

Wholeness and Hybridity: Folklore and Identity in Karnad's Play

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Abstract:

Karnad's play is always composed art with dramatic technique and theatrical representation. He has always rewritten the folklore with modern technique. Through this he questionings the identity, fidelity and desire which is reflected in this society but refused to talk by anyone or at-least accept the fact. Nagamandala is an one-act play, in this play it dealt with the love between a human girl and a serpent who takes a human form. It exposes the male-chauvinistic society which has framed an extraordinary structure for whole women. How should a woman lead her life what she should and shouldn't do. In Hayavadana, the play describes about completeness, where the main character Hayavadana where the person has the horse-headed man. He wanted to become complete. In this play the theatrical metaphor the main characters are in love triangle. Where Padmini couldn't know inbetween whom she loves Devdatta or Kapila. She falls in love with Devdatta's brain and Kapila's physic. Still her dream becomes true by a mistake but that dream never last for long. Both of them gets back their physic in few months. Hayavadana prays to goddess to become complete with wholeheartedly. He is turned into a celestial white horse with divine look.

Index: hybridity, myth, stagecraft, wholeness, folklore, identity

Introduction

Girish Karnad is a prominent modern director in Indian theatre in 1960s, he also worked with the writers like Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sarkar. The critics keep pointing out that his drama rephrases the idea if myth and historical way of telling about contemporary social and moral problems. He takes story from various mythology and adapts to his style by inducing little modernity like his first play Yayati which comes from the great Indian literature Mahabharata, by telling everyone the curse of fast old age into contemplating into responsibility and ethical compromise. The next best work oh his was Tughlaq *Tughlaq* (1964), arguably his best-known work, revisits the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq in order to probe "political idealism, disillusionment, and the dangers of authoritarian rule" (Karnad, *Tughlaq*, Author's Note).

Then Karnad started to write Hayavadana and nagamandala. Which focuses on oral strorytelling , myth and folklore. In these plays he mainly focuses on exploring human desire, opening up with identity, longing for fulfillment. In hayvadana the Bhagavata starts the play by telling a prayer to Lord Ganesha as "the single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness"(Hayavadana, Act I, p.1), while the main character who is horse-headed agrees, "I have tried to accept my fate...I have tried everything!"(Hayavadana , Act II). Also in Nagamandala Karnad call folkllore "not a fossilized past but a living theatre of possibilities"(Collected Plays, Vol.2, Intro), or observe that "to tell a story is to tell ourselves"(ibid), both these plays are closely inter-wined together in many aspects and many

common connects. His works show that he likes to introduce modern thoughts to his work even in 90's were people and the society had different mindset interpreted and contested.

Karnad's dedication towards theatre and he was a pronominal director who focused and immersed himself in cinema, writings, literature, mythical writings, his works always stands out in exception ways. By showing the bold artistic way were many writers stood back. Karnad remarked, "to tell a story is to tell ourselves"(Karnad, Collected Plays, Vol2, Intro). Karnad took a very bold step by making the classical Sanskrit drama Yakshagana into Western theatrical form he mixed both that style by experimenting and giving birth to a new form called "a theatre of plurality and critique"(Karnad, Collected Plays, Volume One, Introduction). Due to this hybrid method he always stood out in his working space. Which also made him well known writer, director across the world. Because of him younger generation know more about Indian myths which become interesting. By converting the old stories with modern touch it made it easy for people to learn and explore more in cultural studies. Karnad himself described folklore as "not a fossilized past but a living theatre of possibilities" (Karnad, Collected Plays, Volume Two, Introduction), a view that explains why his reworking of myth and oral tradition remains so influential. Karnad was honored with Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri and Jnapith Award.

Folklore and Identity

His work always signifies the debate between modernity vs tradition, that too when mainly dealing with the identity crises. In both the plays Nagamandla and Hayavadana he shows the presence of other mythical character presence in his plays like the cobra who takes human form in Nagamandala and in Hayavadana the character itself is a human with horse head which at last turns into a full white celestial horse. The flow of these play go along with showcasing the identity of the characters, their personal choices, regretted feelings, Karnad lets his character make mistake and make them learn from it. Which makes his play into an social expectation. In *Hayavadana*, the Bhagavata opens the performance with the prayer, "O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, we pay homage to you and start our play" (*Hayavadana*, Act I, p.1), these prayers are offered to lord Ganesha who is also an Hybrid God with the head of elephant. According to Hindu mythology before starting any new things the first prayer must be given to lord Ganesha. For symbolize to give strength and success. Karnad does this to engage his audience by introducing them to ancient hindu culture, by reframing it for the modern audiences. His work is always has a unique touch of myth in modernity.

