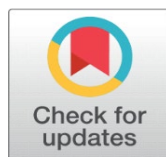


CONFIRMING INDIANNESS THROUGH FOLKTALES: A STUDY INTO KARNAD'S HAYAVADANA

Mompi Saikia 

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English North Bank College, Ghilamara Lakhimpur-787053 Assam, India



Corresponding Author

Mompi Saikia, mompis2020@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In Girish Karnad's plays we discover indigenous subjects, myths, legends, history as well as folklore fused with Indian classical theatre technique and Indianised English language. His main purpose behind this is to revitalize Indian history and culture and, free it from Eurocentric domination as well as to confirm nationality in the field of Indian English drama. His dramatic technique of using Indian folktales, legends and history develops a kind of contemporaneity. This present paper is an attempt to explore the way Karnad has used folktales in his play Hayavadana (1971). The play has been taken as the primary data and the secondary data include articles from books, journals and magazines. The present study is based on a critical analysis and interpretation of the text.

Keywords: Folktales, Indianness, Nationality, Past

1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the dramatic works created prior to 1947 gave rise to Eurocentric ideas, while the works produced after independence, especially from the 1960s onward, revitalized the concepts of nativism and a renewed appreciation for Indian culture. The Natyasastra, a comprehensive document focused solely on the art of theatre and dramatic techniques, provides direct inspiration to playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, and others in energizing the native elements of their stories. This type of realization of unity with Indian culture is a key source for Indian playwrights like Karnad in reducing the influence of colonial thinking in Indian literature. A question rises regarding the tools that contribute to the causative influence of the form and language present in the post-independence dramatic texts of India as a nation. In the case of Karnad, it is evident that he draws from the myths and folklore found in Indian epics. Additionally, he incorporates the ideologies of Vedic culture and the concepts of Natyasastra in certain works.

In his Note to the play Hayavadana (1971), Girish Karnad states: "The central episode in the play—the story of Devadatta and Kapila—is based on a tale from the Vetala-panchavimsati, but I have drawn heavily on Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in *The Transposed Heads*." Nonetheless, this play transcends being just a simple narrative of

Sanskrit stories from India. It becomes a work of poetic creativity in the hands of Girish Karnad. This Sanskrit story transforms into a social and psychological puzzle that broadens its impact on the lives of individuals in our community. The play includes several typical patterns in its plot, characters, types, narrative structure, and identifiable elements that link past literature to the current text.

Hayavadana fundamentally explores the quest for identity within a complex web of relationships. The storyline focuses on the bond between Devadatta and Kapila, while the secondary plot involves the horseman's quest for fulfillment. Devadatta is the thinker, while Kapila is a physically strong man; both share a close friendship. Devadatta weds the lovely Padmini. Subsequently, Padmini develops feelings for the strong Kapila. As a result, the envious husband takes his own life, while his faithful friend Kapila also chooses to do the same. A highly dramatic scene follows where Padmini receives blessings from Goddess Kali, and it takes place at the temple where both friends end their lives. Padmini provides Devadatta with Kapila's body, and similarly, Devadatta gives his body to Kapila. The outcome is a significant mix-up of identities that reveals the unclear aspect of human character. The circumstances change once more. At this moment, Padmini once more becomes attracted to Kapila, who currently resides in the forest and has changed his gentle Devadatta's physique into a strong one through physical labour, while Devadatta's borrowed body has been changed into a shapeless form without the necessary exercise. It leads to a duel in which both men end up killing one another. In the conclusion, Padmini carries out Sati. As noted by Krishna Singh, in this play, Karnad explores traditional myths to express the modern individual's suffering and conflicts that arise within his thoughts. In Hayavadana, the playwright is deeply engaged with the idea of incompleteness and illustrates the characters of Devadatta, Kapila, and Hayavadana (the horseman) as they seek fulfillment.

When one intends to examine the affirmation of nationality in Karnad's plays, it is essential to consider the methods the playwright has employed traditional Indian myths, folktales, and similar narratives and how he has adjusted them to ensure they are appropriate for the current situation. Clearly, Karnad grants a voice and a unique identity to Indian drama through his play by restoring the nation's history.

