

RESEARCH ARTICLE



IDENTITY CRISIS IN 'HAYAVADANA'

ANGALAKUDURU ARAVIND

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, Adikavi Nannaya University, Rajahmundry

ANGALAKUDURU
ARAVIND

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ABSTRACT

The drama begins with a prayer to Ganesha "the destroyer of incompleteness". He is the husband of Riddhi (style) and Siddhi (talent). Riddhi has no existence without siddhi, and siddhi forges its identity with the appropriate riddhi. The synchronization of these two aspects constitutes the ideal of *aucitya* (harmony or appropriateness) that Karnad endeavours to achieve throughout the play through his heroine Padmini. Nevertheless, the ideal is only a transient or ephemeral concept.

Could it be that this Image of Purity and Holiness, this Mangalamoorthy, intends to signify by his very assurance that the completeness of god is something that no one can comprehend.(73)

The play invites our attention to the thought-provoking question -what determines one's identity? Is it facial beauty and intelligence, or strength and physical prowess? Devadutta and Kapila are these two attributes personified respectively. Nevertheless, the two are envisaged only as complementary entities -Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balarama-and are not treated as a unified entity.

KEY WORDS: Synchronization, Purity and Holiness, Transient, Ephemeral, Intends

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Ever since times immemorial, the head has gained predominance over the body. The Bhagavata, the omniscient narrator, he declares that the head defines the identity of a man. Ironically, we find that the Bhagavata he reverses the same when he addresses *Hayavadana* in the first part of the play as "poor man", even though *Hayavadana* possesses the head of a horse. If the voice of the Bhagavata declares that the head is supreme, the tale of *Hayavadana* seems to echo that the body is superlative. The prince controlling the horse indicates the head, and the horse signifies the body. Contrary to these two, the main plot shuttles between priority over the head and the body. Earlier, if Ganesha was the husband of Siddhi and Riddhi, Padmini is the lover of intelligence and strength. Nevertheless, in her case, it fails to

constitute a harmonious whole; she is caught between association with two personalities, and this leads to a split in her identity. The mental imbalance is clearly explicit in the provocative imagery that portrays her as a woman bathing in the blood of the two men. The female protagonist is a schizophrenic individual caught between two worlds. This becomes implicit in the doorframe of her house which has on it the engraving of a two-headed bird. A bird instantly signifies a female. Having two heads its, its individuality can never remain in integrity as one head will always strive to assert superiority over the other. Kapila strikes the chord when he claims:

A proper two-headed bird. But it is so tiny you can't see it at all unless you are willing to tear your eyes staring at it. (87)

.....for this phenomenon is purely psychological. Padmini is legally wedded to Devadutta out of her desire for fair looks and intellect; and attracted to Kapila for his physical elegance and manual efficiency. P. Dhanavel claims that the flourishing friendship between Kapila and Padmini leads to the acute crisis of identity in Padmini. Padmini herself affirms that the song: "Is this one that / Or that one this?" points to her autobiography. When Padmini visualizes Kapilais arriving during their trip to forest, she loses her sense of propriety...and herself divides. The Bhagavata simultaneously chants: "And the head is bidding good-bye to the heart."(95) She relegates Devadutta to the background and gets preoccupied with Kapila: "And what an ethereal shape."

Subsequently, when she comprehends that Devadutta and Kapila have committed suicide, she loses her sense of proportion. For her existence, her identity is deeply entangled with any of the two. Ironically, she either loses both or acquires association with the two leading to an onset of neurosis. She retorts to the Goddess Kali: "If you'd saved either of them, I would have been spared all this terror, this agony."(102)

Her consistent existence depends on the presence of either of them. Eventually, she finds herself in intense euphoria when she combines the head of Devadutta and the body of Kapila. This union signifies and symbolizes her temporal stability. Padmini wants to procure something beyond an earthly concept which she calls the perfect combination: " My celestial-bodied Gandharva." In contrast, the princess of Karnataka seems 'more down to earth', literally and metaphorically, in that she ventures on securing an earthly being and rejecting a celestial being. Her temporal constancy enables her to behave like a normal human being. However, even in that state of condition, there are traces of her earlier self in consoling Kapila. At a later stage, Karnad utilizes dolls to interpret Padmini's dreams. Even at that unconscious level, there is a split-hence Doll I and Doll II. Also, note that the dolls are dressed in such a way that it is difficult to decipher their sex; as conscience has no gender.

