

## KARNAD'S HAYAVADANA: REPRESENTATION OF INDIAN ETHOS

**Dr. Gunjun Agarwal**

(Associate Professor)

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

M.M.University,

Mullana (Ambala)

**Monika Yadav**

Research Scholar,

M.M.University,

Mullana (Ambala)

### Abstract

Girish Karnad is one of the twentieth century writers who reshaped Indian theatre as a national institution. He represents India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. He re-energized the Indian English drama by turning back to old roots and showed how myth, folk and history can serve as a powerful medium to dramatize contemporary situations. Indian myths, legends, folk tales and Indian folk theatre traditions which reflect the social and cultural tradition of India need an immediate attention as indigenous culture is near extinction because of foreign cultural invasion. This return to roots and the preference or revival of local culture and tradition is an important aspect of the decolonization process of all post-colonial societies. He provides a perfect paradigm in his plays that deals with the issues of cultural identity, nationhood, gender discrimination and anti-colonial resistance. The paper examines how Karnad is able to blend Indian and the Western theatrical tradition even though the generation was toned between the tension of the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and their own traditions.

**Keywords** - Indian society, culture, ethos, God and Goddess, marriage, relationship.

Karnad is one of the most renowned media personalities in contemporary India. He is a leading playwright and a very skilful practioner of performing art. When Karnad joined the stage after the nation's independence in 1947, the Indian theatre was suffering from acute identity crises being torn between its ancient cultural past and its more recent colonial legacy, which gave birth to hybrid dramatic forms. Karnad has himself acknowledged this fact:

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 between the various visions of future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. (Karnad 301)

Karnad dictum is to revive the local culture and tradition which is an important aspect of the decolonization process of post-colonial Indian societies. For this, he used Indian myths, legends, folk tales and Indian folk theatre traditions which reflect the social and cultural tradition of India. They need an immediate attention as indigenous cultures are near extinction because of foreign cultural invasions. Karnad represents ethnicity of Indian society through his notable play *Hayavadana*. Karnad presented ethos related to God and Goddess, marriage, man and woman relationship. He depicts the real picture of Indian society. He doesn't try to cover up the drawbacks or negative side of Indian culture.

Karnad's fusion of the Indian and the Western theatrical tradition is reflected in the story of *The Transposed Heads* in *Hayavadana*. In the play *Hayavadana*, Girish Karnad binds an 11th century Indian fable Kathasaritsagar, (a famous 11th-century collection of Indian legends, fairy tales and folk tales in Sanskrit as retold by a Somadeva) with Thomas Mann's 20th century *The Transposed Heads*. The main plot is based on the story of The 'Transposed Heads' in Sanskrit Vetala-Panchavimsati. Karnad highlights blind belief and faith which Indians have in the Gods and Goddesses. In his symbolic and spectacular play *Hayavadana*, he exposes the belief that the Indians have in the elephant-headed Gajavadhana. According to Vinod, Ganapati is a lord of wisdom and also epithets like "Adivinayaka, Siddhivinayaka, Vigneshwara which mean, respectively, the ruler of the divine aspects of Shiva, the first God to be worshipped, the God assures achievement - the remover of obstacles"(Karnad 105). The Indians have a staunch belief that by worshipping Gajavadhana all their troubles will come to an end: "Unfathomable indeed is the mercy of the elephant headed Ganesha. He fulfils the desires of all" (186). Even theatrical performances in India begin after worshipping Ganesha and in *Hayavadana*, Bhagavata sings verses in praise of Ganesha, accompanied by his musician: "O Elephant-headed Herambha whose flag is victory and who shines like a Thousand suns, O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi, seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, we pay homage to you and start our play."(Karnad 105)

It is on the basis of the hope that Vigneshwara would "remove all hurdles and crowns all endeavours with success" (105). Karnad begins *Hayavadana* with a Ganesh Pooja (a sacred offering to Ganesha) which presents his belief in Indian philosophy. In several genres of Indian performance, including Yakshagana, Ganesha is worshipped on-stage by performers and spectators. The playwright invokes lord Ganesha when he starts writing this play, thus he instantly locates the play within the tradition of Hindu performance.

