

# An Exploration of Real and Absurd in Girish Karnad's select plays

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**Abstract**—Real and absurd are the two different concepts in one's day-to-day life. The society expects and frames the law for life is considered as a real world. But people have dreams and nightmares. Man can marry more than once but woman should not marry twice is the law of reality. If a woman is not living according to the principles, then the society treats her differently. This paper, chooses *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* to bring the absurd characters. Horse head, switching of heads and a snake disguise as a character Appanna are all absurd. These all-absurd creations reflect the true nature of the characters from the select plays. On the whole, the stories tell the readers, the completeness is not possible in human life.

**Index Terms**—Real, Absurd, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, Girish Karnad.

## I. INTRODUCTION

From the attainment of Indian Independence on 15 August 1947, India underwent many experiences, challenges and decisions. In literature, "If Indian English Literature is the Cinderella of Literature in English, Indian drama in English is the Cinderella of Indian English Literature" (Naik 151). But, in India, the theatre in English received no chance to develop at all. From 1940 onwards one finds several dramatic organizations launched, but none devoted exclusively to drama in English. The Indian regional language monopolized the theatre. Indian English plays have been given only occasional performance. In post-independence India, Indian English literature has been popular abroad. The plays of Asim Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma and Gurucharan Das have been successfully staged in Europe and USA. In India the

theatre group in Bombay and other agencies too have produced the plays of these dramatists.

## II. GIRISH KARNAD

Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad are the contemporary Indian dramatist. They wrote their plays in the regional languages Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada respectively. Karnad rendered his plays into English by translating his plays from Kannada. Girish Karnad was born in Maharashtra. He gave a new form of drama by combining both westernized and eastern tradition. His two folk stories *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala* are western and modernized following the structure of Indian Oral tradition. These dramas are not bothered about realism. It merely plays with ideas for the sake of entertainment.

## III. HAYAVADANA

Karnad's third play *Hayavadana* written in Kannada and translated to English by the author himself in 1973. It was based on 11<sup>th</sup> century Indian folk story and Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*. The play is narrated by a ghost to an adventurous king. The retelling of the story is not innocent entertainment. It has its intellectual purpose and an exploration for dramatic ways of stating the theme. It highlights a conspicuous absence of attention to the mind and its specific relation to the body. The plot deals with the absurdity in human existence. Lord Ganesh is presented as the symbol of absurdity. The appearance of horse head with man's body, Hayavadana, the

transposition of heads is absurdity and confusion of identities.

The name Hayavadana means horse head. 'Haya' means horse and 'vadana' means face. The name is suitable to the physical appearance a character. The reason is his mother. She was a princess, married a white stallion and she lived with him for fifteen years: No one dissuade her. So ultimately, she was married off to the white stallion. She lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she wakes up-and no horse! In its place stood a celestial being a "Gandharva". Apparently, this celestial being had been cursed by the god Kubera to be born a horse for some act of misbehaviour. After 15 years of human love, he had become his original self again. (Act I)

Hayavadana's mother became a horse herself out of curse by her husband and he went to heaven. Hayavadana's mother ran away happily and her child visited many sacred places in order to become a complete man. At last, Hayavadana became a complete horse instead.

#### IV. NAGA-MANDALA

The story of *Naga-Mandala* has a prologue and two Acts, all of which are knit closely together. It has a single story of Rani and no subplot to divert the attention of the reader from the main characters and episodes. The prologue sets the tone of the play and provides a beginning to the story presented in the two Acts. The play that involves Naga, the snake-god of the Hindus, who grants the wishes of his devotees, especially the wish for fertility.

In the play, *Naga-Mandala*, the paradoxical nature of oral tales, and the story of Rani reflect the predicament of the human need to live both by fiction and half real. Karnad uses myth and legend and folk traditions. It starts from the subtitle 'play with a cobra'; a pun used on the word 'play'. Rani mating with the cobra and cobra plays the role of Appanna and Naga. It is not real in belief but the move of the play based on this abstract. Santhosh Gupta says in an article, Girish Karnad's plays reflect upon contemporary Indian cultural and social life through the use of folk tales, myths and historical legends. He weaves together timeless truths about human life and emotions contained in ancient Indian stories with the changing social mores and morals of modern life. His plays are

particularly concerned with the psychological problems, dilemmas and conflicts experienced by the modern Indian men and women in their different social situation (249)

#### V. THE TWO FOLK STORIES

The two folk stories *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* are western and modernized following the structure of Indian oral tradition. Through the elements of these two plays, one might conclude that he is known for his delightful farce not bothering about realism, merely plays with ideas for the sake of entertainment.

Girish Karnad received Kamala Devi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the Best Indian play of the year for *Hayavadana* in 1972. In 1992, Karnad received Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award for the most creative work of 1989 for *Naga-Mandala*. In these two plays, one can the significance in the name of the characters. In *Naga-Mandala*, Appanna means everyone; Kurudava means blind woman; Kappanna means the 'dark one'. In *Hayavadana*, Hayavadana means 'horse-faced'; Devadatta literally means 'the god-given', Kapila means tawny and reddish; Padmini literally means 'lotus plant' or the 'lotus pond' which is traditionally the abode of goddess Lakshmi. It is ironical that Padmini does not bring any prosperity to the two friends.