Music and dance have always been essential to Indian drama due to their power to evoke strong emotions. Additionally, they serve as a way to engage the audience. Girish Karnad also employs this method of drama. He oversees the stage direction, and in Hayavadana, he employs the technique of Bhagavata for the character of Sutradhara. Karnad's Bhagavata serves his usual function of guiding the stage and introducing characters, with a specific emphasis on the scenes and circumstances. This paper examines Karnad's incorporation of folktales within this play. The Indian influence on the borrowed European literary sources has also been addressed.

2. OBJECTIVES

The following are the objectives of the research paper:

- 1) To explore the use of Indian folktale from Vetala-panchavimsati in Karnad's play Hayavadana
- 2) To examine how he combines Indian and European literature
- 3) To analyse how Karnad confirms his nationality through the use of Indian folktale.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY USED:

In this research paper Karnad's play Hayavadana will be analyzed with the interpretive and analytical methods to focus on the study. The study of the play will be carried in the form of close reading, analysis and textual references. There are two sources of information that are used here- Primary and Secondary. Primary data are in the form of the texts of the selected play, non-fictional works as well as the interviews with the author, while the Secondary data are taken from journals, articles and reference books.

4. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH:

The following are the paper's findings:

- 1) Karnad uses the folk elements not in its full content but in half, and remoulds it again to make it more meaningful.
- 2) He borrows stories from European literature but only to transform it.

- 3) The use of folktales is actually a means of confirmation of nationality for Karnad.

5. DISCUSSION

When one intends to talk about the affirmation of nationality in Karnad's plays, it is essential to examine the methods the playwright has employed traditional Indian myths, folktales, and similar sources and how he has adjusted them to fit the current situation. Clearly, Karnad provides a voice and a unique identity through his play by restoring the country's history.

Both music and dance have always been essential components of Indian drama due to their ability to evoke strong emotions. Moreover, they also serve as a way to engage the audience. Girish Karnad similarly employs this method of dramatic writing. He oversees the stage directions, and in *Hayavadana*, he employs the technique of Bhagavata for the character of Sutradhara. Karnad's Bhagavata serves his usual role of guiding the stage and introducing the characters, placing special emphasis on the scenes and contexts.

In contrast to Karnad's other plays, *Hayavadana* consists of just two acts. In Act I, theatrical elements like the presentation of the actors, the use of folktale techniques, and the combination of the primary narrative (the tale of Devadatta and Kapila) with the secondary narrative (the tale of *Hayavadana*) occur. At the start of the play, the audience is informed about the stage settings and the presence of Bhagavata. The audience can only observe the Bhagavata and musicians seated on the chairs. The incorporation of theatrical and folklore elements is evident at the beginning when the idol of Ganesha, the Hindu god who is honored first during all good occasions, is brought and positioned in the chair for the purpose of conducting the rituals of Pooja. The text opens with a commendation of Lord Ganesha as "the ruler of success and excellence," thus presenting the audience with the outline of the play through the discourse of Bhagavata:

"This is city of Dharmapura, ruled by Kind Dharmasheela whose fame and empire have already reached the ends of the eight directions. The two youths dwell in the city are our heroes. One is Devadatta Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahman Vidyasagar Devadatta is as it were the apple of every eye in Dharmapura. The other youth is Kapila. He is the only son of iron smith, Lohita. (Karnad 9)

As the play focuses on the friendship between two friends and the city of Dharmapura, examining the deeper elements of the text, the various scenes, and the talents of the actors captures the audience's interest. The two friends are not only opposing figures, but they also symbolize the contrasting Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical traditions of ancient Indian society. Adhering to the guidelines of Indian dramatic art this illustrates the equal role that Janana Yojna and Karma Yojna play in enhancing societal welfare. Karnad incorporates these two young individuals who embody both approaches. The Janana Yojna represents Brahmanical ceremonies, while the Karma Yojna signifies a form of theatrical art that is not associated with Brahmanical traditions.

In Indian theater, *Natya* is regarded as a representation of the world, characterized by the depth of emotions or *bhavas* and the different scenarios rooted in actual contexts. As Bhagavata is preparing to disclose the framework of the play, an unusual shout is heard from afar. Nevertheless, Bhagavata effectively controls the stage directions without permitting any form of deviation, ensuring that the audience remains focused on the theatrical performance that highlights the friendship between Devadatta and Kapila.

