



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

THE BODY AND THE MIND IN THE NOVELS OF GIRISH KARNAD

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad has given the traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today. He seems to have used myth with a view to expose the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts, and also to show man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Karnad, in his plays, tries to evolve a symbolic form out of tension between the archetypal and mythic experience and a living response to life and its values. The new dimension and changes that Girish Karnad gives to a play, present an alternate world with incomplete beings, magnanimous gods and at times, they turn indifferent, dolls that speak more eloquently than humans, children who are morose and people having excessive longings, frustrations, ecstasies and miseries.

Keywords: Traditions, Myths, Conflicts, struggle and symbolism.

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INTRODUCTION

Man creates literature, and literature studies Man – his origin and evolution, his interests and inclinations, his emotions and sentiments, his efforts, successes, failures and frustrations, his feelings of love, hatred, faith, devotion, loyalty and patriotism, and above all, his general behaviour, conduct, virtues and vices associated with the existence of human beings as a result of “Man’s first disobedience” and his tasting the Fruit of Knowledge against the will of God.

Of all the four genres of literature – Poetry, Prose, Fiction and Drama, Drama, being an audiovisual medium of expression, has been a very effective genre in world literature. The birth and development of drama in Greece, Rome, England and India emphasizes the fact that it has always been an integral part of culture highlighting evaluation, moral commitments, religious convictions, philosophical approaches, social and political changes in various countries. Regarding the

cultural value of the Greek and the Roman drama, Lee A.Jacobus observes:

“In all ages, drama has been an integral part of culture. For the Greeks, drama developed partly in reaction to the period of barbarism from which the society was emerging and reinforced and affirmed the moral values of civilization. The Greek experience of drama was centered in their religious festivals, which coincided with the agricultural cycle of the year. As the Greeks established themselves as communities, their drama became an important focus for their communal lives. [Lee A. Jacobus, The Bedford Introduction to Drama ,p.18)

One of the foremost dramatists in India, publisher, playwright, actor, director and administrator and the chairman of Sangeet Natak Academy, “Girish Karnad has assumed a variety of roles in his eventful career, but his true identity, as he has himself said, is that of a dramatist, a man of the theatre”. [Jain Nemichandra, Indian Theatre: Tradition,Continuity and Change p.56]

A multi-faceted personality, Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, Maharashtra, into a Konkani-speaking Brahmin family. His initial schooling was in Marathi. As a youngster, Karnad was an ardent admirer of Yakshagana and the theater in his village. He earned his Bachelors of Arts degree from Karnataka College, Dharwar known as Karnataka College Dharwad, in 1958. Upon graduation, Karnad went to England and studied at Lincoln and Magdalen Colleges in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar(1960-63), earning his Master of Arts degree in philosophy, political science and economics. To his credit, Karnad has *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq*(1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Angumalinge*(1977), *Hittina Hunja*(1980), *Naga-Mandala* (1998), *Tale Danda* (1990) *The Fire and the Rain* (1995), *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) and the latest *A Heap of Broken Images*(2005).

The Theme of the Novel: The relationship between the body and the mind in philosophy is controversial. In general, the body is associated with animal instincts and sub-ordinated to intellectual matters. But of late, the philosophers have not agreed with the above statement. They have argued, experience can never be gained sans body. The knowledge of the world is obtained through the body as we are embodied beings.

But empiricism and idealism, two of the most important Western philosophical positions, have different views on the mind and the body. For the empiricists, the body is basically passive but it registers sensations caused by external objects around. The body is a combination of molecules which react to the impact of the other objects according to the law of 'cause-and-effect'. But for the idealists, the most vital aspect of human beings is the mind and its functions. According to them, the mind is powerful and it actually creates the outside world by understanding it. The body is simply the mind's material extension, a secondary aspect of human life. There are three immortal lines that support this view.

"A mind not be chang'd by Place or Time.

The mind in its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n."
[Milton, *The Paradise Lost*, Book-I p.38].

One of the most influential approaches to the mind-body problem in the contemporary thought is functionalism. This position argues that mental states should be understood not in terms of basic bodily processes but in terms of their 'functions'

The above arguments of the psychologists, psychoanalysts and functionalists do lead to conclude that while the mental states are dictating the functions of the physical body, it is as well true that the physical processes of the body are affecting the state of the mind as well. In other words, in certain aspects while the mind has command over the body, the body too through its functional processes has a certain influence on the mind. Still, since the mind is the supreme organ, ultimately its functioning influences the functions of the body. Basing upon that we take it to be the nature of the person or the personality of the person.

The play *Hayavadana* begins with alienation (Apollonian) concept and ends in unification (Dionysian) concept. Lord Ganesha, with whose worship the play starts, Himself is an embodiment of alienation with an elephant head on a human body. A little later, another incompatibility comes on the scene, the character *Hayavadana*, with a horse-head on a human body. Perhaps the mythological figures are shown in the play to suggest the supremacy of the alienation concept over man. Devadatta and Kapila represent the modern man who suffers from self-alienation and it agrees with what Norman O.Brown says in this aspect. The intervention of Goddess Kali and Her power become quite weak since the transposition of their heads and bodies fails to liberate Devadatta and Kapila from their incompleteness. The case of Padmini is different as she is more sensual than sensuous.

