

Dramatic Art and Techniques in Karnad's *Hayavadana*

Dr. Mirza M. Baig

Post Graduate Deptt. of English and Research Centre
People's College, Nanded (Maharashtra), India.

Abstract:

Girish Karnad is the foremost multi-faceted personality of contemporary Indian theatre. Apart from being a playwright, Karnad is an actor, and a director. He had written a number of documentaries and for television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English. He has performed leading roles as an actor in Hindi and Kannada art films, a commercial movies and television serial. Karnad has represented India in foreign lands through art and culture. With the publication of *Tughlaq* in 1961, Karnad established himself as a master dramatist. He afterwards published *Hayavadana* (1971), *Anngmalige* (1977), *Hittina Hunja* (1980), *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Tale-Dande* (1990) and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995). Karnad wrote all his plays in Kannada. These plays have been translated into major Indian languages including Hindi. Five of his plays – *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Dande* and *The Fire and the Rain* – have been translated into English. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004), *Bali: The Sacrifice* (2004), *A Heap of Broken Images* (unpublished script), *Flowers: A Dramatic Monologue* (unpublished script) are the current dramatic contribution by him.

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Discussion:

Use of Myth:

Karnad's plays are known for his use of myths, histories and folk tales. Karnad is not the first dramatist to use myths and references to mythology in his dramas. The practice of referring to myths is not totally new. Other dramatists also have interpreted myths in totally a new way. It seems that Karnad has realized that there is certain relationship between theatre and mythology. The function of theatre, as of literature, is to reflect the society represented through myths which originated in epic. Myths never get old and outdated as they pre-occupy our subconscious and unconscious mind directly or indirectly.

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* is partly originated in Thomas Mann's story entitled "Transposed Heads" and "Vetal Panchavimshati" and "Kathasaritasagar." *Hayavadana* begins where the Vetal story ends. In "Vetal Panchavimshati" Prince Dhavala marries Madansundari,

the daughter of the king named Suddhapata. One day, Suddhapata's son, Svetapata proceeds to his own country along with his sister and her husband. On the way, they come across the temple of goddess Gauri. For paying homage to the goddess, Dhavala goes inside the temple. Out of some inner urge, he cuts off his head with a sword and presents it to the goddess. Waiting for some time and on finding that Dhavala has not come back, Svetapata goes inside to find Dhavala has cut his head off. Svetapata also cuts his head off to offer to the goddess. After a long time when Madansundari enters the temple, she finds two dead bodies lying before the goddess. She is grief-stricken and in such a condition she attempts to cut her own head off but at the very time, the goddess appears and asks her to put their heads on their respective bodies. In her excitement she exchanged the heads. Vetala's question is who is Madansundari's husband? The king answers that the person with Dhavala's head on his shoulder is Madansundari's husband.

The modern origin of the story is to be found in Thomas Mann's "Transposed Heads." The outline of the story is as follows. Shridaman, a Brahmin by birth but vanijya by profession, and Nanda, a cowherd and blacksmith, are very close friends. Shridaman falls in love with Sita whom he happens to see when the two friends travel together. Nanda makes fun of the idea but later he agrees to act as a messenger to his friend. Sita accepts the proposal and marries Shridaman. Some months later, when Shridaman, Nanda and Sita are travelling together in a cart to a house of Sita's parents they lose the track, and come across a temple of goddess Kali to take a halt. Shridaman visits the temple of Kali alone and in a fit of some inner urge, he offers himself as a sacrifice. Nanda goes in search of his friend and finds his head separate from his body. He is afraid of the charge that he has killed his friend because he was also in love with Sita. He does not want to live without his friend, he kills himself too. Sita understands the situation and realizes what has happened, prepares to hang herself. At the very time, the goddess appears before her and chides her for her mad act. She also grants life to the two dead bodies. Like Madansundari in "Vetal Panchvimshati", Sita in "Tansposed Heads" fixes the heads wrongly. Now the problem is: who is her husband? The hermit Kamdaman's advice is taken who establishes that the body with Shridman's head is Sita's husband.

Gradually Shridaman's head begins to control Nanda's body. Sita begins to pine for Nanda, so much so that she sets out to meet him carrying Andhak, her baby boy with her. After a strenuous journey, she finds him at a pleasant place in the forest. They spent the day and the night in heavenly bliss. Next morning Shridaman arrives on the scene. He suggests that they

should kill each other in a combat and that Sita should perform sati. Sita thinks that if she lives the life of a widow, Andhak's future will be dark and if she performs sati, Andhak will be known as Sita's son and his future will be improved. Therefore, she gives her consent and burns herself on the funeral pyre of her two husbands.

