Hayavadana: A Perfect Example for Imperfect Lives

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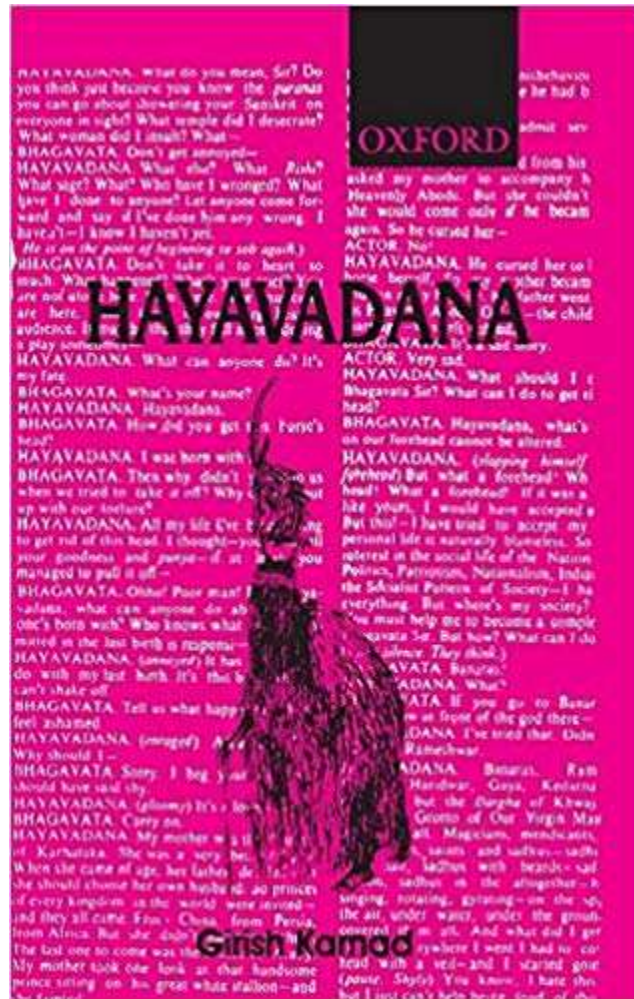
Abstract

Along with Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sirkar and Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, a versatile genius, is considered as one of the pillars of Indian English Drama. Even though Karnad wrote very few plays, he has earned a prestigious place in Indian writing in English. In his third play

Hayavadana, Karnad uses conventions of folk theatre. This play is about the search of identity in the complex human relationships. It reveals friendship of two persons and their love towards a woman. This play presents how all the characters become victims in the hands of fate. It is also a search for completeness. Karnad exemplifies incompleteness in three levels (human, animal and celestial) of creation in the world. Elephant headed Ganesha has human body, so even though he is divine he does not have single complete form. Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini don't possess completeness even though there is transplantation. Even Hayavadana cannot become complete man as he desires but becomes a complete horse. The present paper depicts how wonderfully the playwright dramatizes the events and incidents in the lives of the characters to explore the search for completeness.

Keywords: Incompleteness, Search, Identity, Human relationship.

Introduction – Unique Blend of Techniques

Girish Karnad's award winning drama, *Hayavadana* (1961) has Indian imagination with insightful meanings. This is a noteworthy step of achievement in the history of Indian drama as the playwright makes daring innovations and successful experiments. In *Hayavadana* one can find the blend of western techniques with Indian folk tradition. This play is in the form of Indian folk drama, which obtains quite a few features of ancient Sanskrit drama. In *Hayavadana* Karnad explores the dramatic potential of ancient folk traditions and myths. The influence of Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads* clearly appears on the playwright of *Hayavadana*. 'Katha saritasagara stories' written in Sanskrit was borrowed for the work of Thomas Mann.

As the play begins, a mask of Ganesha is brought on to the chair of the stage. The Bhagavata along with musicians, chants and sings in praise of Ganesha;

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.
Osingle-tusked destroyer of incompleteness,
We pay homage to you and start our play**.** (Karnad 1)

From the beginning onward one can observe that the word 'incompleteness' is used widely in this play. Lord Ganesha is worshiped as the demolisher of incompleteness. Then Bhagavata says: "An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness…" (Karnad 1) Bhagavata considers Ganesha the quintessence of incompleteness because he has an elephant head and a human body. Here Incompleteness has been elucidated at divine level.