The world wonders at their friendship. The world sees these two young men wondering down the street of Dharmapura hand in hand, and remembers Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balarama. (Karnad 2)

There is also a song that depicts the unacceptable ties of friendship between these two individuals: "Two friends there were/ one mind, one heart" (*idem*). The *nata*, that is the actor interrupts the performance when he unexpectedly enters the stage and notifies the Bhagavata regarding the presence of *Hayavadana*. However, Bhagavata addresses the bewildered and chaotic audience by creating an unexpected interruption on stage to commend his "generous audience." The *Natyasastra* emphasizes the particular traits and qualities of the audience. According to this, the judges (observers) ought to possess good character and noble lineage, be knowledgeable, responsible, of intermediate age, skilled in drama, and fair in their assessments. After addressing his "generous" audience, Bhagavata asks about the fear and the unusual shout of the performer. The individual is too shocked to convey to him the information about the scene he has observed. At this moment, Bhagavata informs him about the regulations and sacredness of the stage, and he shares the tale of the horse-headed man (*Hayavadana*) who possesses the ability to speak in a human voice.

The craft of drama necessitates a harmonious combination of scenes, events, and settings with the central storyline. This is precisely what occurs in this play. The main ideas of the story, such as the symbolic depiction of the city and the

unbreakable bond of friendship, are presented at the appropriate moments in the play. Ultimately, Hayavadana arrives on the stage where Bhagavata is present to recount the bond between Devadatta and Kapila. The striking horse-headed character, Hayavadana, captivates the imagination of the audience. Similar to Yakshagana and Kathakali, Karnad incorporates a mask for the character of Hayavadana. Hayavadana sits on the ground and covers his face from the audience, as the feeling of his inadequacy related to his lack of wholeness occupies his thoughts. Bhagavata believes that Hayavadana has concealed his face with a mask, and he attempted to remove it from his body; however, his efforts were unsuccessful.

Bhagavata inquires about the horse's head and poses questions regarding whether he has violated the sacredness of any holy place, to which Hayavadana responds negatively. Indeed, he acknowledges that he was born with a horse's head due to his mother's union with a stallion. After fifteen years of being married, unexpectedly, one by the stallion becomes a heavenly being and informs Hayavadana's mother about the fate that has been assigned to him. He now requests his wife to accompany him to his Eternal Home. She puts forward the condition that she will join him only if he becomes a horse once more. This filled him with rage, and he curses Hayavadana's mother to turn into a horse. After transforming into a horse, she joyfully fled, while the father ascended to his Heavenly Abode. Their child Hayavadana is abandoned by his own parents, striving for excellence either as a person or as a horse.

Bhagavata listens to his poignant and thrilling tale and enhances its dramatic significance by connecting it with the central storyline. He suggests that Hayavadana should visit a few religious shrines in order to attain perfection. Upon the suggestion of Bhagavata, Hayavadana agrees to accompany the nata (actor) to the temple of Kali located at Mount Chitrakoot. Following this, the Bhagavata returns to his responsibilities and organizes the stage for the play's presentation. The narrative of the two friends continues, and the character of Padmini is presented. In the midst of this, Karnad brought to life the themes from folk tradition. He presents a female chorus that suggests the concealed elements of human relationships:

A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm. I have neither regret nor shame. The blood pours into the earth and song branches out in the sky. (Karnad 64)

Following this chorus, Kapila and Devadatta enter the stage. The melody performed by the chorus uncovers certain concealed viewpoints of the narrative. The phrases like "blood pours into the earth" and "a pupil for each eye" suggest the impending conflict between the two friends, indicating that both are admirers of Padmini. Devadatta symbolizes her aspiration for intellectual growth, while Kapila represents the pursuit of physical affection.

In his portrayal of Padmini's beauty, Devadatta compares her to Shakuntala from Kalidasa's play, *Abhijñāna Shākuntalam*. Devadatta is so captivated by Padmini's beauty that he considers her a "teacher" in the art of poetry. Kapila experiences the heartache of his friend and starts to search for the location of the dream girl, Padmini. After following her, he introduces Devadatta to Padmini as a Brahman youth, talented in poetry and knowledgeable in Vedic rituals and scriptures. Even Kapila himself is astonished by the beauty of Padmini. The beauty inspires a fascination in his thoughts, leading to certain psychological changes in his mental condition.

