

Hayavadana: Archetypes and Myths Revisited

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Abstract

The play *Hayavadana* is basically based on myths taken from the stories in Kathasaritsagara and also from Mann's *The Transposed Head*. 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. Girish Karnad uses myth as a social statement rooted in an ancient cultural period that is adapted in a modern cultural context to convey the intended views of the author. For the author, myth is not just a device to look back into the past, but an instrument to analyse the present and contemplate about the future. He presents myth in the modern ways of life and interweaves it with the contemporary social and political situation. This becomes even more significant in a colonial arena where revisiting the past and expressing it in a renewed perspective has a politics inherent in it.

KEYWORDS – Archetypes, Myths, Hayavadana, Girish Karnad, Switching heads , folk theatre

The question of perfection or completeness is central in the play *Hayavadana*. It has been inspired by Mann's story and that also represents the human craving for wholeness which is impossible to attain. Cross cultural differences and changed social circumstances have diverted the central themes of Karnad's play and the focus is something else. The idea of Arya- Dravida culture and the fusion of both is reflected in the pre-independent work of Mann while it is the idea of Westernisation which finds voice in Karnad's play. The concept of body and soul and the debate regarding the supremacy of these has always caught attention all around the world, especially in Indian philosophy. Karnad's extensive use of myths helps him to transcend the limitations of time and space and thus provides an opportunity to explore human psyche and its contradictions. Use of myths and archetypes increase the possibilities of the play in discussing the amalgamation of traditional values and modernity in the post colonial world. Single myth written by Somadeva in eleventh century AD has been employed by different authors, changing into a Sanskrit parable to a German novella. He retrieves the local culture and nation so as to develop a vision in his plays which can successfully depict the complexities of a diverse nation like India.

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tension between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions and finally the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries.

(Girish karnad 1994:20).

Cultural and social colonization of the native culture by the dominant foreign influence has not only resulted in unprecedented change in social and cultural ethos of India, but it has also been accompanied by an alteration of the economic scenario of

our nation. Myths and archetypes has a role to perform in the plays. Belonging to the post colonial group of writers, Karnad's generation has the moral duty to preserve the rich folk culture and traditions which moulds their sensibility and creativity and it is this artistic responsibility that can be seen in his plays. So this project aims to read the revisited myths and archetypes in Hayavadana looking into the significance of it in a postcolonial nation and its literature.

Archetypes and Myths in Literature: M.H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines archetypes as the narrative design, patterns of action, character types, themes and images which recur in a wide variety of works of literature as well as in myths, dreams and even social rituals. Such recurrent items are often claimed to be the result of elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader because he or she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author. 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.

India has a rich tradition of story telling, puranas, Vedas and Upanishads which are highly symbolic in nature, somewhat metaphysical in nature and every story has a message to convey. Girish Karnad has the tradition of exploring this collection and then these are brought before us as in *Naga Mandala* and *Hayavadana*. Retelling of myths attain a political significance in *Hayavadana* in a particular context of history.

Culture defines society and Karnad's plays are a reflection of the culture in our society. Focusing on our folk culture, he takes inspiration from mythology and folklore. With *Hayavadana*, Karnad has taken us back to the myths and legends of the Hindu religion.

Hayavadana deals most explicitly with the question of human selfhood where one's identity is questioned and the body and soul becomes dichotomies in defining oneself. His mythical characters emerge as archetypes of general human characteristics and the folktales he uses helps him to overcome the spacio-temporal limitations of the plot and thus able to present the issues as relevant to human existence. Karnad also make use of the purusharthas Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha in his plays. Along with the central theme, there is a sub-plot wherein *Hayavadana* (the horse-man) reflects incompleteness. With the face of a horse and the body of a man, *Hayavadana*, the off-spring of a celestial being and a princess, loathes and wants to rid of the horse's head and longs to be a complete man. He is symbolic of the identity crisis we face today.

Myth of Switching the Head : Girish Karnad was actually reworking the parable from the *Kadhasarithsagar* but the central episode of the play is borrowed from Mann. The characters are less individualistic and more symbolic in Karnad. The main theme revolves around the mistake made by Padmini in placing the heads in Kali's temple. The feminine power is represented along with other archetypal symbols in the play.

