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A Comparative Study of Myth and Folk Elements in Girish Karnad's *Nagamandla and Hayavadana*

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Abstract:

Indian drama written in English by Indian playwrights makes extensive use of tradition, myths, legends and Folklore. Girish Karnad's plays vividly exemplify this trend. Girish Karnad has significantly gone back to the roots of Indian myth, tradition and culture and has re-created the rich and vibrant picture of Indian Society. Culture defines Society. The cultural ethos of every society is unique in its form and essence representing the character of its people, their experiences and beliefs. Myths, legends and folklore are in fact the embodiments of these cultural ethos that represent the underlying values and principles of life, the rules and the codes of society. Girish Karnad has time and again returned to the eternal roots of his cultural tradition, taking inspiration from Mythology and Folklore.

Keywords: Culture, Mythology, Folk Elements, legends, Tradition.

Girish Karnad is the most significant dramatists of post-independence Indian literature. He focuses on ambivalent relationship on classical and colonial past and also contemporary problems of Indian society. He also discussed the two realities that exist in India, the tradition and the modern and he thrived in developing a style of social realism. He has more interest in story telling which contributes to the success of his plays in Indian villages. Karnad is an Indian who has given the most comprehensive, in-depth and analytical study of the dramatic art to the world. He started his writing career with *Yayati*. He found his source of inspiration for *Naga-Mandala* in stories that he heard from the poet and academic A.K.Ramanujan. He explains that this type of story is told by women while they feed children in the kitchen.

Girish Karnad gives a special attention to his plays and he gives success to the management of stage. His play *Hayavadana* begins with stage directions. *Hayavadana* is based on Thomos Mann's story titled "Transposed Heads" which in turn is based on one of the versions of the story in *vetal panchavimshati*.

He uses the story to explore the theme of human identity in a world of strangled relationships and a struggle for perfection. In *Hayavadana* Karnad wants to suggest to us that for us king Vikram's solution does not solve the problem. In fact the real problem begins when it appears to be solved. At the same time he makes significant departures from Thomas Mann's story too. *Hayavadana* is an enigmatic play.

Indian drama written in English by Indian playwrights makes extensive use of tradition, myths, legends and Folklore. Girish Karnad's plays vividly exemplify this trend. Girish Karnad has significantly gone back to the roots of Indian myth, tradition and culture and has re-created the rich and vibrant picture of Indian Society. Culture defines Society. The cultural ethos of every society is unique in its form and essence representing the character of its people, their experiences and beliefs. Myths, legends and folklore are in fact the embodiments of these cultural ethos that represent the underlying values and principles of life, the rules and the codes of society. Girish Karnad has time and again returned to the eternal roots of his cultural tradition, taking inspiration from Mythology and Folklore.

Karnad takes his inspiration from the rich tradition of India's past and weaves it through the web of his imagination into tales of his own. The Mythical story is a tale of responsibilities, sacrifice and self-realization.

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* source their origin from the folklore tradition of India. *Hayavadana* is based on Thomas Mann's translation of the Sanskrit '*Vital Panchavimshati*' and *Naga-Mandala* is inspired by the snake myths prevalent in south India. It is a dramatization of two folk tales of Karnataka.

Stories are autonomous and independent of the person who tells them, although they live by being told and shared (Naga : 17). In *Naga-Mandala* the woman character Rani is portrayed as dependent in all three phases of her life, as a daughter, as a wife and as a Mother. In Indian society, the woman is said to be complete only after her marriage.

The main plot in the play *Naga-Mandala* is Rani's story. She is introduced as a young bride on the verge of a new life with her husband Appanna. She started her new life with many expectations, desires and dreams. But Appanna treats her as if she were a mere servant. Meanwhile he keeps and uses a concubine. So Rani decides to drug her husband with a love root, which she mixes in the curry.

That curry is spilled on the nearby ant hill and Naga, the king cobra drinks it. It falls in love with Rani. Naga takes the form of a human being and begins to visit her every night in the form of her husband. Due to their relationship she becomes pregnant. As soon as Appanna discovers her pregnancy, he informs to the village panchayat.



Rani proves her innocence by undertaking the snake ordeal. Surprisingly, the cobra instead of biting her, it “slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like umbrella over her head (Naga:58)”. However her husband is not ready to accept her. He decides to find out the truth by spying on the house at night. Appanna is shocked to see the Naga in his form and spending time with Rani.

Appanna gets furious with the Naga and indulges in a fight with him. Eventually the Naga dies in the fight. After this incident, Appanna realizes his mistakes and he accepts Rani along with the child she is carrying.

It is a play taking its inspiration from the popular Myth and oral stories centering around the king cobra. *Naga-Mandala* discusses man-women relationship, position and identity of a woman about psychology and the impact of social and cultural modes on the feminine psyche. *Hayavadana* begins with an invocation of Lord Ganesha, the remover of all obstacles who is to be worshipped first among the gods.

The story in the main plot of *Hayavadana* is based on a myth taken from Somadeva’s *Katha Sarit Sagara* and Thomas Mann’s version of the same story of ‘Transposed Heads’. Karnad makes the play an interesting study of man’s quest for a complete and wholesome experience of life.

Karnad combines the transposed heads plot of Mann with *Hayavadana* story which is completely Karnad’s own invention. This is how Karnad makes use of a myth. He takes them only in parts and the rest he supplements with his imagination.

In *Hayavadana*, his mother was the princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. Her father deciding that his daughter should choose her own husband, invited the princes of every kingdom in the world. she was married to the white stallion. She lived with him for fifteen years.

One morning a beautiful gandharva stood in the place of the horse. This gandharva had been cursed by the god Kubera to be born as a horse for some act of misbehavior . He released from curse, he asked his wife to accompany him to his Heavenly abode. She agreed and became a horse herself by the curse of her husband and ran away happily. The child of their marriage was *Hayavadana* who was left behind.