Exemplary Plot of the Play

The story of the play begins with Kapila and Devadatta who are dearest friends. They live in Dharampura. Devadatta, the only son of the reverend Brahmin Vidyasagara, is calm and quiet in appearance, fair in complexion and unequaled in cleverness. Kapila, the only son of an iron-

smith, is dark in complexion. He possesses very good physical skills. The Bhagavata says: "The world wonders at their friendship. The world sees these two young men wandering down the streets of Dharampura, hand in hand, and remembers Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balarama." (Karnad 2) The Bhagavata labels them as 'one mind, one heart'. Kapila finds that his best friend Devadatta is in love with Padmini. He convinces Padmini to marry Devadatta and arranges Devadatta's marriage with her. He comprehends that Padmini is both clever and beautiful. Inspite of Kapila's fascination with padmini, he prefers and respects Devadatta's feelings. Devadatta and Padmini are married.

After marriage Padmini is attracted to the well-built physic of Kapila. One day they plan a short visit to Ujjain. While Kapila drives the cart Padmini admires Kapila's skills and physique. Now Devadatta does not like this admiration of Padmini. He has a doubt that Padmini is attracted towards Kapila. When Kapila offers to go to the temple of Rudra, Padmini immediately agrees to go to the temple with him. Devadatta doesn't want to go there so when Kapila and Padmini go to the temple of Rudra he goes to the temple of Kali. He addresses Goddess kali with high sounding words and begs her forgiveness for not fulfilling his promise made to her earlier. He decapitates himself with a sword available there. When Kapila and Padmini return, they don't find Devadatta there. Kapila goes in search of him. He enters the temple of Kali and sees the dead body of Devadatta inside the temple. Now, he thinks that if he goes back with the news that Devadatta is dead, Padmini and other people will think that he has killed Devadatta. So he also cuts off his head with the sword. When Kapila doesn't return, Padmini goes to the temple and sees both Devadatta and Kapila dead. She decides to kill herself with the sword, but Goddess Kali's terrible voice is heard which freezes Padmini. Padmini requests Kali to give life to Devadatta and Kapila. Kali asks her to put the heads on their bodies and press the sword on their necks and they will be alive again.

Padmini, while following the instructions of Goddess kali, makes a blunder in her excitement. She puts the heads on the wrong bodies and presses the sword. Both of them come to life but three are greatly surprised as they see the head of Kapila with the body of Devadatta and the head of Devadatta with the body of Kapila. Kapila with Devadatta's body claims Padmini. He argues that it is with the body that Padmini took the vows of marriage before the sacred fire and the child which she is carrying in her womb is the seed of that body. Then they seek help of a sage who declares that just as Kalpavriksha is supreme amongst all the trees, head is supreme of all human organs. He decides that the body who has the head of Devadatta is a real Devadatta and the body who has the head of Kapila is a real Kapila. So Kapila with very sad feelings goes to the forest. Kurkoti writes:

> Initially Devadatta – actually the head of Devadatta on Kapila's body- behaves differently from what he was before. But ever so gradually he changes to his former self. So does Kapila. But there is a difference. Devadatta stops writing poetry while Kapila is haunted by the memories in Devadatta's body. Padmini, who, after the exchange of heads, had felt that she had the best of both the men, gets slowly disillusioned. Of the three, she had the capacity for the complete experience. She understands but cannot control the situation in which she is placed. (Kurkoti VI)

At the end of this play we see that both the friends, in a duel, kill each other and Padmini becomes a suttee. Before dying, Padmini says to Bhagavata: "My son is sleeping in the hut. Take

him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in this forest and tell them it's Kapila's son. They loved Kapila and will bring the child up. Let the child grow up in the forest with the rivers and the trees. When he's five take him to the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapura. Tell him it's Devadatta's son." (Karnad 62)

