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Our Contributors

Plurality is Unity: A Study of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* in the Perspective of Hybrid Identity

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India is a land of pluralities and pluralism has been the main feature of Indian Society since its inception. Being the second largest country of population in the world, India presents endless varieties of physical features, cultural patterns, linguistic varieties and groups, caste and religious divisions. Despite the partition of India in 1947, it remained committed to the recognition of cultural diversity and the possibility of pluralism. Pluralism assumes that its practice will lead decision-makers to negotiate solutions that contribute to the "common good" of the entire society as a whole and the individual as an entity. The reality concerned with the existentialism of modern India is a plural society of extremely large cultural diversity in scale and degree. Plurality, consequently, intends to put forward a kind of nationality that is discernible neither in universalism created by the process of making things uniform or similar completely, nor by exclusive attachment to one's interest, group, or community; only social cohesion makes the Indian society unique in sustaining its culture along with its specification of plurality as well as diversity. The Present Research paper attempts to explore the dictum of plurality is unity in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* in perspective of hybrid identity.

Among the modern Indian writers, Girish Karnad has been the foremost to make a very expressive use of myth, history and folklore in the quest of contemporaneously relevant topics for his plays, and subsequently, he has successfully and dexterously transformed them into a word that aptly find a way into the current texture to match the today's social mores and issues like caste, heredity, religion, love and sex. His plays

make the audience to ponder over the human life with a new perspective rather than making him emotional. In other words, like Bertolt Brecht, Karnad makes the audience to respond intellectually rather than emotionally to the action of the play. With his artistic skill, he combines myth and reality, past and present and portrays the complexities of the modern life. In each of his play, beneath a legendary/mythical or historical story, we notice subtle and constant juxtaposition of the past and present which has been a common feature of Karnad's dramatic art. He chooses events/episodes from Indian mythology to question their values and relevance in the present context. He writes in the introduction to his *Three Plays*, "The myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally" (Verma 175). Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1975) is a fantastic cross-section of human and cultural issues presented using humanistic methodology along with unfolding the struggles and tempts that erupt in the human psyche as a result of contrast created by conflicts caused by natural forces and societal craving, extramarital love and relationship, child birth, and man's thirst to achieve the unattainable. Karnad has very well recognized this phenomenon and has used the characters of the three universes- Divine, Human and Animal- to effectively tackle it in his play *Hayavadana*.

Hayavadana is Karnad's third play which is based on the story *The Transposed Heads* (1955) by Thomas Mann. Originally, it is sourced from *Vetal Panchavimshati* and ancient short story collection entitled *Brihakatha Saritsagar* by Somdeva in the eleventh century AD. Like Thomas Mann, Karnad also questions the logic of head over the body, and thereby explores the theme of identity and as well as search for completeness in the modern Indian society. The Play deals with the complexity of human relationships and man's yearning for perfection or unachievable quest. Karnad himself remarks about the play:

... it was when I was focusing on the question of folk forms and the use of mask and their relationship to theatre music that may play. *Hayavadana* suddenly began to take shape in my head. (Karnad, *Three* 346)

Hayavadana deals with the theme of completeness and by opening the play with Lord Ganesha, Karnad indicates that the perfection of man has nothing to do with his physical look which perhaps the audience of this performance cannot understand completely. In this play the incomplete *Hayavadana* seems better than the complete human character such as Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini. Use of Ganesha worship symbolically also introduces the main theme of the play that is 'incompleteness' and the quest for 'completeness' or 'perfection'. *Hayavadana* 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. 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 sub-plot of *Hayavadana* and the play is written in the folk drama tradition.

Hayavadana is basically a story of two friends and lovers of a single woman. It is a drama of 'tangles relationship' - on one hand there is Devadutta, a man of mind and intellect and the other is Kapila, a man of steel like body - and the both love Padmini, the wife of Devadutta. Padmini in turn loves Devadutta's mind and Kapila's body and wants both these qualities assembled in one - that is 'a fabulous mind in a fabulous body'. She even desires to have a son who would be an embodiment of a sound mind in a sound body. Here characters are trapped in a state of agony, confusion and as well as suffering due to a peculiar complexity of relationship i.e. tangled relationship. At last they both become pitiable figures and appear as strangers, loners and outsiders in their own world; whereas Padmini seeks to obtain a perfect and ideal man without self-alienation. She ultimately gets entangled in an identical and existential crisis resulting from a confusion of identities. The ambiguous nature of human personality is revealed through her own remarks:

What are you afraid of, Devadutta? What does it matter that you are going soft again, that you are losing your muscles? I am not going to be stupid again; Kapila's gone out of my life forever. I

won't let him come back again. Kapila? What could he be doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still and his face dark? Devadutta changes. Kapila changes. And me?" (Karnad, "HV" 49)

On seeing Kapila's changed, virile body, Padmini is bewildered and unable to solve the tangles web of existence:

Yes, you won Kapila. Devadutta won too, but I the 'Better' half of two bodies, neither win nor lose. No, don't say anything." (Karnad, "HV" 57)

Although Kapila tried his best to erase the faceless memories of the past from his mind but Padmini's appearance revives them and adds to his anguish, dread and desperation. His existential situation is revealed in following lines:

The river only feels the pull of the waterfall. She giggles and trickles the rushes on the banks, then turns a top of dry leaves in the navel of whirlpool, weaves a water-snake in the wet of silver strands in the green depths frightens the frog on the rug of moss, sticks and bamboo leaves sings, tosses, leaps and sweeps on in rush-while the scarecrow on the bank has a face fading on its mud pod head and body torn with memories. (Karnad, "HV" 59)

Soon Devadutta arrives on the spot and both ruthlessly fight and kill each other and Padmini performs the ritual of 'Sati'. Hence none of them is able to attain completeness. The identity crisis of Padmini, of Devadatta as well as of Kapila leads all of them to find liberation in fire.