Karnad always made sure that his plays can be read and understood by any commoner by deeply tied to their belief without hurting the commoners belief and faith. In *Hayavadana* the horse-head becomes a powerful mixed identity by letting out the agony "I have tried to accept my fate... I have tried everything!" (*Hayavadana*, Act II), In *Nagamandala* the play talks about the women's desire and agony the protagonist Rani unknowingly falls in love with the king cobra who takes her husband's form she was deceived by him. When her husband confides her she has no knowledge what was happening in her life. Karnad elsewhere insists that folklore is "not a fossilized past but a living theatre of possibilities" (Karnad, *Collected Plays*, Volume Two, Introduction), reinforcing the idea that such tales continually reshape identity. Rani

struggles to prove her end still she does. Even in Ramayana Sita had to prove her purity by stepping into the fire and walking out of it.

Wholeness and Hybridity in *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*

In *Nagamandala* the writer talks about the wholeness by taking a difficult path to achieve it within the social norms without exceeding or overstepping. In this plot Rani life hangs in-between real life vs mythical life. Unknowing to herself she leads a mythical life with the cobra. In night and in morning when her actual husband comes and the way he reacts confuses her. The identity crises confuses everyone in the village, where no one has how Rani got pregnant and she had to prove that she is innocent by putting her hand into the snake hill and the snake comes out and curls in her neck as a garland. The village council and the people think her as a spitting image of goddess. Critics mentions that “myths and folk tales are the mirror that reflect cultural values,” and Karnad uses this mirror to dramatize “the world of feminine strength” through Rani’s story (Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence*, 2005). Still Rani feels fragile, exposed, unshielded, naive and uncorrupted by the society. After the council meeting Rani emerges and learns about selfhood, rather expressing hybridity as a weakness. In this play Karnad shapes the view of women portrayal in this society “not a fossilized past but a living theatre of possibilities” (Karnad, *Collected Plays*, Volume Two, Introduction). Karnad uses folklore to make the incompleteness of the play and make it into Wholeness which doesn’t come with perfect runway, without uncertain connect to lives.

(Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence*, 2005). In this sense, *Nagamandala* suggests that women’s identity is not simply defined by social roles, but also by the capacity to imagine and inhabit alternative possibilities within a “living theatre of possibilities” (Karnad, *Collected Plays*, Volume Two, Introduction). The story of Rani talks about the identity crises which she faces through out the play which she doesn’t even realize that both Appana and the cobra are playing with her inner emotions, even she is not aware of this when she gets control of her life the play ends with an open ending. Still the play If I have been faithful to my husband, may this cobra protect me. If not, let it strike me dead.”(Girish Karnad, *Nagamandala* act 2) through the entangled hunger for desire by the serpent who fell in love with Rani after tasting the curry which was made for Appana.

In this play the main character Hayavadana is itself hybrid where his appearance shows the bodily fragmentation and mixed identity. Hayavadana himself is a showcase of hybridity even when Bhagavata starts the play he offers his prayer to lord Ganesha “O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, we pay homage to you and start our play” (*Hayavadana*, Act I, p.1). In Indian mythology hybridity has always been a part even Dasavathar of lord Vishnu there are forms of hybridity he takes to save the world. Even Goddess Lakshmi Goddess Paravthi take hybrid forms to fight the asuras.

In the story which Bhagavatha tells about the head and body mixup of Devdatta and Kapila is little unpredictable but still it fits the play and moves along the story line. To break it even karnad mentions that the head rules the body not that body rules the head. When the heads get mixed up but not that persons emotion or rage continues to be the same. As Kirtana Kumar notes, “Karnad’s dramaturgy insists that identity is always fractured, shaped by competing

desires and cultural codes” (Kumar, *Indian Theatre Journal*, 2010), the play mentions that any effort to define themselves will be bound to fail.

“I have tried to accept my fate... I have tried everything!” (*Hayavadana*, Act II), Hayavadana’s consents to this story and when he accepts his fate from being the hybrid as a half-human and half-horse he lets the agony out and make the audience feel the pain that he has gone through. He let down his desire to become a human and prays to Goddess Kali that he wants to be whole rather than a hybrid. The Goddess grants his wish by transforming into an celestial white horse. Hayavadana feels complete. This play teaches us that every human has an animal side it depends upon the person to select which side to make him complete.

Conclusion

In the end Hayavadana and Nagamandala represents the magical work of Karnad who transforms myth and folklore into an amazing way of discovering identity, in both of his works. Throughout the play the protagonist search for fullness and remains as a center of attention to the crowd. Still he made it easy and interesting by using the Indian myths which we are familiar with. He approaches with a new way of thinking.

Karnad mentions that hybridity is not a flaw it’s a approach to define us by picking a side of a coin.

Work Citation

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