In the city of a Dharmapura, Devadatta endowed with all the accomplishments expected of a Brahmin youth, comely in appearance, unrivalled in intelligence, fair in colour and the only son of the revered Brahmin Vidyasagara, fell in love for the seventeenth time with an extremely agile, beautiful, quick-witted, and vivacious girl Padmini, the daughter of the leading merchant in whose house "the very floor is swept by the Goddess of wealth" (Karnad 213). Love has blinded him and instead of taking effort to arrange for the marriage, his blind faith in God makes him to swear: "If I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the Goddess Kali, I will sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra" (120). This demonstrates blind faith of Indian people in the

Gods and Goddesses. The level of faith can be understood through the thinking and dialogues of Devedatta that his acts of sacrifice can fulfil his wishes. He never thinks to try on his own level. Karnad exposes how people turn to gods and goddess for help to achieve the simplest of jobs. Through Kapila, Karnad divulges that human needs could be met by human efforts.

In the play, there is second plot in which a man with horse head struggled to become a complete man. When incompleteness bugs him, Hayavadana narrates his pathetic story to Bhagvata, who advises him to “go to Banares and make vow in front of the God there” (115). To this Hayavadana replies that he had already been in-

Banares, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Gaya, Haridwar, and Kedarnath not only those  
But the Dargah of Khwaja Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of our Virgin Mary- I’ve  
Tried them all. Magicians, mendicants, maharshis,- fakirs, saints and sadhus-  
Sadhus in the altogether- hanging, singing, rotating, gyrating - on the spikes, in  
the spikes, in the air, under water, under the ground . . . I’ve covered them  
all. (Karnad 115)

But of no use. Frustrated from all sides Hayavadana is advised by Bhagavatha to try the Kali of Mount Chitrakoot as the “Goddess there is famous for being ever-awake to the call of devotees”(81). Through the play, Karnad endeavours to present the realm of Indian society related to God and Goddess. He is one of the few Playwrights who dared to venture the reality of the blind, superstitions belief of the Indians in Gods and Goddess in a humorous, in offensive way.

In India women are considered to be the weaker sex. Karnad very dexterously pictures the condition of a typical Indian female ruled by the patriarchal order bound by tradition of marriage, but whose spirit remains unbound. Though not a feminist, but a humanist with his profound concern for the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘downtrodden’, he depicts women enthused with feminism, fighting the unjust norms of the patriarchal order. In their direct encounter with patriarchy, his women characters end up in death or disaster. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad exposes how women are exploited in the family. Devadatta, a gentle scholar, falls in love with a beautiful and vivacious girl, Padmini. His friend Kapila, an ironsmith and has an impressive physical stature acting as a matchmaker, realizes that Devadatta “can’t bear a bitter word or an evil thought”, but Padmini is “Fast as lightning- and sharp” (Karnad 308). Though Kapila realizes that Padmini needs a man of steel, but he is unable to do anything. So he is committed to obtain her in marriage for his dear friend Devadatta. Ultimately, the two families were brought tighter by the toll of marriage bells. Kapila realizes that Devadatta is not a suitable partner for Padmini, as the two families decide, their marriage take place leading to the utter failure of their life. Women in India are taken for granted as men have failed to realize that she too has feelings and emotion. Karnad portrays the way of marriage take are fixed in India. Padmini protests against the patriarchal order of command but ultimately she too becomes a prey to the tyranny of the patriarchal society. In Indian culture, marriage is considered as a supreme blessing for a woman because it offers her salvation through her service to her husband.

Padmini is travelling with her jealous husband Devadatta and his friend Kapila; and her husband is unable to bear capricious actions of his wife, beheads himself at the altar of the Goddess Kali. No Indian man would tolerate his wife having relationship with another man. So Devadatta depressed by his wife’s unconcealed amorous attraction for his friend and in a sudden outburst of emotion, he decides to sacrifice his head to Goddess Kali. This action of Devadatta demonstrates the philosophy related to man and woman relationship in Indian society. In India, adultery done by a woman can’t be acceptable. A man can have extra- marital relationship but

for woman's chastity is supreme, more than her own life. That's why, Padimi decides to be 'Sati' because she knows very well that society will never accept her.