The woman in the original myth, on whom the character of Padmini is based, accepts the social code of conduct of preserving her love only for her husband by following the instruction of accepting a particular combination of head and body. But Padmini in *Hayavadana* violates the convention of love for husband by showing her physical attraction towards Kapila. This is very clear in the cart-ride scene where she appreciates the beautiful and athletic physique of Kapila: "He is like a Celestial being reborn as a hunter. . . . How his body sways, his limbs curve- it's a dance almost" (Karnad, "HV" 96). Thus, Padmini

symbolizes the incompleteness of human desire. Her mind longs for Devadatta, but her body urges the love of Kapila. And Karnad has very appropriately chosen this character to problematize the search for completeness.

Thus, man finds himself being an unstable, finite being who is ultimately menaced to die in this world. He is told that man has freedom to transcend his role and his free choices eventually shape him in a way that he becomes an 'object' till his further possibilities are extinguished by death. As a conscious free being, he/she too has to abide by the rules of nature just like animals; and hence biologically there is no difference between them. It is also a reality of human world that man can not evade society altogether and finally encounters the inevitable 'death' as a final judgment. He/she can choose to endeavor to identify himself with the group-consciousness of the society, thereby evading the responsibility of freedom. But his freedom and responsibility that set him apart in lonely isolation can also be acknowledged in 'dread'. Man is always in quest of meaning of his life, his existence and solution to his problems which define his values in the society and goals of human life. But finally man attains failure as a ruler and becomes a stranger, outsider and a loner in this world. There is a sense of loss of his world and his self.

It is the theme of the search for completeness which co-relates the main-plot with the sub-plot in *Hayavadana*. In the sub-plot we encounter the character of Hayavadana who has the head of a horse and the body of a man and who can sing in the human voice. Unlike the main-plot where Padmini's search for completeness ruins her at the end, Hayavadana becomes happy when he turns into a complete horse. Goddess Kali helps him to become a complete horse and he gets rid of the human voice by singing the Indian national anthem. In a way, it is a comment on the fact that completeness and unity of the self is possible only for non-human beings. Interestingly enough, all the animals are true to their nature, for example, tigers are ferocious, lambs are calm. It is only the nature of the human beings which is indefinable.

The protagonist of the sub-plot, Hayavadana, has a human body and an equine head but he is not a god as is Ganesha. Though Hayavadana is born of a *gandharva* father, he is not one himself because he does not have divine powers like his father to change his own shape or that of others. He is not a man, nor a horse, though he has features of both. Hayavadana is thus incomplete but he is unable to accept his fate. Within the range of his experience, he desires to look like human beings in order that he may belong to their society. Hence, he struggles for completeness that is to be a complete human being. Karnad brings in Ganesha, a traditional use of mask, with that of Hayavadana, a modern presentation of mask, to study the two characters focusing on their similarities and differences.

In *Hayavadana* Karnad has chosen selected myths and folk tales relevant to his dramatic purpose and applied them to make a critique on the unreasonable human aspiration of the search for completeness. Thus, the story of *Hayavadana* is a reworking on the legendary tale of Somdeva. Karnad has presented this familiar tale in a defamiliarised mode in order to comment on the contemporary social problems and human characteristics. Karnad's characters in the play are not individuals but archetypes. According to Karnad:

That is why the characters in *Hayavadana* have no real names. The heroine is called Padmini after one of the six types into which *Vatsyayana* classified all women. Her husband is Devadutta, a formal mode of addressing a stranger. His friend is Kapila, simply 'the dark one'. (Karnad, "HV" 13)

Thus, the Play takes us the story of Padmini, Kapila and Devadutta where Padmini desperately interchanges the head of Kapila, representing the physical beauty, with that of Devadutta, representing the intellectual beauty, in her search for completeness. Biological transformations take place in both Devadatta and Kapila as they reach their former self of distinct head and body. Gradually, Padmini is disenchanted with her transposed husband. In fact, she speaks to Devadatta about the increasing loss of Kapila's vitality in him. He brushes aside the question

but she becomes obsessed with Kapila's memories and these are dramatically well brought out through her song and the dolls. The sub-plot talks about the character of Hayavadana who succeeds in his search for completeness at the end of the play by becoming a complete horse. So, the sub-plot very artistically parodies the main-plot. So, *Hayavadana* most effectively subverts the accepted notion of superiority of head over the body.

The theme of incompleteness, embodied by Lord Ganesha, Hayavadana, Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila requires that the audience analyse their own incompleteness and accept it as a fact of life. The sword fight of Devadatta and Kapila, and the reaction of Padmini are stylised so as to increase the awareness of the audience about the problems faced by the characters in the play. In this way Karnad as a writer deals with mythical episodes in his plays and interprets them in contemporary reality. Linking the ancient and the modern dramatic traditions in his plays he links the natural and supernatural phenomena in human conditions. In the use of myths he presents the absurdity of human life with all its basic passions, conflicts and individual's eternal struggle to achieve perfection.

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