Plot:

Karnad has derived the plot of *Hayavadana* from "Kathasaritasagar" and the "Transposed Heads." Karnad has combined two plots together and created a full length play. The play has main plot and a subplot. The main plot deals with the story of Devadatta, Padmini and Kapila. Devadatta, a Brahmin scholar, with the help of his close friend, Kapila, marries Padmini. After the marriage, the trio arrange for a picnic. By this time, Padmini shifted her liking from the head of Devadatta to the body of Kapila because Devadatta, being a Brahmin, is known for his intellect and wisdom and Kapila is known for his valour, courage and strong body. When Padmini finds that her physical passions are not to be satisfied with Devadatta, she starts to cherish and appreciate the physical strength of Kapila. In fact, Devadatta is also aware of Padmini's interest in Kapila but he cannot convey it to the later. He does not have enough courage to tell Kapila in a straightforward way not to visit his house as Kapila is a close friend to him. He even does not clearly restrict his wife from meeting and talking openly with Kapila. In the course of action, during their picnic, Devadatta surrenders his head to goddess Kali so does Kapila. Their heads are transposed by Padmini.

Padmini gets a new husband who has got a perfect mixture of intellect and physical power. The husband with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body even does not make her happy because her new husband, gradually, takes the form and shape of Devadaata. Once again Padmini searches for Kapila and goes to the forest in his search. When she meets Kapila, she requests him to let her head rest on his chest. It is proof that Pamini has still not satisfied with Kapila. When Devadatta comes to know that Padmini is with Kapila, he throws away the dolls which he has bought for his son. Devadatta does not want to share Padmini with Kapila. Both, Devadatta and Kapila, come to the conclusion that they should die and kill each other whereas Padmini performs sati. For five years Padmini' son was kept in the forest and the last scene takes place after five years when Hayavadana gets the total from of a horse and Padmini's son gets his smile back. This is at this point that Karnad interlinks the main plot and the subplot of the play.

The title of the play *Hayavadana* goes to the subplot. The meaning of Hayavadana is a man with horse's head. Karnad has analyzed in detail about the birth of Hayavadana that Hayavadana's mother was a princess of Karnatak. Many suitors have come to ask for her hand in marriage. An Arby prince arrives on a stallion and she falls in love with the white stallion. Hayavadana is the product of the princess' marriage with the white stallion. As a result of this marriage, Hayavadana is thrown into this world neither as a human being or as a beast. He is half human and half beast. Even Padmini is totally withdrawn from the world. His only companions have been the inanimate dolls. When he meets Hayavadana, his innocent smile makes Hayavadana a complete horse and Hayavadana's laughter makes the boy forget about his past.

Action:

The action in *Hayavadana* is a combination of main plot and subplot. The action of both the plots take place simultaneously. The meeting of Padmini and Devadatta and his falling in love with Padmini is significant action where the main plot begins. The next scene opens after six months where Padmini is present. During the picnic, Kapila is to join them. Kapila's skill of driving the cart, his physical movements, his bringing of the Fortunate Ladies flowers, his broad back like an ocean with muscles, rippling across it attract the attention and mind of Padmini to Kapila. For her, Kapila is not a common man but a celestial being. Her abounding attraction towards Kapila, perhaps, makes her to commit a mistake of transforming the heads.

Act II presents a significant action that of Devadatta's coming home back with Kapila's body and Padmini's happiness with changed Devadatta. The action in the Act II clearly shows that Devadatta fails to maintain his body for long time. He comes to his original shape very soon. Devadatta purchases two dolls for his son to play with. A significant action of dual between Devadatta and Kapila takes place in which both are killed. Padmini also prefers to go for sati. This action of Padmini is indicative of her love for both Devadatta and Kapila. In his search for completeness, Hayavadana, Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini and Padmini's son are in the direction of seeking completeness but only Hayavadana succeeds in getting it.

Characterisation:

Karnad's *Hayavadana* is known for its theme rather than Karnad's art of characterisation. However, the characters depicted in the play are, no doubt, interesting and realistic and also they represent the common human tendency of getting perfection in each field of life. Devadatta, the

very name means gift of god. Hence he is representative of intellectual people. Kapila means iron and he stands for his physical power and bodily strength and skills. Padmini means petal of lotus which is a mark of beauty. Padmini is the central character of the play. She is assertive and dominant. She is representative of the women who long for a perfect man in the qualities of head and body. Hayavadan means the horse-man who is representative of incompleteness in human life.