Eponymous Subplot

This play has an interesting and rightly chosen subplot. A subplot is defined as "a subordinate plot in fiction or drama" according to https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subplot. Hayavadana, eponymous character, has the horse head and the human body. He wants to have a complete human form. Haya, in Sanskrit, means 'horse'. 'Vadana' is also a Sankrit word which means 'face'. Hayavadana is the son of the Princess of Karnataka who was very beautiful. She loved a white stallion and married to that Horse. They lived together for fifteen years. One morning she woke up and came to know that there was no horse and in its place she saw a beautiful Heavenly Being, a gandharva. She also came to know that this Celestial Being was cursed, to born as a horse, by the god Kuvera to for some act of misbehavior. Kuvera gave a word that after experiencing fifteen years of human love he would get his original form again. After getting released from his curse he requested the Princess to come with him to his Heavenly Abode. But she rejected and wanted him to be a horse again. So he cursed her to be a horse herself. She became a mare and run away without thinking of Hayavadana, the son the couple.

Hayavadana begins his search for identity and completeness of his physical body. He wants to quit his horse-face. He visits many religious places and meets a number of sages. But he is not able to get rid of his horse face. The Bhagavata asks him to go to the temple of Kali. He goes there and falls at her feet and requests her to make him complete. Even before saying to make him complete man, the goddess says 'So be it' and disappears. So now he has complete horse form but he does not become a complete horse because human voice is still with him. At the end of the play, he gets his horse voice. Now both of them feel the real difficulty with alien bodies. They struggle a lot. Devadatta is strong for some time with Kapila's body which Padmini fascinates. But soon he becomes normal as previous Devadatta. Kapila feels very bad with weak body of Devadatta but soon he changes that weak body into strong one with physical activities.

As Dwivedi has opined:

> Hayavadana achieves completeness when finally he becomes a complete horse and loses the human voice through singing the Indian National Anthem. But this is one-sided completeness. But for human being, who is a combination of flesh and spirit, body and mind, completeness requires a harmonious relationship between body and mind but Cartesian division seems to be a perennial irresolvable problem for man. The major reality of this world is self-division. Both man and society are self-divided and disturbing antinomies struggle for supremacy. The problem of Hayavadana, alienation, absurdity, incompleteness and search for identity are central of the plays of Karnad. Incompleteness is an inescapable and insurmountable reality. This concept helps to solve such riddles in Hayavadana as why Hayavadana's mother chooses for her husband a stallion rather than a man and

why Goddess Kali makes Hayavadana a complete horse instead of a complete man." (Dwivedi 234)

Successful Presentation of Subplot

In his 'Introduction' to *Hayavadana* Kirtinath Kurkoti writes: "The sub-plot of Hayavadana, the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. The horse-man's search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the Uttamanga, the human head!" (Kurkoti V) Thus, Karnad has successfully presented the theme of incompleteness at Divine, Human and Animal levels. The Bhagavata considers Ganesha incomplete because he has the elephant head and the human body. But at the end of the play, he chants and praises Ganesha: "Unfathomable indeed is the mercy of the Elephant-headed Ganesha. He fulfills the desire of all – a grandson to grandfather, a smile to a child, a neigh to a horse. How indeed can one describe his glory in our poor, disabled words ?" (Karnad 71)

In the case of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, we see that they fail to achieve completeness. They all die. But Hayavadana succeeds in achieving completeness. He wants to become a man but he becomes a complete horse.

As one writer rightly assesses:

In the primitive man, the body and the mind are in perfect harmony which Brown call   Dionysian ego. As man has been vainly striving to be above biological principles for   ages, he has evolved Apollonian culture which causes alienation. Devadatta and Kapila, like the people of modern society, are victims of self-alienation while Hayavadana, his   mother and Padmini's son attain Dionysian ego (Sarath 230).

Conclusion

When newness and innovative ways are experience by the readers or the audiences, that play is welcomed as great play and the playwright is acclaimed as a genius writer. Karnad has skillfully and effectively employed the form of folk drama in *Hayavadana* to portray the persistent problem of identity and search for completeness. So the theme of incompleteness has been presented with artistic genius in this play. So it easy touches the hearts and souls of the readers or audiences. As the technics used in the play are innovative even after five decades it has its freshness.

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