

HAYAVADANA: A CELEBRATION OF HYBRIDITY*Arya B. L., Thekkeveedu, Velavoor, Koliyacode PO, Thiruvananthapuram***Abstract:**

Hybridity is an important aspect of the modern-day world. From the very basic sense of the word, meaning mixture, to its highest connotation, 'hybridity' contributes to a number of modern concerns. Girish Karnad's Hayavadana celebrates hybridity in a most elaborate manner. It is a bit different from the advanced Postcolonial Hybridity, as the play explores hybridity as a basic concept. This is evident from the surface level reading of the play itself. Karnad uses the technique of hybridity in its simplest terms. Instead of using the age old 'east-west' conflict, Karnad suggests that differences occur at the very micro level. A man himself can be a blend of different persons, that is, he may have different versions of himself. This can be perceived from two different angles: physical and emotional. One's physical appearance may not match his personality, for e.g. an erudite may not always be a well-built person and vice versa. The second aspect is further more deep. The emotional stability is almost a myth. A clever man behaves in the most foolish ways at worst circumstances. So, the concept of hybridity is present from the very fundamental aspects of the society. These differences lead to the higher forms of race and culture. Thus, through Hayavadana, Karnad suggests that imperfections can be beautiful. Hayavadana also advocates that fragmentation is not inferior. In fact, it often contributes to the diversity of nature and culture.

Keywords: *Hybridity, myth, fragmentation, culture, identity.*

Introduction

Girish Regunath Karnad is a renowned Indian actor, film director, scholar and writer who usually writes in Kannada. He himself translates his plays into English. Many of Karnad's works are based on Indian history and mythology. He uses them as a vehicle to address contemporary issues and conflicts. Indian culture has always been a driving force behind Karnad's writing and *Hayavadana* is no exception. How diversity contributes to unity is core to Indian culture and this theme is effectively employed throughout the play. The basic plot of *Hayavadana* is taken from *Kathasarithsagara*, but Karnad adapts the story from Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads*. The sub-plot is the story of Hayavadana, a horse-man and his search for identity. Karnad uses both the plots as a catalyst to arrive at the themes of fragmented identity and hybridity.

Characterization of *Hayavadana* is indeed remarkable. Almost all the characters in the play celebrates the theme of hybridity. According to Hindu belief, invocation of Ganesh and lighting the lamp before any deed is important, as evoking Ganesh will help in the smooth completion of the act and lighting the lamp will ward off the evil. The play begins with an invocation of Lord Ganesh. He is known as 'Vigneshwara' or the 'destroyer of obstacles'. Apart from the religious and cultural significance, Ganesh is brought at the beginning of the play intentionally. Taking a look at the physical appearance of Ganesh will give a clear picture. Ganesh is the embodiment of fragmentation. He has a man's body and elephant's head. He has only one tusk. He has a cracked belly, but he is invoked as the destroyer of incompleteness.

"O Elephant-headed Heramba
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." (Hayavadana 1)

The mask of Ganesha that is brought on the stage makes the audience aware that fragmentation is not always awful or incomplete. It is a reminder that the very God who destroys incompleteness is incomplete himself.

The sub-plot is about the eponymous Hayavadana. He has a man's body and a horse's head. Through him, the other side of hybridity is portrayed. He is very much sorry about his unique physical appearance and he is ready to go to any extent to have a normal human form. He describes how he is always considered a bizarre creature and how he always covers his face with a veil to avoid attention. His fragmentality prevents him from being a part of any society. He doesn't belong to the human society nor the animal faction. He asks, "Where's my society? Where?" (Hayavadana 9). Hayavadana's search for his identity is prevalent throughout the play. His prayer to Kali is to help him find his identity. He says, "Mother, make me complete." (Hayavadana 68). His lack of belongingness haunts him more than his physical appearance. He transforms into a full horse after his visit to the Kali temple. But his human voice makes him different from the other horses. It's very fascinating to note that once Hayavadana meets the boy, he transforms into a complete horse. When he laughs with the boy, his human laugh slowly changes to a horse's neigh. Through his transformation, Hayavadana highlights how completeness is almost impossible for the human beings. He finds his identity in the animal form.

The most important characters in the play who literally contribute to the central theme of hybridity are Kapila and Devadatta. The mixing up of their heads proves to be the central conflict of the play. When their heads got swapped, they lost their existence. The body with Devadatta's head starts living with Padmini and the body with Kapila's head retreats to the forest. Kapila and Devadatta are two very different individuals in many ways. Despite the fact that they are thick friends, they never share any similarity. Physically, mentally and even economically and racially they never match. Devadatta is slender, delicate-looking and well-educated. Kapila on the other hand is a well-built man. He has very little education. "Devadatta is the only son of a revered brahmin. He is a poet. A pandit. Knows the Vedas backwards, writes the grandest poetry ever. Long, dark hair. Delicate, fair face." (Hayavadana 19). Kapila is everything which Devadatta is not. He is the son of a blacksmith. He is dark and physically fit. Though they are close friends, Devadatta never considers him as his equal in any way. "What do you know of Poetry and literature? Go back to your smithy. That's where you belong." (Hayavadana 13), says Devadatta. Kapila himself knows that he is nowhere near his best friend. "If it wasn't for you, I have been no better than the ox in our yard. You showed me that there were such things as poetry and literature. You taught me..." (Hayavadana 13). Obviously, these differences had nothing to do with their friendship. They knew each other very well. When Kapila comes to know about Devadatta's love, he is more than ready to help his friend marry his sweetheart. How enthusiastically he goes to find the house of the woman who stole his best friend's heart. But the moment Kapila departed, Devadatta knew Kapila would like her. "He is too rough, too indelicate" (Hayavadana 15, 16). As Devadatta doubts, Kapila falls in love with Padmini at the very first sight. Their tight bond of friendship is shattered by their love for Padmini. Even after his marriage with Padmini, Devadatta is jealous of Kapila and views him as rival as far as Padmini's love is concerned. The plot becomes more complicated when Devadatta remembers his promise to the Gods that if he marries Padmini, he will sacrifice his two arms to Kali and his head to Rudra. In between their journey to Ujjain, Devadatta visits the famous Kali temple, remembers his promise to the Goddess and cuts off his head. The play further complicates when Kapila, finding out his friend's death, beheads himself too. Kali appears in front of the frantic Padmini and asks her to put back the bodies and heads together so that She could make them alive again. Padmini mixes up the bodies and heads and as a result the two men interchange their heads. Here, the question of superiority of head arises and both men claim to be the husband of Padmini.

