MYTHOLOGY IN THE GIRISH KARNAD'S *HAYAVADANA*

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ABSTRACT

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright is concretized when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage. 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 virtuosities. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with splendid results. 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. In all his plays are 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. In Hayavadana, he skilfully uses the principles and theme of Indian mythology, folk tales and folk theatre- masks, curtains, dolls, the story-within-a-story to create a bizarre world of incomplete individuals, indifferent gods, dolls that speak and children who cannot world which appears to be indifferent to the desires and frustrations, joys and sorrows of human beings. In this paper an attempt has been made to study how successfully Karnad has used myth, folk tales and history to represent his theme in his play.

Key words*- Mythology, Girish Karnad, Indian mythology.*

Introduction-

Girish Karnad, the great Indian playwright, poet, actor, director, critic and translator, was born on 19 May 1938. He is the latest of seven recipients of *Jnanapitha* Award for Kannada,

the highest literary honour conferred in India. Karnad has written a number of plays in Kannada which have also been translated into several major Indian languages and English by the playwright or by others. He has often used history and myth to tackle contemporary issues. His plays have been directed by eminent directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B.V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur and Satyadev Dubey. He is also regarded as an eminent figure in Indian cinema, where he has worked as an actor, director and screenwriter, earning numerous awards. He has been honoured with Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

Mythology-

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.

Mythical Elements in the *Hayavadana* –

Hayavadana is the third and the most representative of his plays. It deals with archetypal theme, underlying mythical patterns, identifiable character-types, folk theatre conventions i.e. use of mask, curtains, dolls, story within story, use of images of Kali, Ganesh, Rudra etc., allegorical significance of the play are the characteristic features of the play. It was originally written in Kannada and it was persuaded by Rajinder Paul to translate the play into English and first published this translation in his journal *Enact*. It was Mrs. Laxmi Krishnamurthy and Mrs. Yamuna Prabhu who jointly produced it for the madras Players at the Museum Theatre, Madras on 7th December 1972.

The plot of *Hayavadana* is derived from Somdeva's *Brihadkatha Saritsagar*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. The central episode in the play the story of Devadatta and Kapil is based on a tale from *Vetala Panchavimshika,* but Karnad has borrowed it through Thomas Mann's novel *Transposed Heads,* a mock-heroic transcription of the original Sanskrit tales. Whereas the sub-plot—horse-man's search for completeness, is Karnad's original invention. *Hayavadana* is a play on the "mad dance of incompleteness?" and search of identity in a world of tangled relationships. Devadatta, the intellectual, and Kapila, the man of body, are intimate friends who represents two extreme opposites one Apollonian; another Dionysian tendency.

Devadatta marries Padmini. Padmini and Kapila fall in love with each other. The two friends kill themselves. In a highly comic scene which is of great dramatic significance Padmini transposes their heads, giving Devadatta Kapila's body and vice-versa. It results in a confusion of identities which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. The situation gets complicated. They fight a duel and kill themselves again. Padmini performs *sati*. Karnad delves deep into the traditional myths to spell out modern man's anguish and dilemmas that are created in his mind.

Karnad's play in a characteristic way begins where the 'Vetal' story ends. How would the woman take it if it really happened and would it ultimately solve the problem for her? Are the fascinating questions the artist in him faces? Karnad doesn't satisfy with Pooru's acceptance of his father's old-age and *Yayati* uses this only as a starting point. If young Pooru had a wife how would she feel about Pooru's extraordinary decision, becomes the nucleus of his exploration of the problem raised by the mythical story. In *Hayavadana* what Karnad wants to suggest is that for us King Vikram's solution does not solve the problem. In fact, the real problem begins when it appears to be solved. That could be reason why he dropped the version of *Vetala Panchavimshika* which had the "incest" theme at its core. He also makes significant departures from Mann's story. Shubhangi S, Raykar analyses thus: "In all his plays Karnad takes this kind of leap from the original story and develops it further. This further development is the play of artist's imagination and it challenges the glib solution offered in the original stories"

Hayavadana – Reshaping a Myth

In *Hayavadana,* Karnad re-shapes an ancient Indian myth from the *veralapanchavimsati* to point to man's eternal quest for completeness, or self-realization. With its highly stylized action and mimicry, especially the scene at the temple of *Kali* and the sword fight between Devadatta and Kapila in the second act, Karnad invests the play with a significance, which brings out the emptiness of the "incomplete" human being.

