

Significance of Girish Karnad's Hayavadana to Postcolonial theater in India

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Abstract- This paper examines the postcolonial analysis of Girish Karnad's 'Hayavadana,' highlighting Karnad's significant role in the decolonization of Indian English drama. The incorporation of folk tales, myths, history, and legends in the play creates a rich tapestry of Indian culture, which is reflected throughout the narrative. The play adeptly integrates elements of both Brechtian theatre and traditional Indian theatre. The theme of acquiring and redefining identity as a postcolonial subject is prominently explored.

Keywords: postcolonial, Indian English Drama, Identity consciousness, Theatre of roots.

INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is a distinguished Indian playwright who has significantly contributed to postcolonial theatre by seeking to decolonize Indian English drama. His deliberate incorporation of myths, folk tales, legends, history, and Indian folk theatre forms renders his works notable for examining the synthesis of dominant Western theatrical conventions with modern Indian theatre, which traces back to its theatrical roots. Karnad's play "Hayavadana" exemplifies an amalgamation of 'Brechtian theatre' and 'Indian theatre of roots,' brought to life through the play. He employs modern Western theatre techniques to enhance the play's performativity rather than merely imitating Western theatre. Karnad's work is inspired by the Yakshagana of Karnataka, which he encountered during his childhood. He experimented with folk and classical techniques to create highly effective and successful stage productions. His objective is to 'decanonize and decolonize' in order to revitalize Indian history and culture, free from Eurocentric or Oriental domination over Indian English drama. The play opens with a pooja to Lord Ganesha, conducted in a typical Yakshagana tradition, and incorporates multiple folk conventions such as masks, curtains, sutradhar, music, a horse-headed man, dolls, a play

within a play, and supernatural characters like Kali, making the play distinctly indigenous. The introduction of a Brechtian narrator figure through Bhagavata challenges the traditionality of indigenous theatre. Traditionally, Bhagavata's role is to narrate the story and remain outside the play, but here Bhagavata is introduced as a character who closely examines the characters and events and also interprets the events for the audience. Bhagavata also introduces the central themes in the play through his commentary and offerings to Lord Ganesha about completeness and imperfection, prompting the audience to contemplate these ideas. However, Bhagavata's agency in the play is limited, as he is surprised by the interruption created by Hayavadana during the initiation of the play, representing the unpredictability of life observed throughout postcolonial India. "Could it be this image of purity and holiness, this Mangala Murthy...God is something no poor mortal can comprehend?" (Act 1) Karnad's use of Ganesha presents the idea of incompleteness post-independence, where the search for identity is a major task, whether individual or national. This resonates with the postcolonial condition of fragmented identities and the desire to overcome the repercussions of colonial rule. Additionally, Lord Ganesha himself is a hybrid figure representing postcolonial culture in India; hybridity and the celebration of mixed identities challenge the Oriental ideal of perfection and singularity. The play questions the postcolonial yearning for wholeness and stable identity, as all the characters in the play appear incomplete and are searching for completion. Hayavadana, the horse-headed man, is the direct embodiment of this desire, yearning for completeness. Here, the horse head symbolizes an identity crisis imposed from outside, representing not only the individual level but also the national level.

The play serves as a catalyst for awakening the nation's identity. The protagonist's assertion, "My personal life has naturally been blameless. So I took interest in the

social life of nation civics, politics, patriotism, Nationalism But where is my society?" (Act 1), underscores a national quest for completeness, guiding the audience towards an understanding of reclaiming the present from a colonial past that remains unstable. By the conclusion, the protagonist regains his identity as a horse but retains a human voice, symbolizing the postcolonial condition where independence does not equate to temporal or political freedom, as colonial remnants persist, influencing both individual and national identities.