On the other hand, Padmini who always loved Devadatta's intellect and Kapila's body, gets what she wants. The mixing up leads the play to a new direction. Devadatta's head and Kapila's body, now united, lives with Padmini and Kapila, with Devadatta's slender body, withdraws to the forest.

Whether a person is able to withstand the changes which happen to him, be it physical or cultural, is the real question here. Devadatta with his new found strength enjoys his life at first. He no longer writes poetry. He performs well as a wrestler and loves to spend time outside his house, which is very unlikely of him. Padmini also loves this transformation. But gradually, his physical strength weakens and his body turns pale and slender. His interest in physical activities deteriorates and he is reminded of his duties as a brahmin. Kapila's case is not different as well. He, at first, with Devadatta's meek body, finds it very difficult to live in the rough living conditions of the forest. He mentions that how his new bodies have the memories that he couldn't relate to. He also finds himself attracted to the beauty of nature and more interested in poetry and literature. But as times pass, he gets his natural strength back and the life in forest is no more tough. Thus, it is evident that the 'mixing-up' never altered their personalities. Their identity is further more crushed now. They lost their roots and the hollowness in them deepened. They ended up as their own selves, further more broken and fragmented. Ultimately, tired of their existence, they decide to kill each other.

Padmini is one character who seems so complete at the beginning of the play. She is the epitome of beauty. For Devadatta, she is his muse and for Kapila, "She is yakshini" (Hayavadana 16). But a closer look at the character shows that she is as fragmented as the other characters. She is married to Devadatta but she has always been attracted to Kapila's strong body. "What she needs is a man of steel." (Hayavadana 19). The engraving of the two headed bird on the door of Padmini's house can be seen as an indicator to her divided self. It is she who mixes up the heads of her husband and his friend. Although she did not do it on purpose, it is what she always wanted, she gets her dream life but it doesn't last long. She gets disillusioned when Devadatta transforms into his former self, both physically and mentally. In a fight, both Kapila and Devadatta dies and Padmini, recognizing how rootless she is without them, performs sati. Her life shows that she was not the composed, perfect woman she seemed to be. She had her own battles to fight. She always found it difficult to define her identity, that is, whether she wants to spend her life with the intellectual Devadatta or with the muscular Kapila. Her conflict is well depicted in the song of the female chorus, "Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?" Towards the end of her life she understands that she, Kapila and Devadatta are the different manifestations of the same spirit. They never had individual existences. So, she says, "We are three." (Hayavadana 63).

Padmini's child is the last character in the play who portrays the theme of hybridity. Even though he is born in Padmini's womb before the "mix up" happens, his whole life is a blend of different aspects of life. After Padmini's death, he lives among the hunters as Kapila's son till the age of five. He grows up in the nature's lap. After his fifth birthday, he is taken to a brahmin and is introduced as Devadatta's son. Thus he carries in himself the legacies of two different cultures. But he is not fragmented as the rest of the characters. He is, in fact, the culmination of all their identities. His inability to speak points out to his incompleteness. He never talked or even smiled. But once he meets Hayavadana, he laughs out loud. The child's search for identity starts there.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction of the play, the basic plot from Kathasaritsagara addresses a moral problem while Thomas Mann uses it in the mock-heroic form to address the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He also ridicules the philosophy which considers that the head is superior to the body. Karnad's play can be viewed from both the aspects. How Padmini wishes for a man, who is not her husband is indeed a moral concern as far as Indian society is concerned. The

concept of head superior to the body, on the other hand, is seen through out the play. Kapila and Devadatta argues about this after the mixing up. Even Goddess Kali seems offended when Devadatta offers her his arms instead of the head as a sacrifice. "he had once promised his head to rudra and arms to me! Think of it- head to him and arms to me." (Hayavadana 33). Then there is Hayavadana, who has a horse's head and a man's body. When he appeals the Goddess for completeness, he becomes a horse, not a man. His animal head triumphs over the human body. Thus, by employing all these themes, Karnad stresses that human beings are incapable of attaining perfection. Their identity crisis and fragmentation follow them throughout their lives and those who finally understands that human life is beautiful with all its imperfections, succeeds in celebrating their existence.

References

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