



GIRISH KARNAD'S HAYAVADNA: EXPERIMENTATION OF PAST FOLKLORE ELEMENTS WITH MODERN AGE

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Abstract

The Roots movement during 1970s and 1980s was the channel of resistance against the colonial attitude and supremacy to rule over Indian traditional theatre. Girish Karnad emerged as a heroic figure that adopted and transformed Indian myths and folklore to delineate the modern dilemma of status, satisfaction, identity, alienation, existentialism and search of selfhood. Two of his avant grade plays " Hayavadana" and "Nagamandala" very beautifully experiments with the elements of Yakshagana techniques of masks, dance, Bhagavata , half - curtain, invocation to Ganesha, use of dolls and songs etc. These plays deal with the tensions and problems of a tough marital life and shattering of the aspirations and dreams of an individual, who is subjected to defeat and failure on every front. Both the plays are the fine piece of existentialism where women serve as the heart and soul of the story. The plays of Girish Karnad discover an endless search of identity and selfhood in the light of absurdity and ambiguous concepts of modern society. In *Hayavadana* Karnad attempts to bridge a rapport to express strive of age - long conflicts of identity and selfhood.

Keywords: folklore, identity, selfhood, existentialism, yakshagana techniques

"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. The various conventions - the chores, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds - permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem." (Introduction to Three Plays 14)

India is a land of age - old traditions inhabited by diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious- racial multitudes. The country presents a vivid and

colourful picture gallery of our rich and glorious traditions and customs through the unique assortment of Folk Art and Culture preserved in our hamlets and rural areas. In short, folklore may be termed as a traditional and cultural art literature - a practice which is circulated through oral communication and behavioural example. It is not only essential for economic, social, political developments but also to sustain the history of the people in modern world.

The study of folklore in India has developed as an essential part of Indian Literature. The first collection of Indian folk - tales came into being in 1868 by "Mary Frere", under the title "The Old Deccan Days." Scholars like A.K. Ramanujan.

Jawaharlal Handoo, Sarat Chandra Mitra, B.B.Reddy, etc. have rendered their best efforts to shine and polish it. Folklore is like a large store house full of traditional beliefs, legends, medieval romances and mythological characters.

Folk theatre emerged around 1000 A.D. onwards after the decline of Sanskrit theatre which was much polished and rigid in nature. Some popular folk theatre forms in India include Bhavai of Gujarat, Swang of Haryana, Jatra of West Bengal, Tamasha of Maharashtra, Nautanki of U.P, Yakshagana of Karnataka. The latest Indian flick "Paheli", the Indian nomination for Oscar is the latest illustration how the folk theatre and conventions are in demand among the directors and the audiences and how it helps to bring them closer.

"Folk arts serve as a communication channel for transmission of knowledge and beliefs. Folk arts provide moral, philosophical and historical knowledge to the people. They help to increase the knowledge about culture and civilization, values and beliefs, norms and behaviour, prevalent in a social structure in the past." (Folk Arts 10)

Hayavadana is Karnad's most celebrated and well acclaimed play abounding in cultural past and folk setting to synthesize and co - relate the experimentation of past with modern age. Karnad defends the adoption of folk elements in this play as, "I turn not only to myths, legends and history, but also to folklore....Since folk tales make fun of everybody - rulers, priests, even gods - everything is taken in good humour." (Interview by Chaman) Such experimentation with folk forms not only enriches the performance text, but also adds an aesthetic colouring to *Hayavadana*.

In *Hayavadana* the playwright wants to suggest that for the modern complicated world Phrenic solutions do not yield the result. In fact, the real problem occurs when it seems to be solved. *Hayavadana* poses a problem to discover the psychological and philosophical yearning of an individual who is a product of society and is entrapped in his own false illusions and visions struggling with the metaphysical anguish of the tangled relationships in the form of "Search for

Completeness" and" this mad dance of incompleteness."