DOLL I: Is that little Satan asleep yet?

DOLL II: Think so. God! It's killing me.

DOLL I :.....crying all day.

DOLL II: Making a mess every fifteen minutes. (114)

DOLL I: His palms! They were rough when he first brought us here like a labourer's. But now they are soft, sickly soft like a young girl's. (116)

Dolls are generally acquainted with soft hands. If Doll I therefore call it "sickly soft" it is not from its personal point of view but that of Padmini's. And it speaks so, immediately after Padmini touches Devadutta and shudders realizing that fact that he has transformed into his original form. The split becomes more prominent as the dolls begin quarrelling with each other (this reflecting the conflict in her mind) and Padmini tries to achieve the ideal concept in her imaginative lullaby. First the paragon of her dreams is constructed in the song and subsequently her failure to achieve this in reality is reflected in the latter part.

Here comes a rider! From what land does he come?

On his head a turban with a long pearly tail.

Round his neck a garland of virgin-white jasmines.

In his fist a sword with a diamond studded hilt.

The white-clad rider... ..what shine in his open eyes?

Pebbles O pebbles why is his young body cold O so cold? The white horse gallops across hills, streams and fields. To what land does he gallop? Nowhere O anywhere. (117)

Padmini coaxes Devadutta into believing that she does not care about Kapila anymore. At any rate, as soon as she closes her eyes, the dolls start speaking of the visitor in her dreams. As Devadutta transforms into his original self once again, the split becomes almost complete in Padmini; and she becomes belligerent (pg.50). A schizoid individual does things in secrecy and the tattered dolls can be attributed to this aspect. Furthermore, with the dolls is associated a sense of honest propriety (or what one would call the morality principle) and she has to discard them before she leaves for Kapila.

DOLL I : The whore

DOLL II: The bitch. (120,121)

When the heroine goes to Kapila again, he pleads with her to go away. He hits the hammer on the nail when he retorts:

"What do you want now? Another head?"(125)

Padmini clearly reflects that she is an entity caught between two different identities of association.

"Yes, you won Kapila. Devadutta won too. But I, the better half of the two bodies- I neither win nor lose (126)."

The realisation of the split reaches its saturation point when Devadutta and Kapila meet each other in complete honesty at the end of the play. Padmini comprehends that both cannot co-exist within her at the same time. She says on pg.130 that she knew it in her blood that they both could not have lived together, because they had to share not only her body but share theirs' as well.

KAPILA : Devadutta, couldn't we all live together like the Pandavas and Draupadi

DEVADUTTA : What do you think?

KAPILA : No it cannot be done. (129)

Subsequently, we find the Bhagavata presenting the crack in Padmini's self in emblematic terms:

After sharing with Indra
His wine ,His food,His jokes
I returned to the earth and saw from far-
a crack had appeared in the earth's face-
exactly like Indra's smile.(129)

The only solution to this is the exorcising of the ghosts of Kapila and Devadutta, and in turn suicide for Padmini. The playwright achieves this in a remarkable metaphor. As the two slay each other, Padmini jumps into the funeral pyre in the ritual of Sati. As their fight is stylized like a dance, Padmini's reaction is also in the form of a dance synchronizing with the former. In expressionistic terms, this dance is exemplary to Padmini's identity crisis.

At another level, Kapila and Devadutta get into a state of identity crisis when their heads get transposed. The Bhagavata in his omnipotent authority allows the head to gain precedence and christens them Devadutta and Kapila corresponding to their heads. Devadutta also refers to the shastras and says that the head is the sign of a man. Nevertheless, one cannot fail to perceive the

influence of the bodies of the two. Like never before, the dull-witted Kapila becomes logical and convincing in his arguments:

This is the hand that accepted her at the wedding. This is the body she's lived with all these months. And the baby she's carrying is the seed of this body. (106)

And in Devadutta we observe a kind of violence in language and action.DEVADUTTA (pushing Kapila aside):Get away, you pig.(107)

Devadutta professes to have defeated a champion wrestler and sword-fighter just because his body had 'inspired' him. He avows that his body "doesn't wait for thoughts-it just acts!" (113)At any rate, this is only a passing phenomenon of stability, and ultimately the body adapts itself to the head. Padmini summarizes the gist of the play when she tells Kapila in Pg.55:

The head always wins, doesn't it?