Furthermore, the characters Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila, whose story is narrated by Bhagvata and interrupted by Hayavadana, exemplify a narrative within a narrative. This technique, incorporating elements of Yakshagana, reflects the complexity of Indian culture and state. The characters grapple with identity conflicts and desires for each other's attributes. The transposition of Kapila and Devadatta's heads by Padmini fails to fulfill their quest for wholeness, instead creating dilemmas, such as Padmini's choice of partner and the paternity of her child. Their identities remain ambiguous, rendering their existence unstable and rootless. The confusion and identity exchange between Kapila and Devadatta highlight human ambiguity, culminating in their deaths as a resolution to their conflicts. Even Padmini, despite retaining her body, cannot achieve the completeness she seeks in Kapila, now in Devadatta's body. This leads her to question her identity and existence, ultimately resulting in her committing sati. Her child, too, is incomplete, initially mute but playing a crucial role as a symbol of future generations born from fragmentation and instability. The child's eventual laughter and speech, prompted by Hayavadana's curse, signify an acceptance of incompleteness.

Postcolonialism critiques static, essentialized identities, and Hayavadana illustrates identity fluidity through his transformation into a horse. Karnad also introduces marginal and subaltern voices, challenging dominant discourses. Padmini represents the marginalized, despite being a wealthy merchant's daughter, as she suffers due to her husband and his friend. Their internal conflicts exacerbate her psychological distress, contributing to their rootlessness and conflicts. The portrayal of female characters extends beyond marginalization, questioning traditional cultural and religious authority.

Goddess Kali is depicted as lazy and indifferent, rather than fearsome or divine, further challenging established norms. Colonial misinterpretations and the decolonization of the demonized image of the Goddess are central themes in this analysis. In certain communities, Kali is associated with marginalized groups, and her authority to intervene and alter outcomes subtly empowered the oppressed during colonial rule. Additionally, the concept of nationhood is prominent in the play, aligning with the 'Theatre of Roots' movement in postcolonial India, which sought to revive Indian theatre through folk traditions. However, Indian theatre has increasingly gravitated towards nationalism, necessitating that all elements be filtered through a 'national' lens, even as debates about national theatre persist. Karnad's conception of nationhood reflects the fragmented and unstable identities left in the wake of colonialism. The play references the National Anthem, situating it within a specific historical and political context. When Hayavadana expresses a desire for completeness, he remarks, "That's why I sing all these patriotic songs and the National anthem!... I have noticed the people singing the National anthem always seem to have ruined their voices. But it doesn't seem to work...?" This critique highlights the imposition of nationalism as a means of achieving completeness, while simultaneously enforcing a national positivity and unified identity on the populace. Towards the play's conclusion, Hayavadana enters singing 'Jana Gana Mana,' symbolizing the chaotic ending that juxtaposes individual and national identity crises, challenging the notion that a unified nation can coexist with the diverse realities of postcolonial life, as seen in India, where unity is found in diversity, reflecting on the concept of nationhood. Furthermore, Karnad employs various theatrical conventions to introduce indigenous and supernatural elements into the play. The wooden dolls, an innovative and experimental addition, serve as the audience's voice, questioning actions and reflecting on the unspoken elements of the play. These dolls perceive Padmini's dreams and desires, depicting the passage of time through references to spider webs and dust. Inspired by India's puppet folk tradition, these dolls domesticate the play, complemented by the clever use of voicing techniques. The use of curtains and masks, typical of Yakshagana elements, is employed by Karnad to depict the burning pyre,

Goddess Kali, and to conceal Hayavadana in the first act, thereby creating suspense.

CONCLUSION

Girish Karnad's play "Hayavadana" not only interrogates social and cultural conventions but also reconciles them with both rural and urban values, thereby depicting a potential society in the postcolonial era. The play explores the complexities of the Hindu caste system while simultaneously challenging established norms. Devadatta, a Brahmin, is a friend of Kapila, the son of an ironsmith. Despite significant caste and class differences, such as Kapila sitting on the floor while offering Devadatta a seat on a platform, they are described as "one mind, one heart" and ultimately meet their demise together. Karnad skillfully interweaves the mythical and contemporary in the play, drawing the plot from the "Kathasaritsagara" and reinterpreting Thomas Mann's "The Transposed Heads" within a postcolonial context. His play presents a unique exploration of human identity in a world characterized by complex relationships.

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