Devdatta's friend Kapila becomes impatient after waiting for his friend and so goes to the Kali temple and he gets terrified to see his friend's severed head before Kali. Kapila sacrifices his head too, not out of his love for his friend, as he likes to tell himself, but only to avert the possible ignominy. In reality, Kapila thought that people taking ill of him and this would spoil his reputation. In his fear, he also beheaded himself. According to Indian culture, infidelity is a heinous crime for which death is the only solution. A civilized society never accepts such a woman who wants to live with two men. Not even society but the two men will also not accept sharing a woman. They cannot live like the Pandavas and Draupadi in the Mahabharata because they are not epic characters which are personifications of abstract ideas. Padmini's life ends in tragedy as she unwittingly goes against nature's course. She commits 'Sati' as she cannot choose a life of her own because her extra marital relationship will threaten the order of the society. She herself utters: "If I'd said, 'Yes, I'll live with you both', perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I couldn't say it. I couldn't say, 'yes'" (Karnad 170).

Indian society is divided into many castes and religion and the upper class people always rule over the lower classes. The relationship is like the ruler and ruled. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad illustrates how the consciousness and the participation into the caste politics of power has rendered the friendship of Kapila and Devadatta. The plays of Karnad abound with subalterns especially women and lower caste people subjected since ancient time by patriarchy or upper hierarchy of the society. Kapila in *Hayavadana*, the son of the iron-smith Lohita, is "dark and plain to look at, yet in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing, in strength and in physical skills he has no equals" (102). His physical features and traits of the personality mark-off his social identity and inferior position in the society contrasted with Devadatta's "comely appearance, fair colour, unrivalled in intelligence.... Only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidhysagara... felled the mightiest pundits of the kingdom in debates on logic and love, having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit... apple of every eye in Dharampura" (Karnad 106). Devadatta and Kapila represent two opposite extremes - one soul another body. Their friendship is exceptional, "One mind, one heart" (106). The Brahmins tactfully conceal their lack by colonizing the consciousness of those from the inferior castes. The Brahmins have succeeded in convincing the low-castes to see the situations in the way they want them to see. Devadatta hardly appreciates the expertise of Kapila" (118). Kapila projects himself insignificant and greatly indebted: ". . . And I'll say it again. If it wasn't for you I would have been no better than the ox in our yard. You showed me that there were such things as poetry and literature. You showed me that there such things as poetry and literature. You taught me. . . (118).

Kapila's evaluation that without Devadatta's guidance he "would have been no better than the ox in our yard", and his declaration that "Even my parents aren't as close to me as you are. I would leave them this minute if you asked me to" (118) reveals another aspect of caste psychology. Despite his closeness with Devadatta, there is always a deep-rooted feeling in Kapila's mind that he belongs to lower caste. He doesn't dare to sit on chair with Devadatta rather sits down on the ground happily:

Devadatta: Sit down.

(This is of course exactly what Kapila wants. He sits down on the floor.)

And don't speak...

(Devadatta gets down on the floor to sit beside Kapila. Kapila at

Once leaps up and gestures to Devadatta to sit on the chair. Devadatta shakes his head but Kapila insist, pulls him up by his arm. Devadatta gets up.)  
You are a pest.

(Sits on the chair. Kapila sits down on the ground happily... ) (Karnad 119)

Even Devadatta makes a satire on his profession: “What do you know of poetry and literature? Go back to your smithy—that’s where you belong,” (13) reminds subalternity of Kapila. Despite the maltreatment, Kapila incessantly moves towards Devadatta because he wants to hold his connection with upper-caste norms. “This adoption of upper-caste norms is, instead, an attempt to appropriate a prestigious cultural style that, they feel, enhances a change in their low- caste status.” (Chakraborty 198)

Conclusively, it can be said that Karnad’s characters in *Hayavadana* are greatly influenced by the customs of the society. Characters are portrayed as prisoners who have to suppress their desires as they are unacceptable according to the norms of the society. Karnad’s mark of genius is quite evident from his portrayal of real characters in real situations.

### Works Cited

- Chakraborty, Kaustav. *Indian Drama in English*. New Delhi: PHI, 2011. Web 5 June 2014.
- Karnad, Girish. —Author’s Introduction. *Three Plays: Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana and Tughlaq*. New Delhi: OUP, 2007. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_.ed. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker. *Collected Plays. Tale- Danda, The Fire and the Rain, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, Two Monologues: Flowers, Broken Images*. New Delhi: OUP.2005. Print.
- Mukherjee, Tutun. *Of Text and Performance: Girish Karnad’s Plays Introduction*. Girish Karnad’s Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006. Print.
- M.K.Naik, “From the Horse’s Mouth: A Study of Hayavadana”. *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984. Web 4 June 2014.