Devadatta:

Devadatta is a scholar as well as a poet. He symbolizes intellect and wisdom in the play. It is Devadatta who has introduced art and literature to his bossom friend, Kapila. Physically and emotionally, Devadatta is a weak person. He is in the habit of falling in love with the girls and Padmini is the sixteenth girl whom Devadatta has fallen in love with. He is a passionate lover of beauty. He is intelligent and can see only the pristine beauty. He fails to know the woman in her. Kapila is Devadatta's best friend both the later is jealous of him on account of knowing that there is some hidden bond between Kapila and Padmini. Devadatta possesses an active head and a passive body which is the main reason behind his suffering. After getting the body of Kapila, Devadatta becomes a victim of suffering. He cannot keep the same power of the muscle in his body as that of Kapila. Devadatta suffers with the new body of Kapila whereas Padmini is more interested in Kapila's body. Devadatta does not think evil of Kapila but to make himself free from suffering, he challenges Kapila for a dual in which both of them kill each other and die.

Kapila:

Unlike Devadatta, Kapila is a man of body. Kapila is a totally diversified character in terms of qualities and skills. Devadatta is a pandit whereas Kapila is a lay man. Even in their complexion, they differ. Kapila is having dark colour and Devadatta is having white one. There is no comparison to Kapila in terms of physical strength and skills. He has strong muscular body. He is as innocent as a child. He is totally opposite of Devadatta. Despite these differences, they are very close friends. Oftenly people use to call them Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balrama. It is Kapila who manages the marriage of Devadatta and Padmini. Padmini changes the personality of Kapila. Kapila also gets attracted towards Padmini's beauty and is always seeing around her. It is his sincerity towards Devadatta which does not let him to express his love to Padmini. He loves Padmini and prefers to kill himself in the temple. It suggests that he is not a selfish person. After the exchange of the heads, once

again, when Padmini goes into the forest to meet Kapila, he advises her to return to her husband. This shows his sincerity as well as understanding the value of marital relations.

Padmini:

Padmini is young and beautiful character in the play. She represents the modern woman. She is bold, courageous, free and frank in expression, quick in her decision and has an enthralling personality. Her bold and courageous outlook does not let her to stop praising Kapila in the presence of Devadatta. She is a woman who desires perfection in each and every thing. Not only this, she even strives to achieve that perfection. She wants an intelligent and physically powerful man as her husband. Devadatta is intelligent but not physically powerful but Kapila is vice a versa of Devadatta. Padmini craves to have both in one person. Her fascination for a perfect man makes her to put the head of Devadatta on Kapila's body. By doing this she gets a fabulous Devadatta but she is not satisfied and happy for a long time because Devadaata starts getting his original form which Padmini does not like to have. Changed Devadatta cannot satisfy her desires and requirements. She returns to the forest in search of Kapila and becomes successful in convincing him for sexual relations. Even Kapila also suggests Devadatta that they will stay like Pandavas. Devadatta does agree with this suggestion. Hence when, in a dual, they die, Padmini also undergoes 'sati.' Padmini's character is a landmark to suggest that the search and thirst for perfection remains imperfect throughout.

Stage Performance of *Hayavadana*:

Hayavadana is Karnad's bold and successful experiment on folk theme. He uses successfully the conventions and motifs of the folk tales and that of folk theatre. Masks, curtains, mime, songs, horseman, dolls and the story within a story have been employed by him in a very tactful manner so as to add a needed dramatic effect of the play. Karnad has used rich resources of the native folk theatre like Yakshagana and other folk form. At the same time, he has attempted to show how the use and appearance of the supernatural elements play a significant role. The dramatist has created an entire atmosphere of incompleteness on the stage like incomplete individuals, mute children and frustrated human beings. In Karnataka, Yakshagana is very popular and Karnad is highly influenced by the techniques used in Yakshagana. Hence he has employed the same in this play.