In the marriage episode, Kapila requests Padmini's hand for his friend Devadatta. The elements of folk theater are revealed as Kapila contrasts the teachings and admirable traits of Brahman Vidyasagar's lineage. As a result, the union between the two individuals occurs. After a period, both friends, together with Padmini, take a journey to Ujjain. During this time, the relationship between Kapila and Padmini becomes stronger, which creates a faint sense of jealousy in Devadatta's thoughts. Padmini develops a certain admiration for Kapila upon observing his proficiency in cart driving. She ultimately expresses her admiration for Kapila's physical physique:

How he climbs like an ape and what an ethereal shape! Such broad back like an ocean with muscles rippling across it and then small, feminine waist which looks so helpless. (Karnad 96)

Devadatta nurtures doubts regarding Padmini's increasing aversion towards him and her admiration for Kapila's physical appearance; however, he manages to gain control over these doubts. At the same time, he feels a sense of defeat, which is why he permits both Padmini and Kapila to visit the temple of Rudra. In the interim, he arrives at the temple of Kali, seizes the deceptive weapon of "a tribesman," and beheads him in front of the Mother. In search of Devadatta, Kapila reaches the temple, only to discover that he is deceased. Feeling guilty, he also severs his head. After some time, Padmini observes both friends lying lifeless. She also contemplates the possibility of sacrificing her life. Karnad employs the use of the curtain and miming to highlight the theatrical and folkloric elements of his play. When Padmini petitions Mother Kali, expressing her sorrowful and desperate state, the goddess assures her that she will restore the lives of both men.

Mother Kali then reconnects both heads to their respective bodies as promised. Padmini plays a prank by switching Devadatta's head with Kapila's body and vice versa. Thanks to the blessings of Goddess Padmini, the two men with intertwined heads remain alive. Next rising question is who ought to be Padmini's husband. Both friends begin to argue with one another over Padmini. However, Padmini chooses the man who possesses Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. Devadatta, in the form of Kapila, reveals the logical reasoning that shows the importance of the mind over the body.

Of all the human limbs the topmost in position as well as in importance is the head. I have Devadatta's head and it follows that I am Devadatta. According to the sacred texts(Karnad 106)

With this puzzle regarding the connection between the body and the head, Act I of the play concludes.

Act II commences with the myth of King Vikramaditya from Ujjain. With the example of King Vikram, Karnad also organizes the scene in which Kapila, Devadatta, and Padmini come to the hermitage of a sage seeking a final answer to their identity crisis. With his powerful and resonant voice, the sage provides a resolution that states:

As the heavenly Kalpa-Vridesha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore, the man with Devadatta's head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini. (Karnad 107)

The Bhagavata employs imagery of roads to signify the ongoing nature of the organic structure of plot development. Devadatta returns to the city of Dharampur, while Kapila, lost in thought, travels along the path leading to the forest. City life and forest life can represent two different lifestyles: the intellectual way of living and the laboring way of the tribesman, respectively. Remarkably, as time goes on, both friends return to their initial forms.

At this point, Karnad introduces a scene with a doll that exposes to the audience the deceptive thoughts that Padmini harbors in her mind. One day, Devadatta stresses the need for new dolls for their child. Consequently, Devadatta proceeds to Ujjain to acquire new dolls. These dolls display the enchanting irregularities of Padmini's thoughts. She dreams of someone else. The Doll scene expands with a variety of folk motifs due to the ability of folktales to cover extensive areas without being restricted by boundaries. The doll scene represents the characters from Thomas Hardy's rural communities. The dolls reveal Padmini's incest thoughts before the audience.

