

AN ODYSSEY IN IMAGERY IN GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAYS FROM 'TUGHLAQ' TO 'THE FIRE AND THE RAIN'

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"Imagery of Girish Karnad in his plays is one of the most distinguishing and praiseworthy features. In the present article, I shall discuss in some detail, Girish Karnad's **The Fire and The Rain** to show how with the passage of time and with practice, the playwright has made significant use of imagery to spell out his leitmotifs and messages. A very simple image can say a number of things in a flash. Most of the images that we get in Karnad's plays as we shall be seeing in detail are functional. They help us in preparing the atmosphere of the play, to enliven dialogues, and to make Karnad's play written in prose poetical.

The Fire and The Rain is certainly history-making and a historic monument of Girish Karnad in the field of Indian English drama vis-a-vis his use of imagery in which has been skillfully made by him a very powerful and handy means to serve a number of leitmotifs so nicely fabricated in the text of the play.

The play's title in Kannada is *Agni Mattu Male* (1995) in Kannada as in Sanskrit and Hindi the word *Agni* means fire and "Male" in Kannada means "Water". Now a dramatic master-stroke has been played by Karnad by changing "water" into 'rain', which, considered in terms of imagery is more comprehensive and compendious, as the image has become metaphorical and symbolical in its final analysis. The play as it stands is a collage of a romantic tale, a myth, a legend and thought-provoking sketch of Indian social and political conditions; it reads like *Pauranik Katha*, a variable *Pancham Veda* of Bharata's conception. The plot has become highly complex because the roles assigned to characters, events and images are multi-layered. The words "Fire" and "Rain" juxtaposed in the title have more meanings and implications than one. They are elements that are both life-givers and life-takers. 'Fire' is '*Agni Deva*' accepting libations. It is the great power that burns all things to ashes, and it also stands for many a burning and scorching passion - ambition, revenge, martyrdom, existentialist strike and feminist cause. Similarly 'Rain' as water symbolises a number of things; it is extinguisher of fire, and it stands for mercy, compassion, peace, dampness, solace and quiet and forgiveness. The fire of jealousy sets Raibhya, Yavakri and Bharadwaj ablaze and spells their ruin. On the other hand there is the rain of compassion, forgiveness and mercy the characteristic feature of Nittilai's and Aravasu's character. Visakha tells Paravasu how her father-in-law Raibhya had three fires burning at once in him - the fire of revenge, the fire of sex and the fire of anger.

The Fire and The Rain presents different varieties of fire which are extinguished when the dark and black clouds are too saturated to hold formation of drops any longer and start raining, which is at the end of the play. The effective and telling images interspersed in the play have given the play the impression of shot-silk with the result that the plot has become a sort of hold-all bursting at the seams, as Karnad has made the contents and figures, mythological and legendary, modern and annal-like. Fully packed with different messages, it has become a medley of various purposes and cross-purposes, a bewildering and bewitching criss-cross of lights

thrown from different angles in images drawn from objects and colours on the present day and timeless issues knit together in the fabric of the play. The play hypnotically presents an old myth and legend; at the same time, the writer's focus is at the chaotic and troublesome contemporaneous conditions of our country and the world. In its ultimate symbolical analysis the play serves as an illustration of the victory of good over evil, of *Dharma* over *Adharma*. The play becomes a moral lesson in itself preaching not by precept but practice that it is not *Brahminism* but humanitarianism that is Godism, next to Godliness. Thus the symbolical explication has turned a plain tale of revenge and fratricide into a serious parable of ethics and philosophy. To be sure practice has made the dramatist Girish Karnad perfect.

Girish Karnad has used images, as earlier F. E. Caroline Spurgeon had used them in her path-breaking work *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* fruitfully for the setting of the plays, for character-sketches, and for making various scenes evocative and effective. An analytical study of the play becomes interesting as well as informative in making a comprehensive study of Girish Karnad's imagery, which has certainly enriched his plays in respect of both - the subject-matter and its expression. To take just one example from the play to substantiate the observations :

“Ten years ago I had come to your house to bid you goodbye. And you led me quickly to the jack-fruit grove behind your house. You opened the knot of your blouse, pressed my face to your breast, then turned and fled ---The smell of your body---.” (p.14)

The images in "jack-fruit grove", "opened the knot of your blouse, pressed my face to your breast", "the swell of your body" are varied - visual, gustatory, kinetic, sympathetic, kinesthetic, olfactory. The verbs "led", "opened", "pressed then turned and fled" make the passage poetical, and the adverb "quickly" with "led" becomes revelatory of the psychic conditions of the characters.

Aravasu is eager to meet Nittilai then she asks him to attend the council of elders. The visual image in "The elders will gather under the big banyan tree - - -" (p.5). An dhakha speaking of Aravasu's strategic moves uses, a beautiful original image "Extract the honey without ruffling the bees" (p.7). Here "honey" arouses, our gustatory sense. The image of "ruffling bees" is visual.

The drought has been beautifully portrayed by the dramatist.

Nittilai: --- Parched every morning, women with babes on their hips, shrunken children shrivelled old men and women gather in front of my father's house for the gruel. (p.10)

"Parched", "women with babes on their hips", "shrunken children" and "shrivelled old men" – all these visual images are expressive of the miseries of the villagers.

Vishakha is filling water in her pot and carrying it to the hermitage but Yavakri is standing right in the middle of her path Karnad has made this scene highly visual.

Vishakha, aged about twenty-six, is filling water in metal urn. She has scooped out water from holes dug in the wet sand and collected it in the pot. She must have been an attractive person once. But now looks angry and haggard. She looks around furtively. She picks up the pot, puts it on her waist and starts for home. (p.12)

A series of images "filling water", "metal urn", "scooping water from holes", "wet sand", "attractive person", "looks angry and haggard", "looks furtively", "picks up the pot" and "puts on her waist" make the description picturesque.

Yavakri shares his experience of the jungle with Vishakha. Here is Yavakri giving broad visible outlines of the place where he had been worshipping. Yavakri: "I looked around the same old black scorpion. The same horned chameleon. The shower of bird-shit around me." (p.13) "Black scorpion" and "horned chameleon" and shower of birds-shit are visual images. Here dramatist has, by all means, tried to introduce us with the fauna kingdom.

In jungle the God again comes to Yavakri and asks a question to him "Why are you being so stubborn? He chides. "You can't cross a full stream on a bridge of sand" (p.14). "A full stream" is a synaesthetic image which is visual and kinetic as well.

Vishakha narrates her post-marriage experience to Yavakri she is confessional even more than any poet known for his confessional element:

Vishakha: He used my body and his own body, like an experimenter, an explorer. As an instrument in a search You are still lost in the fragrance of the jack-fruit, Yavakri I have known what it is to grow heavy, burst open, drip and rot. (p.16)

"Used my body" and "his own body" effect a sensual touch. "The fragrance of jack fruit" is an olfactory image. The attributes like "grow heavy", burst open", "drip", and "rot" applied to jack-fruit are synaesthetic evoking the senses of sight and smell.

In brief, we can say that the sources of images exploited by the dramatist in this play are truly poetic in nature, highly affective, telling and captivating, they have enriched both thematic and stylistic contents of the play. Our study of Girish Karnad's imagery in this play has evinced that Girish Karnad has been successful in making a perfect blend of tradition and individual talent.

Work cited

- For the consideration of space the title of the plays in the text have been giving in their abbreviated forms as HV for *Hayavadana* NM for *Nagamandala*, BTS for *Bali: The Sacrifice*, TD for *Tale-Danda*, TDTS for *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* and TFAR for *The Fire and The Rain*.
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