The main plot of the play *Hayavadana* comes from Somadeva's 'Kathasaritsagara' an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. But Girish Karnad has borrowed the plot from 'The Transposed Heads' by Thomas Mann who retells the story 'The Heads that Got Switched', from Kathasaritsagara. The Sanskrit tale told by Betala to an adventurous king Vikramaditya deals with a moral problem but Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical concept of life which looks differently at the body and the

mind. He argues that “even the transposition of the minds and the bodies will not liberate people from the psychological limits imposed by nature” [Nanda Kumar, Indian English Drama : A Study in Myths. p.124]

ⁱ. Girish Karnad has adapted ‘The Transposed Heads’, but made many changes in it especially, by introducing a sub-plot of ‘Hayavadana’, presented the whole thing in ‘Yakshagana’ style and explored further into the alienation and unification of the mind and the body.

In both these works, the stories run thus:

In a temple in the city of Shobhavati, through the favour of goddess Gowri Prince Dhavala marries Madanasundari, the daughter of a king named Suddhapata. Svetapata, Suddhapeta’s son, one day proceeds to his own country along with his sister and her husband. On the way, they come across another temple of goddess Gauri. Dhavala goes into the temple to pay homage to the goddess. There he happens to see a sword, gets obsessed with the idea of offering his head to the goddess, and does the same. When he does not return for long, Svetapata enters the temple and gets stunned to see Dhavala dead and his head presented to goddess Gauri. Through some irresistible urge, he also cuts off his head and presents it the goddess. After waiting for long time for her husband and her brother, when Madanasundari reaches the temple, she seeing both of them dead, loses control over herself and in a fit of sadness raises the sword to cut off her head. The goddess immediately appears before her and begs anything of her. She requests the goddess to restore her husband and her brother. Hearing this, the goddess Gauri asks her to set their heads on their shoulders. But out of excitement, Madanasundari puts the head of her husband on the body of her brother and that of her brother on the body of her husband. Both of them come back to life as such. Madanasundari then realizes her mistake, but the “done cannot be undone” [Nanda Kumar, Indian English Drama : A Study in Myths. p.124.]

At this stage, Vetala asks Vikram, “who is the person with Dhavala’s head on his shoulders”. The king answers that the man with Dhavala’s head is her husband since the head is the supreme organ, *uttamanga*. In the Vetala story, the problem seems

to have been solved and thus presents a moral problem, but in Karnad’s play Hayavadana the real problem begins from this point.

Hayavadana takes a different genre, Yakshagana style with masks and curtains. In this connection, Shubhangi S. Raykar observes:

“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 the reason why he dropped the version of Vetal Panchavimsahti which had the “incest” theme as its core. The sub-plot of Hayavadana is entirely Karnad’s invention. In the play the stories of the sub-plot throughout support the main plot”ⁱⁱ

The title Hayavadana means a horse headed-man. “The sub-plot of “Hayavadana”, the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. The horse-man’s search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse,. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the *uttamanga*, and the human head”. [Kirtinath Kurtkoti, Introduction to Hayavanda,; P.V]

The combination of a perfect mind (head) and a perfect body is an improbable possibility. The sub-plot of Hayavadana, the man with a horse head, is Karnad’s own invention that increases the depth of the concept in the play. The playwright has treated it in a novel way. Hayavadana appears on the stage covering his horse head when the Bhagavata sings, “Two friends there were – one mind, one heart”. Both are great friends and wander in Dharmapura like Lava and Kusa, like Rama and Lakshmana. As the Bhagavata says that, one mind, one heart, Devadatta is the mind i.e. knowledge and Kapila is the heart i.e., physique. They are bosom friends in spite of their differences. Actually their friendship is based on the fact that each depends on the other for what each lacks.

Conclusion

The play Hayavadana, from the stand point of the transposition of the body and the mind proves that it is the mind that dominates the body though the latter has its own memories which may have little bearing on the former. The three judgments of

Vikramaditya, the *rishi* and Kamadama prove it. In the case of Hayavadana too, the same has happened, but he does not get rid of his human voice. It is due to the inattentive state of Kali. It shows Gods' indifference to human beings. In this case, Padmini's son and Hayavadana help each other. When the latter speaks in the human voice, the boy laughs and becomes like others in behavior. When Hayavadana gives a ride to the boy, he gets rid of the human voice and the transition is complete as a result of his being helpful to make the boy happy. The transposition of the body and the mind takes place because of Padmini's desire for a perfect husband. The world is full of incompleteness as it is not made for anyone; therefore one has to adjust with it. Wish or desire whatever it is, it should be evaluated whether it is attainable or not, attainable is to be pursued and unattainable is to be given up. The following two mighty lines of Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice' may be remembered:

"Some there is that shadow's kiss
Such have but a shadow's bliss."
[William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice
(Glasgow: Harper Colloins, 1994) Act II
Scene IX]

From the psychoanalysis point of view, in the primitive man, the body and the mind are in perfect harmony which Norman O. Brown calls Dionysian concept. As man has striven to be above biological plane for ages, he has evolved Apollonian concept which causes alienation. Devadatta and Kapila, like the people of modern society, are the victims of self-alienation while Hayavadana, his mother and Padmini's son attain Dionysian state, the undifferentiated body-mind. At the same time some critics think that it is humanly impossible to achieve perfection i.e., the unification of Apollo and Dionysus. But the above presentation is just from the point of view of psychoanalysis.

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