body. This way the theme of the play is a complex one.

HAYAVADANA

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* is a play in two acts. His third play originally written in Kannada. The play was an immediate success on the stage and received the prestigious Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya award of 1971. The play Wright himself translated it into English retaining, however the original title *Hayavadana*. *Hayavadana* literally means 'one with horse's head'. The precursor text is the Transposed Heads by Thomas Mann. Although switching of heads of two people are relatively rare in the myths, legends and folk tales of most cultures, Indian myth provides a fairly rich source of these stories. The most Indian example of this narrative concerns the origin of the elephant-headed God Ganesha. *Hayavadana* has one main plot and one sub-plot. The story of *Hayavadana* constitutes the sub-plot while the main-plot is based on the story of Transposed Heads. It's obvious that the main theme of *Hayavadana* is derived from one of the stories from Sanskrit *Vetala Panchavimshati* which forms part of Kshemendra's, *Brihat Katha Manjari* and Somadeva's *Katha Sarit Sagara* written around 1070 A.D. Each of these stories poses a riddle at the end which *Vetala* challenges the King to solve. All the riddles are capital brain teasers. A modern source of *Hayavadana* is Thomas Mann's long short story *The Transposed Heads* which the author himself called a "metaphysical jest". If Mann's aim was to stress the ironic impossibility of combining perfectly the spirit and the flesh in human life, Karnad tries to pose existential ideas like the problem of being and the metaphysical anguish of the human condition. For this he combines the plot of the transposed heads with the *Hayavadana* story which is entirely his own invention. The importance of this addition is clear from the fact that the play derives its title from it. The under plot at *Hayavadana*, the horseman provides the frame work of the play both as a prologue and as an epilogue. The story of *Devedatta*, *Kapila* and *Padmini* in Karnad's *Hayavadana* follows elements of characterization and the order of events in Mann's story. But Karnad tries to pose existential ideas like the problem of human condition as appears



as essential; one of disunity and imperfection culminating in death. For this it seems that he combines the human condition of transposed heads with the Hayavadana story which is entirely his own invention. Karnad's *Hayavadana* raises a few relevant questions such as what determines the identity of a person, is it head or the body? Is it facial beauty and intelligence or strength and physical prowess? The plot also revolves around the query of what appeals to a woman intellect or physical skill? Then the valid questions arise which might sound a bit philosophical but, yet to be addressed. What is your real self? What do you think you are? What do others think you are? *Hayavadana* tells a story embellished with the harsh truths of life and the incongruities of our existence capsule in fantasy. It's simultaneously a story of a woman. It's a comment on blind faith devoid of any reason. Karnad characteristically handles a riddle which has plagued mankind in wanting to break out of society, inflicted moral codes. Karnad's protagonist is Padmini, the woman and not Kapila or Devadutta, because social beliefs put such a price on her purity. Padmini epitomizes the eternal desiderative wish of a human being for the acquisition of a substantial idea. Padmini wants both brain and brawn as her companion in life. Karnad's own vision does not let her succeed. Mankind cannot live with perfection. On the other hand, Karnad allows half man, half – horse Hayavadana to evolve into a full horse because he tries his sights lower down the ladder. Karnad's handling of the sources of his plot in the play makes it abundantly clear that this interpretation of the ancient Indian history not only differs substantially from the originals but also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with a new meaning which has an urgent relevance to present day thinking about man and his world. As Kirtinath Kurtkoti, in his 'Introduction to *Hayavadana*', has accurately remarked: "Karnad's play poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. The result is a confusion of identities which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality."

TALE-DANDA

The essential method of *Tale-Danda* is the same as that of Tughlaq: to understand the present

one must return to the past, because the premodern history of India prefigures and encompasses the drama of modernity. But where Tughlaq confronts the problem of majority and minority religions (Hinduism and Islam) turning against each other, Tale-Danda goes further back in time to uncover the history of the majority religion turning against itself. This is a necessary move because the play responds to a later moment in the political evolution of India-as-nation--the decisive shift in the late-1980s from secular to religious (and more specifically Hindu) nationalism, which suppressed individual styles of charismatic leadership in favour of mass politics fuelled by communal feeling. In pursuing their program Hindu nationalists follow what T. N. Madan describes as the 'basic premise of communalism ...that the political interests of a religious community are unaffected by ethnic, linguistic, class, or any other divisions within the community. Rather, these interests are defined antagonistically in relation to other similarly conceived religious communities' ('Religion' 61).

The second claim, put forward not so much by Hindu ideologues as by political theorists attempting to explain the rise of religious extremism in modern societies, is that the simultaneous appearance of secularization and fundamentalism is only 'apparently contradictory, for in truth it is the marginalization of faith, which is what secularism is, that permits the perversion of religion.

There are no fundamentalists or revivalists in traditional society' (Madan, 'Secularism' 749). Karnad's play is a rejoinder to the claims that Hinduism is a monolithic cultural unity which can unproblematically oppose rival systems of belief like Islam, and that religious intolerance is a problem created by a secularized modernity. The play's historical narrative centers on the twelfth-century Virasaiva movement of religious reform and protest, led by the poet-saint Basavanna, which flourished for a time in the city of Kalyan (in present-day Karnataka) under the patronage of King Bijjala, but ended in violence when the new community translated its opposition to caste into practice by arranging a marriage between a brahmin girl and an untouchable boy. To focus on the hierarchical disunity of Hinduism, Karnad foregrounds the problem of caste



and relegates the devotional, mystical, and poetic features of the movement to the background. And to highlight the pervasiveness of violence in a 'traditional' society, he incorporates the conflicts not only across caste boundaries within brahminical Hinduism, but also between Hinduism and reformist religions like Buddhism and Jainism.

Two further arguments emerge from this representation for Hinduism to claim an exclusive right in the constitution of an Indian nation is to flout a long-term history of racial and religious diversity, and for Hinduism to claim a pristine pre-Islamic past is to disown history of reform, protest, sectarianism, and violence.

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CONCLUSION

The entire play is cast in the form of traditional Indian folk drama which took several features of ancient Sanskrit drama but adapted them to its own special needs as a popular form of art. The particular form of drama that Karnad draws upon is Yakshagana of Karnataka but this form has much in common with other traditional forms extant in the different parts of the country. In this respect, though a multi-dimensional personality, Girish Karnad is at his best in playwriting.

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