Metaphorically applied this idea can always pertain to any system also, be it social, political or economic. The head of a system always dominates over the system for its smooth functioning. This is always the case and if the system rarely renders itself stronger, then the head is overthrown. Therefore, as long as they co-exist the head is always superior. A stable relationship is not something consistent and always remains a utopian paradigm in our imagination.

As for the identity of the child, it remains shrouded in mystery. It probably corresponds to a representative of the next generation in that it remains indifferent to the system or reacts violently to the same. The child biologically belongs to Devadutta's head and Kapila's body; however, it exhibits the qualities of Kapila in its violence and unintelligible activities. The mole of Kapila remains, on his shoulder and on his identity. The body reigns supreme here. To cap it all, Padmini prefers Kapila over Devadutta; the body over the head at every instance. She utters the name of Kapila before Devadutta always (101,104). And the child favours the horse over human; bodily instinct over human intelligence yet again. This becomes Karnad's primary motive in writing the play, to ponder upon the significance of the body in one's identity and hence reverses the dichotomy head/body in his title *Hayavadana* where 'haya' stands for horse/body

and 'vadana' for man/head. N.P. Ashley affirms that the focus on the body governs the characterization of the two male characters. Since they have inanimate, static faces (masks), body language become the "signature of their individuality". And according to me, the main reason for the title "*Hayavadana*" is that- *Hayavadana* is more complete than the other main characters Devadutta, Kapila and Padmini. And more significantly, he is complete, because towards the end, he is the only character who is satisfied! Being complete/incomplete is only a matter of one's own perception; else, how can the animal-headed Ganesha be regarded supreme and the animal-headed *Hayavadana* be called incomplete.

Besides, the head/body dichotomy also relates to the dialectic pair man/woman. According to the Semitic religions of the world, a woman is said to be constructed from the ribs of man. Karnad seems to question this theory also. Besides, by presenting a white Devadutta, and a black Kapila, Karnad also appears to address hidden agendas and issues of racism. Critics like Erin B. Mee stress: "*Hayavadana* exemplifies the divided self of the postcolonial subject, he is also an example of the failure to deal successfully with that situation: he survives by negating one side of he." Does the body really depend on the head? By relying on bodily instincts, isn't it better to transcend back to primitivism than live in this calculating and manipulative era by the aid of the brain? Which holds a better identity for this? These are points to ponder upon in the play.

CONCLUSION

Hayavadana (1970) is the third and the most representative of Karnad's 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 Krrishnamurthy and Mrs. Yamuna Prather, 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 Kapilis based on a tale from Vetala Panchavimshika, but Karnad have 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? (57) And search for identity in a world of tangled relationships.

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 the artist's imagination and it challenges the glib solution offered in the original stories"

Karnad is an innovative, multifaceted and problem playwright who imbibes several personalities in one. He has contributed a lot to enrich Indian English Drama through playtext, performance, acting, and direction. Moreover, like his contemporary playwrights Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, and Mahesh Dattani he has reshaped Indian English Drama. But unlike his contemporaries, he adapts mythical and historical material with a view to giving it a psychological interpretation. As a modern playwright, Karnad is always engaged in the act of "deconstructing myths. He takes up mythical and legendary tales from his own culture and unfolds them in the light of modern sensibility. This deconstructing myth becomes an act of self-searching for the playwright...he combines the past and the present into a unity that bespeaks of tradition and modernity in his art of playwriting" (Gill 8). Karnad upholds the rich cultural heritage of India and endeavours to fight against the legacy of colonialism by advocating Indian values and cultural ethos of India. Subjects from the native soil, characters deeply rooted in indigenous culture,

English very much Indianised to suit the context and create feel of Indianness, and folk and classical theatre traditions endorse his well- thought design to set free Indian English drama from the colonial yoke. Indian imagination and sensibility can be easily seen throughout his plays.

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