Doll I: A Man

Doll II: But not her husband

Doll I: No. Someone else

Doll II: Is this the one who came last night

Doll I: Yes the same. But I could not see his face then

Doll II: You can now. Not very nice. Rough like a labourer's. But he has got a nice body looks soft (Karnad 110)

Padmini is once more connected with Kapila, who has now enhanced his physique. When her husband is not around, she ventures into the forest and encounters Kapila. When Devadatta discovers his wife's deceit, he engages in a second confrontation with Kapila, and they both end up killing each other. In this situation, Padmini once more feels a sense of responsibility and shame in this world, leading her to choose to carry out "sati" alongside both men driven by her feelings of guilts. Before carrying out "sati," Padmini voices her worries regarding her son and states, "Allow the child to mature in the forest alongside the rivers and the trees." Karnad changes the concept of "sati" into a comic situation. Because Bhagavata remarks later on Padmini's action that no devoted wife would have performed "sati" like she did. Furthermore, the exact location where Padmini performed "sati" remains unknown to anyone. At the conclusion of the play, Karnad again introduces themes of folklore and theater when Hayavadana reenters the stage, this time with the full identity of a horse.

Karnad opens and concludes the play Hayavadana with praises for Lord Ganesha. This is permanently observed in Sanskrit drama. In Indian poetics, it is stated that the craft of drama is akin to the Vedic sacrificial rituals and serves as a symbol for conveying messages of location, friendship, and abundance. In this play, Karnad addresses the folk motifs and theatrical elements of Indian drama, which give it a unique character and enriches Indian English drama.

This is very much evident in the concluding speech of Bhagavata:

Grant us, O Lord good rains, good crop,

Prosperity in Poetry, Science, Industry and other affairs.

Give the rules of our country success in all endeavours

And along with it, a little bit of sense. (Karnad 111)

6. CONCLUSION

Girish Karnad's impact on Indian English drama is significant. He articulates his concepts and reference materials from mythology, history, legends, and folktales, and showcases them in his plays through elevated ideals and philosophical perspectives. Throughout all his works, we can observe revisions and new interpretations of the original story source. His main characters are consistently human beings who are deeply connected to Indian beliefs and mindset. Through his plays, Karnad conveys his beliefs about life, showing a distinct appreciation for beauty and the enjoyment of life. He is strongly connected to Indian culture and tradition, and his remarkable talent for drama is supported by a vivid imagination that simultaneously investigates human psychology. Nayak says that in selecting a theme that blends modern politics with ancient myths and present realities, along with elements of folklore and the expression of Indian thoughts, he endeavors to refresh contemporary life through his dramatic talent and creative vision (89). Karnad believes that the history of any culture deserves focus, as it significantly influences the endurance of the present.

India is a nation rich in mythology. Karnad views these myths as a source of dramatic narratives. Simultaneously, he elevates the old cultural myths and modifies them to align with the modern socio-cultural reality found in the pan-Indian experience. In his theatrical portrayal of myths, he highlights their important function in society to promote a change in social and cultural issues. Perhaps this is the reason his plays reflect on the ordinary aspects of daily life. Similarly, the folk elements in Karnad's plays offer opportunities for challenging and reevaluating dominant ideologies. All of his folk plays assist us in adopting a psychoanalytical perspective to comprehend certain issues within our culture. Both myths and folktales, along with history, resonate with the contemporary interests of Karnad. His historical plays are analyzed as critiques of the post-independence period. Going beyond all the limitations of time, his historical characters have come to symbolize certain modern figures in Indian politics. The characters in his plays clearly represent their values, although they are portrayed as imperfect and prone to human mistakes at the time they are shown.

Karnad does not overlook their feelings of disillusionment, despair, and failure caused by the betrayals of someone from their own ranks. P. D. Nimsarkar states that the female characters created by Karnad consistently express their opinions clearly so that they can be easily understood by the audience. His women express their thoughts openly and share their intentions without fear of disapproval or criticism. In addition, Karnad has expressed his opinions on several topics by focusing on women and their challenges in his plays. His women, by opposing the conventional and traditional culture and society, challenge the previous portrayal of the traditional woman and introduce a new woman seeking a different identity and role in modern society" (Nimsarkar, 120). These female characters also play a prominent role in discussing various current issues such as family, marriage, purity, politics, loyalty, society, culture, religion, and rituals, among others. In this play Padmini is considered to be one of the radical women characters in Indian drama who can express her desires and sexuality.

In summary, we can conclude that Karnad has produced modern masterpieces with his theatrical works. His legendary, traditional, and historical plays showcase the human challenges faced throughout history. In his theatrical works, Karnad employs both technical and traditional artistic elements, making his plays continually accessible to interpretation and re-examination.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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