Hayavadana’s problem is how to get rid of horse’s head. On the advice of Bhagavata he goes to Kali temple of Mount Chitrakoot. He threatens to chop of this head. As in the transposed heads plot, Kali’s ambiguous boon creates another problem while solving one. In response to *Hayavadana*’s prayer, “make me complete the goddess makes him complete horse and not a complete man and in addition to this, he retains his human voice. When the five year old son of Padmini of the transposed heads plot makes him to laugh again the laughter turns

into a proper neigh indicating the complete liberation of Hayavadana. The horse has at last become normal.”

Although in our Indian context myths are related to religion, Karnad is only interested in the mythical side of it. He finds a Jungian quality in these myths. Moreover the elements of myth and history are common to most audiences in our country. Most myths have a strong emotional significance and the audiences have set responses towards them and Karnad likes to play on that. Thus, the myth acquires new dimensions in the creative hands of Karnad and the play unfolds rich strands of meaning. These two plays are Karnad's own imagination. Both plays are love stories. In *Naga-Mandala*, the snake changes into a man where as in *Hayavadana*, the horse changes into a man. Both plays show the relationship of man and woman.

The theme also reveals the Upanishad principle that visualizes the human body as a symbol of the organic relationship of the parts to the whole. Sacrifices also form a part of such religious practice as seen in the obliteration of the self physically in *Hayavadana*, the snake ordeal that Rani undergoes in *Naga-Mandala*. Spiritual thought and wisdom inherent in religion are also incorporated into the themes of the plays.

The Bhagavata says in *Hayavadana* - “Padmini became a Sati. India is known for its pativratas, wives who dedicated their whole existence to the service of their husbands.” The role of Appanna and Naga in the play *Naga-Mandala* represent the twin roles in the husband, “as a stranger during the day and as lover at night.” In *Naga-Mandala* Kurudava gives the aphrodisiac root to Rani, giving a new twist to the tale. *Hayavadana* is resonant with multi-layered social messages and also tempts us to see it as a volatile autonomous being.

The play *Naga-Mandala* is based on two folk tales of Kannada. The energy for the folk-theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values. Old women in the family usually narrate the folk tales, either when the children are being fed in the evenings or when they are put to bed in the night. The play *Naga-Mandala* is divided into prologue and two acts. Girish Karnad uses a magical folk tale to reveal the complexity of human life. He uses the folk tale in the Indian context to reveal the social and individual relations.

Man-woman intimate relationships, the question of chastity being imposed on married women while their husbands have a merry -go-round with other women outside their wedlock, the throbbing of secret love that Naga demonstrates by his killing himself on the passionate and warm body of Rani and above all, the result of the sexual communion being a male child, the “son” lighting funeral pyre and so many other potent and hidden meanings, make this play a very complex.

In the backdrop of a folktale, which includes flames, snake, avatars, performance of impressive ordeals, cremation of the dead snake, and the back ground chorus, *Naga-Mandala* comes alive with numerous symbols, hidden meanings and explicit and implicit lessons. The play started with a curse of dead or non-responsive audience, but we complete reading the play certainly as active and live audience.

Hayavadana is an excellent play based on the tale of the transposed head. It is the first modern play to employ traditional techniques. Kapila, Devadatta and his wife Padmini



are on a vacation. Devadatta and Kapila enter into a decrepit temple devoted to the goddess Kali and in a fit of religious frenzy-cut their heads off. Padmini come in, saw the bodies and think to commit suicide, when the goddess Kali appears, Kali tells her that she will bring the bodies back. In her haste, the woman puts the heads on the wrong bodies. Now who is the woman's true husband? It takes the tale and moves beyond it, showing the woman and the two men living with the consequences and how the human heart can want impossible things in the worst way.

Nothing stays perfect forever and one person's dream is another's nightmare. It is such a beautiful play. *Hayavadana* is resonant with multi-layered social messages and also tempts us to see it as a volatile antonymous being. Most critics have tried to come to terms with the problem of "in-completeness" that the conflicting situation and also the personalities in the play depict.

Both are based on a simple love triangle stories and ends in a comedic and confusing twist of fate. *Hayavadana* is situated in the interstices of an invigorating legacy of traditional Indian folk and modern western theatre. *Naga-Mandala* builds on the folkloric tradition implicitly and has intimate connections with the ways mythic systems of belief co-exist with ontological realities. The energy of folk comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values. It also has the means of questioning those values, of making them literally stand on their head.

In *Naga-Mandala*, the story ends with the question who is Rani's husband? Her husband Appanna or Naga. In *Hayavadana*, the story ends with who is the real husband, the one with the husband's head or the one with his body? In *Naga-Mandala*, the god is Naga who saves Rani's life during snake ordeal and in *Hayavadana* the goddess is Kali, who bring them back to life.

Girish Karnad like any other modern dramatist makes extensive uses of myths in his plays to condemn Socio-Cultural evils, which have deeply eroded the personal life of woman. Karnad wanted to explore the social-injustices perpetrated an innocent, ignorant Indian women. Innocent women who were subjected to the violence of their sadistic husbands were made to tolerate their husbands because they were afraid of social stigma. Therefore many modern dramatists wanted to abolish these wrong concepts, which afflicted the Indian Society. Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* deals with deeply psychological problems faced by modern Indian women in the present society.

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad does not take the myths entirely. He takes only parts of them that are useful to him and the rest he supplemented with his imagination to make his plots clear. The dilemma of the female character is exposed through Padmini and the flash back of *Hayavadana* is purely dramatical. Karnad has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience. This is the main theme of the play *Hayavadana*.

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