Karnad moves the play *Hayavadana* with the help of Bhagavada and in *Naga-Mandala* with the help of flames. The central character of these plays is Padmini and Rani. Karnad examines the concept of the rational and the physical and weaves a mazy pattern of relationship. Karnad portrays that the perfect union of the spirit and flesh in human life is not possible. His knowledge of human nature has made him a great actor and playwright. He is well aware of the paradoxes of human nature and has thorough knowledge of life's ironies. The protagonists in his plays illustrate the glaring paradoxes in human nature and life.

Karnad through the use of dolls, who possess a special insight, reveals very effectively and strongly to the audience the thought process and inner psyche of Padmini as she visualizes the gradual metamorphosis of Devadatta's body into its original form and dreams of Kapila's strong body. Whereas in *Naga-Mandala*,

Rani talks to herself. She goes into her fancy land where her parents protect her. She is happy. Then the stag comes again calling to her, and he tells her that he is not actually a stag but a prince. The girl sits weeping there. It is the story that adds this information, and again the stage directions intrude to tell the audience that the girl mimes, cooks, etc. This reminder and the intercession of story again, emphasize the farcical nature of the story. The dream like quality of the play is emphasized by the girls slipping into her fancy land every now and then.

Padmini wants her companion both in knowledge as well as in body. She wants Devadatta's knowledge and Kapila's virility, while the society focuses her to seek these qualities in one man. But it is impossible for such a man. So, she creates such a man by transposing the heads. In this play, Kali provides Rani some roots which have a magical power to make her husband come round to her. Unfortunately, the magical portion turns into poisonous red. So, Rani pours it into the ant-hill, in which lives a king cobra. The behaviour of Rani is like Padmini, who without thinking of the possible outcome, hurriedly, transposes the head in the Kali temple.

## VI. FULFILMENT OF LIFE

In *Hayavadana*, Padmini never worries about her husband. In the Ujjai fair, returning back from Rudhra temple, Kapila searches for his friend but Padmini never bothers. She knows he has no enthusiasm for such things: he is physically fragile for such exercise. In Kali temple, Padmini attains the completeness; it does not work for a long time. To the end, Padmini does not regret the fact that her desires have led her in a path that society would not approve of. Even when she dies the only desire that her son be brought up both as a son of nature and as the son of the scholar—until he is five, he should be brought up in the forest and then he should be taken to his scholarly grandfather. Thus, Padmini's son should have the best of both the worlds.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Rani worries about her husband's health when she mixes the root. After the appearance of Naga as Appanna, every night Rani anxiously waits for Naga. She feels very happy in the company of Naga. She has many reasons to doubt that the Naga is

not Appanna. But she does not accept it, as she does not want to lose the heavenly bliss that she is enjoying in the company of Naga. The Indians consider cobra as divine and worship it. Such a divine being plays the part of evil in *Naga-Mandala*. In such a way, both the plays; *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* play a four-play.

There is a difference between the ways in which the two plays deal with woman. In *Hayavadana*, woman is not treated as an individual. She is on the other hand presented a symbol of the abstract instinct for fulfilment through the senses. The human instinct is for not mission out on any aspect of life. But unfortunately circumstances force on us the need to identify ourselves the fragments of the possibilities of life. The intellect and the emotion are not to be divorced. They coalesce into each other in practical life. But the training for life that we get in life puts us in a position where we divorce the tendencies. People become slaves to one aspect of their being. But there are people who feel the inward need for both these. Padmini is woman symbolizing the urge to find both the elements in the companion she picks for her life. But she finds that her yearning cannot be fulfilled. Not even the grace of Goddess Kali is able to enable her to get the kind of fulfillment she yearns for.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Girish Karnad while using mythology has put forward a question mark to some of the values of today. *Naga-Mandala* and *Hayavadana* fall under one group as they deal with the question of women's freedom. In *Hayavadana*, woman is not treated as an individual. She is on the other hand presented as a symbol of the abstract instinct for fulfillment through the senses. A man can keep as many wives or mistresses as he likes but a woman is deprived of the same privilege. Does it mean that a woman does not have a desire for multiple husbands? The play gives an answer affirmatively. Karnad acknowledges that a woman has her desire but it is impossible to live like a Draupati from Mahabharatam, in the contemporary society. What will happen if Padmini, Devedatta and Kapila live happily? Can they live happily forever? These are the inner questions to Devadatta and the talk of Devadatta and Kapila ends with killing each other. Padmini accepts Sati.

In *Naga-Mandala*, there is a deliberate mixing of different traditions of presentation presents the plight of the suppressed woman in modern society. It presents the injustice that man does to woman without a thought and without a qualm. It also shows how this society is capable of impertinent in its interference when man asks for justice. In reality this society has no real probity.

The study of Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* bring enchantment. There is a great scope of comparing and contrasting Ibsen's *Doll's House* and Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* from the women's inner feeling self. The settings clearly highlight how women cope with the realities of life and the absurd nature of their emotions. Karnad pays adequate attention to his characters. Though his characters are from history they are not devoid of life and vitality. The characters are living, highlighting their qualities for the development of his plot.

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