The play begins with the appearance of the mask of Lord Ganesha, the presiding deity of traditional theatre on the stage and his worship like a typical Yakshagana play. The choice of the

elephant-headed god is significant because Lord Ganesha with human body and animal head aptly suggests the central theme of incompleteness of a being. The Bhagvata establishes the symbolic sense of the play through the image of Lord Ganesha. He comments:

An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly – whichever way you look at him he sees the embodiment of imprefection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Varkratunda – Mahakaya, with his crooked face and distroted body, is the Lord and Master of Success and Perfection? Could it be that his image of Purity and Holliness, this Mangalamoorthy, intends to signify by his very appearance that completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend? (Karnad, 1995: 1)

The perfect combination of the spirit and the flesh in human life is next to impossible. The sub-plot of *Hayavadana*, the horse-man, is Karnad's own invention. It deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it in a different manner. It provides the framework of the play both as a prologue as well as an epilogue. Krishna Gandhi writes, "The theme of the play in an old one ... man's yearning for completeness, for perfection. It's this yearning which makes people restless in ordinary existence, and makes them to reach out the extraordinary things ... But the ideal of perfection itself is ambiguous. The character of Hayavadana in invented as an example of this ambiguity." (Gandhi, 1972, n.p.)

Hayavadana is man with the head of a horse where 'haya' means horse and 'vadana' means face. Hence Hayavadana is the son of the Princess of Karnataka a very beautiful girl, who fell in love with a white stallion. She was married off to the horse and lived with him for fifteen years. One morning, the horse turned into a heavenly being and also revealed that he was a *gandhara* cursed by the God Kubera to be born as a horse for some act of misbehavior. After fifteen years of human love, he had become his original self again. Released from his curse, he asked the Princess to accompany him to his Heavenly abode. But she wanted him to become a horse again. So he cursed her to be a horse herself. She became a mare and galloped away without thinking in the least of Hayavadana, the product of her marriage with the white stallion.

Hayavadana now wants to get rid of his horse's head and become a complete man. Later he goes to the Kali temple and threatens to chop off his head. The goddess grants him his boon "make me complete" but in her hurry to fulfill it, she makes him a complete horse instead of a

complete man. However, Hayavadana still retains his human voice. His liberation complete only when the five years old son of Padmini asks him to laugh and soon the laughter turns in a neigh.

Karnad employs the ingenious folk device of masks which is a typical feature of Yakshagana play just to project the personalities of different characters. In the beginning of the play, Devadatta appears on the stage wearing a pale-coloured mask and Kapila a dark mask. Later on, to signify the transposed heads, their masks are transposed. Lord Ganesha wears an elephant-headed mask and Kali a terrible mask of a man and in the end the mask of a horse.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad has employed various conventional stagecraft which are integral to the action of the play. Half-curtains and painted curtains carried by the stage hands are used to convey some facts. For example, when Padmini performs sati, the curtain has a blazing fire painted on it and as it is lifted, the flames seem to leap up. The front curtain is totally absent and there is no elaborate stage set up.

The action of the play is mimed, for example, when the three characters proceed to Ujjain, a cart does not appear on the stage, “Kapila followed by Padmini and Devadatta, enter miming a cart ride. Kapila is driving the cart.” (25) The play is replete with instances of miming. For all these techniques, Girish Karnad owes a great deal to folk theatre.

Songs:

Karnad wrote *Hayavadana* in the style of Yakshagana in which there is lot of folk music, dance and songs. In Kannad version, Karnad wrote many songs and those songs are sung by women chorus but in English translated version, Karnad has paraphrased those songs. The Bhagvata’s invocation song, Padmini’s lullaby for her son and the song of the female chorus are some of the examples of Karnad’s use of songs in the play which automatically adds to the overall effect of the play. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad has employed the myth of the Hayavadana to signify that no one is perfect in the world. The example of Padmini is enough to establish Karnad’s message that along with some positive things, some lacunae are always there. Although Padmini is married to Devadatta, a perfect intellectual, but also longs for Kapila, a perfect physical built-up but a combination of both is quite impossible. The message of Karnad is an all inclusive message for the whole humanity. It invites everyone’s attention to be satisfied with what your fate has offered to your destiny. The scope to Karnad’s dramas is as universal as that of Shakespeare’s.

Conclusion:

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad has employed the myth of the Hayavadana to signify that no one is perfect in the world. The example of Padmini is enough to establish Karnad's message that along with some positive things, some lacunae are always there. Although Padmini is married to Devadatta, a perfect intellectual, but also longs for Kapila, a perfect physical built-up but a combination of both is quite impossible. The message of Karnad is an all inclusive message for the whole humanity. It invites everyone's attention to be satisfied with what your fate has offered to your destiny. The scope to Karnad's dramas is as universal as that of Shakespeare's. Karnad has dealt with the very sensitive issues like suspicion in matrimonial life that he deals in one of his masterpieces

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