Karnad finds it really very hard to go with the solution given in folktales and considers it as highly problematic: the head is "Uttamanga" or 'the best part of the body', but what about the whole identity of an individual? Is it the whole man? Does the body have a feeling separate from the head (mind)? What about the woman who knows her husband's body and mind and now is compelled to accept his head with other's body in one person? Will they be at loggerheads, or will one takes over the other? *Hayavadana* beautifully builds up the conflicts between the superiority of head and body, mind and heart, external and internal, moral and immoral, instinct and reason, man and animal, spiritual and physical, admirably portrayed in the revolutionary lines from the beginning to the end. It tries to emphasize the reality and nature of life delivering the message that the very idea of completeness is absurd and unachievable. The play is written in an attempt to search a suitable option between mind and body.

The dramatic society in *Hayavadana* is bizarre and topsy - turvy. But the tensions and conflicts presented in the play hold a mirror to the reality of man's everyday dreams. The play is written as an endeavour to explore the character - psyche, and to reveal the emotional states and the inner workings of the mind. The playwright has very artistically incorporated the moral problem with the philosophical dilemma of social life as in the case of Padmini who defies the moral code of conduct, is sure to suffer the pang of alienated life as suggested in the play. At this point Karnad as a rationalist tries to shed off the pinky notions regarding romance, children, marriage and life.

Hayavadana is an enigmatic play. It talks about the absurdity and meaninglessness of life where half - formed beings emerge right from the beginning in the form of Lord Ganesha and *Hayavadana* - a stallion, where dolls speak and comment more than human beings; while the son of Padmini hardly opens his mouth to speak, where goddess is indifferent towards human beings.

Hayavadana is heavily cast in the ambience of Yakshagana folk theatre ethos of Karnataka with the inclusion of dolls, masks, Ganesha pooja, literary allusions, Karma and rebirth theory, family, marriage, destiny, story-within-a-story device, curtains, mimes, stage-hands and the political issues to create an eerie and magical world with a rational scientific push to demonstrate the consciousness of people at the rate of aesthetic satisfaction. P. Dhanavel describes, "As Ulysses is the best novel of the twentieth century, according to the Random House Committee, so is *Hayavadana* the first best drama of this century for India." (The Indian Imagination 122)

Karnad quips at the use of myth and folk in an interview as, "you see the point is I've grown up in myth. I've seen Yakshagana ... I just love myths and I know them. I grew up in them." (Interview by Arka Mukhopadhyay) *Hayavadana* employs folk techniques to draw the contour of contemporary realities of individual's eternal search for his identity and to present strife of urban v/s rural, purity v/s guilt, spiritual v/s materialism, the primordial relation between man and woman, life v/s death on broad spectrum.

The opening of the play is charged with alienated and existentialistic spirits carrying the overtones of utter gloominess and dejection, all pervasive in the entire cosmos. "The stage is empty except for a chair, kept center-stage, and a table on stage right - or at the back" (*Hayavadana* 105) may suggest that the entire world represented as "the stage" is devoid and arid of any life-giving water which can satiate the spiritual craving of a modern individual wandering through the vacuum looking for a personal identity. The playwright of all centuries, Shakespeare, once made a universal remark: "all the world is a stage and all the men and women merely players." Karnad, being the great admirer of this legendary figure also quotes the same idea in *Hayavadana*. The stage is the mirror of the society and represents its entire figure in genuine form with all their ills and oddities. The term 'empty' refers to the 'emptiness' and a 'void' in human life and destiny, which suggests the theme of the play leading the actions further.

In *Hayavadana* Karnad makes use of the story for a different purpose to examine the crisis of a modern man. *Hayavadana* presents the problem of identity in a world of tangled relationships. Karnad as a reformist wants to draw the attention of the society at large to wake up and protest against the injustice imposed on it by the few central authorities ruling over millions of population. With the religious background of the ancient Indian drama, the playwright struggles with the modern philosophy like existentialism.

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