The transposition of heads and the subsequent scenes show how complex is human nature. Completeness or perfection is never attained in human world. Thus a

story from our past could convey the tensions of modern world. It is very rare to find this myth in world literature. But in Indian context we have enough examples to analyse this. The story is related to Ganesha. He was fully human at first. Then as per the puranas, there are a series of incidents taking place at Kailash, after which his head is replaced by an elephant's head by Shiva to pacify the angry mother Parvathy. Karnad implores Existentialism by intensifying the motif of incompleteness by a broken tusk and a cracked belly - which other way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. He is the Vigneshwar, the one who blocks the obstacles and make our path smooth for progress. The fact that he himself is not complete physically becomes ironic. However this episode in Puranas signify the death of ego symbolically shown through the beheading (done by lord of destruction, ascetic Shiva), which makes Ganesha pure. Thus it is not physical perfection but the moral character which makes him the first one to be worshipped in any yajna. Here too we can find an importance given to soul over body. Ganesh's perfection is determined not by his body. In the play too the head is considered as the self determining thing than the body. Eventually this notion is also questioned and the climax is problematic. Kapila's dialogue that "the child she is carrying is the seed of this body" is noted.

The story recorded in Kadhasarithsagar contributes to the core of the play. It is a collection of many frame stories and this is one among the stories that King Vikramadithya hears from the demon, at the end of which the story reaffirms the superiority of intellect over emotion and spirit over body. Mann drops the entire frame story of Vikramadithya and just takes the episode of switching of heads to develop his story which suits his period. Karnad also does the same placing the myth in Indian context of class and caste.

Karnad reveals the religious sentiments prevalent in our society, psychology and culture by showing the presence of Goddess Kali. Kali is an archetypal symbol of feminine power and does not match the traditional descriptions of women. Hayavadana begins with an invocation of Lord Ganesha, who is generally worshipped first among the gods. In the beginning, Devadatta worships Kali in order to win Padmini's hand for marriage. Later in the course of time, he offers himself to the goddess by beheading himself and his friend Kapila follows suit. The Hindu rituals and superstitions are very well portrayed by showing people offering themselves to Kali. This was a practice that was followed a few decades back. Now people offer goats and animals to Goddess Kali, who is also known as the goddess of Destruction. The theme also reveals the Upanishad principle that visualizes the human body as a symbol of the organic relationship of the parts to the whole.

Politics of the Text: Some names and instances can be easily connected to our inherent understanding of the meanings related to it. This is how archetypes can reveal the politics of the text. He chooses events/episodes from Indian mythology to question their values and relevance in the present context. Commenting on the use of techniques of the classical and folk theatre of India, Karnad says, "The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head." Girish Karnad has been regarded as the leading dramatist so far as the use of myth and history is concerned. With his artistic skill, he combines myth and reality, past and present and portrays the complexities of the modern life. The Karnad drama focuses on the complexity of human relationship and contains an indirect critique of modern Indian society. As is the practice in other dramatic forms in India, every

Yakshagana performance too begins with a host of preliminary rites. The play *Hayavadana* begins with the invocation of Lord Ganesha in the folk drama tradition.

The names which are used by Karnad itself are symbolic. It shows the nature of the characters and hints at their caste and class. He has followed Mann in this. Kapila who is physically strong is a wrestler and a smith. The word Kapila means black. Devadatta is a learnt Brahmin and a poet and his name is usually used with respect. Caste distinction is expressed with the names itself which makes things easier for the playwright.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad mocks at the religious beliefs and practices. He boldly questions all the outdated practices and traditional mindset. This is best conveyed in Hayavadana's visits to different religious places to achieve perfection. As Hayavadana says: "Banaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar – Dargah of Khwaja, Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of our Virgin Mary – I've tried them all. Magicians, mendicants -- saints and sadhus – I've covered them all." Here, Karnad makes fun of the Indian belief that we can obtain anything if we visit such holy places as mentioned above. Through ironic presentation of Hayavadana's endeavours to be a complete man, Karnad criticizes the Hindu concept of gods and goddesses. In this context, Mohit Ray rightly puts it: "The demystification & religious beliefs and practices -- which must be seen as a reflection of modern sensibility – is at its highest in Hayavadana." Socio-Cultural practices like Sati, Varna and the Patriarchal moral codes are portrayed with remarkable clarity and precision by the playwright in plays *Yayati*, *Nagamandala*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Fire and the Rain*, etc. The Bhagavata thus says in Hayavadana, "...Padmini became a sati. India is known for its pativratas, wives who dedicated their whole existence to the service of their husbands." Karnad has very successfully employed the folk drama form in *Hayavadana* to present the perennial problem of identity and search for completeness. "It has been this sort of sentimentality which has been the bane of our literature and national life", says Hayavadana in the end and then prays for good crops, prosperity in poetry, science and industry- a clear indication of national interest. It is time to forget the legacy of past and to move forward, inspired from our myths and tradition.

Thus *Hayavadana* presents before us the boy with a happy laughter at the end. A social statement for the progress of the nation is made by using myths. *Hayavadana* shows us the power of folktales and myths in the hands of a revolutionary artist.

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