Padmini - An Archetypal Figure

In this play, the central figure is a woman, Padmini. Selfishness and sensuality find expression in her insatiable desire for both brain and brawn, which are symbolized by Devadatta and Kapila respectively. Married to Devadatta, Padmini craves for the „muscle" and „body" of Kapila. In the myth, and in the play as well, the craving is not explicit, it runs as an undercurrent in Padmini's sub-conscious. She desires deeply for both the body and the intellect, though sub-consciously. It is difficult to prophesy whether or not she would have behaved differently had there been a proper equation of physical strength and intellectualism in either Devadatta or Kapila. The happenings in the Kali temple, where she transposes the

heads of Devadatta and Kapila, reveal her sub- conscious desire. Padmini‟s act, though unintentional, is indicative of the „incomplete' human beings‟ silent cry for „wholeness."

Hayavadana is a re-shaping of an ancient Indian myth from Thomas Mann's translation of the Sanskrit *Vetal Panchavimshati* which forms part of Kshemendra's *Brihat Katha Manjari* and Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* to point out a man's eternal quest for self-realization. The theme also reveals the Upanishad's principle that visualizes the human body as a symbol of organic relationship of the parts to the whole. The issue of the transposition of heads is the significant issue in this drama. Karnad dramatically exposes the "incompleteness" of the human being by referring to some of the stylized actions from the drama. Kapila and Devadatta's fight in the Kali temple bears that stylized action. Padmini is represented as a model of selfishness and sexuality. She had the limitless urge to quench her thirst through the means of brain and body she is married to Devadatta but she craves for Kapila.

One of the significant skills of Karnad while dealing with myth is the transformation of religious myths into the non-religious ones. In India most of the mythological stories are centered on religion. But Karnad is not a blind imitator. Here lies the individual quality of Karnad as a dramatist. He transforms the religious myths to question as well as critique those myths. He makes certain changes in the names of the characters. He wanted the names not to be the reflection of the ancient myth entirely, ha wanted the names to be generic. Karnad's logic behind the change of names can be justified from the above remark made by him: "In Sanskrit, any person whose name you do not know is addressed as 'Devadatta'. Kapila means dark and therefore earthy and Padmini is the name of one class of women in Vatsayana's Kamasutra".

In *Hayavadana* the presence of the goddess Kali presents the religious sentiment of the Indian society. It also focuses on the cultural and psychological interpretations of the goddess Kali to be representative of a deity as well as a destroyer and preserver. Going back to the age of Pope and Milton it was the tradition to seek divine intervention before beginning any grand venture. Coming back to the post-independence playwrights, Karnad makes that issue prevalent in Hayavadana. In this drama divine intervention unfolds the central theme, the "incompleteness" of the human beings (the fight between Devadatta and Kapila at the Kali temple) and the same man's quest to active completion. Karnad develops various folk conventions like music, chorus, and the amalgamation of human and non- human worlds in order to permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view.

Hayavadana, marked another major change of direction, not only in his playwriting but in post-independence theatre as a whole, because it was the first work to translate into notable practice the debate over the usefulness of indigenous performance genres in the development of a new, quintessentially 'Indian' theatre. Girish Karnad has taken the plunge into the depths of Indian literature: epics, myths and legends to look for the subject matter for his plays.

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The plot of Hayavadana comes from Kathasaritsagara, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. In Kathasaritsagara, the story of 'The Heads That Got Switched' contains a simple riddle. A woman was travelling with her husband and her brother discovers the men's decapitated bodies in the temple of Parvati, receives a boon from the goddess to bring them back to life, but switches their heads by mistake. The resulting problem of 'true' identity has an unambiguous solution in this version- the answer given in the Kathasaritsagara is: since the head represents the man, the person with the husband's head is the husband. a different purpose. Interestingly, the main and the sub-plot of Hayavadana deal with the moral and philosophical aspect of the problem raising more important issues relating to the human existence.

Conclusion-

Indian society is traditional and an individual is still governed by societal roles and norms that ensure a continuity and survival of its cultural mores. As Eric Fromm writes, „We are what we believe in and where we live in." Girish Karnad makes use of myths, mythologies and folklore as his source for his plays, not for the glorification of the chosen myths but to relate the myths to the present and to the past beliefs found in these myths. Readers and viewers instantly see how even with changed forms human values and behaviours seem to follow well set norms. Karnad provides us with a glimpse of the past as well as its relevance to an understanding of the contemporary world.

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