



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2019; 5(9): 39-41  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 25-06-2019  
Accepted: 28-07-2019

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## **Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*- An influential mythological play tribute to literature's doyen- Girish Karnad (19 May 1938 to 10 J End of an Era)**

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### **Abstract**

Drama is flavoured with several elements in which myth plays a crucial role. This paper throws a light on the mental arena of an Indian playwright dealing with the mythical elements. In the narratives, myth usually comprises of superhuman characters - devils, demons, witches, gods and demigods. These narratives come under the genre of folklores which are transmitted verbally from one person to another person. The dramatic genius of Girish Karnad is expressed in his use of myth at mother Kali temple where Padmini, the prominent character, exchanged the heads of both Devadatta and Kapila. At the end, paper will analyse the aesthetic effects and various ideological purposes of myths in the selected plays of Girish Karnad

**Keywords:** Mythical, folklores, aesthetic

### **Introduction**

Girish Karnad, a modern Kannada playwright had put his best efforts in writing plays enriched with mythical elements. Myth is a conventional story of false belief or idea having supernatural beings in it. The plays of 21<sup>st</sup> century playwright Girish Karnad are the treasure-house of mythical elements. He had achieved the peaks of excellence in his literary creations full of myths. The fables involving myths in the form of witches, unusual acts of human beings, miraculous deeds of gods or goddesses depict the deep root in the human heart with enduring patience. Myths arouse pity, fear and thrill among the readers. The horrifying acts performed by the super human beings touch the basic nerves of the common people.

The research paper deals with the study of ancient myths in context with the modern scenario. As it is evident that Karnad's treatment of using myths in his plays gained him much fame and secured for him a place quite apart from other playwrights. He used the myth in a different perspective and earned for him a reputed position in the literary field. There is no doubt that for the past four decades Girish Karnad has been named as one of the greatest names in theatre and drama writing. First of all, he used myths in his first play *Yayati* which seems to be a rare piece of work. There is love for life on one side and on the other hand the deception of the warning disguises it. The play is not one dimensional, it is multidimensional. After the successful creation of *Yayati*, Karnad tried his hand in writing the historical play *Tughlaq* with a modern outlook. And then, *Nagamandala* which is based on the folk tales of Kannada, seems to be a bridge between tradition and modernity in which readers can roam freely. This paper gives a glimpse of contemporary modern resonance with the traditional old myths prevailed in the society. Writing contemporary issues through history and mythology is not always easy but Karnad was an expert in it. Karnad said that the idea of the play *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in his mind when he was having an argument with B.V.Karant... about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre's relationship to music. Myths used in his plays transport the readers into the realms of fantasy. Now we have a look at the mythical approach of Girish Karnad in his play *Hayavadana*. At the very outset Karnad suggested the theme of identity and imperfection in the human world. In the title *Hayavadana* in which 'haya' means the horse and 'vadana' means male or female body. Through this play Karnad tries to convey that every human being is involved in entangled relationships and longing for self-identity and struggling for perfection. Karnad tactfully mixes the Indian folk psyche with western techniques and makes it an enigmatic

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play. Karnad started this play with the invocation to lord Ganesha during a stage play. Lord Ganesha is also a symbolic representation of myth because he is having a distorted body; crooked face; elephant's head; seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake. He is the husband of two wives Riddhi which means wealth and Siddhi which means perfection and having a tusk. A rare combination of elephant's head over a male body. Most of the people in India are having a belief system that if we pray to lord Ganesha before starting any work then that work will get completed without any obstacle and lord Ganesha will bless us with wealth and perfection. But nobody pays any attention to this fact that how an imperfect being can remove the obstacles of life to make us perfect. Karnad has also followed this age old tradition of worshipping the lord Ganesha in the beginning for the success of his play in lines such as these:

“O Elephant-headed Herambha  
whose flag is victory  
and who shine like a thousand suns,  
O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi,  
seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake,  
O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness,  
We pay homage to you and start our play.”(CP-Vol.-I-105)

Another mythical evidence is clearly visualized at the very outset of the stage play when the audience hear a scream and an actor rushes on to the stage trembling with fear. He states on the stage that he has seen a horse-headed talking man. But nobody believes him. Karnad added thrill to his play with the story in which Hayavadana says:

“My mother was the Princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. When she came of age, her father decided that she should choose her own husband. So princes of every kingdom in the world were invited –and they all came. From China, from Persia, from Africa. But she didn't like any of them. The last one to come was the Prince of Araby. My mother took one look at that handsome prince sitting on his great white stallion –and she fainted.” (CP-Vol.-I-113)

This sub-plot of Hayavadana's story added grace in the play. Here Karnad with the help of Freudian psychology explains the subconscious mind of the princess. Actually Karnad is very well aware of the fact that if mythical elements are added in the fables then they would add a special flavour to the story. Myths are the effective ingredients of the play because they add a thrilling adventure in the minds of the readers. Because the incidents which are presented in the mythical plays are impossible in the real world. That's why readers feel excited to listen to such type of stories. Karnad left the story with an open ending so that readers may add something to it according to their wish with the dialogue of Bhagavata when he blesses Hayavadana and says; “May you become successful in your search for completeness.” (CP-Vol.-I-116)

After the exit of Hayavadana from the stage for the search of perfection Karnad brilliantly turned the readers to another mythical story in which a poet named Devadatta and a wrestler named Kapila are having deep friendship but due to love with the same woman they become rivals. They fight with each other in front of a temple in a lonely area and both of them fall apart from the forehead and fall down. Girlfriend named Padmini prays to goddess Kali to save their lives. The climax of the story reaches when goddess

Kali empowers Padmini to attach the heads of Kapila and Devadatta to give them life again. Goddess tells the woman: “Put these heads back properly. Attach them to their bodies and then press that sword on their necks. They'll come up alive. Is that enough?” (CP-141)

Here Karnad stresses the dilemma of an emancipated woman that she likes the strong body of the wrestler but at the same time she likes the poet because he describes her appearance perfectly and constantly looks for new ideas. So, after knowing all this Padmini exchanges the heads of Kapila and Devadatta to give them life again and puts the head of the wrestler on the poet's body and vice-versa. Here Karnad sarcastically points out the dishonesty prevailing in the society when goddess Kali says: “My dear daughter, there should be a limit even to honesty. Anyway, so be it!”(CP- 142)

Then with the blessings of goddess Kali their soul returns. The poet driven by his thought style does not work through the body of a wrestling body and writes poetry. Similarly, the wrestler is also driven by his thought style. With the passage of time they both become as they were before. This shows the artistic excellence of Girish Karnad in dealing with the mythical elements in his plays. Karnad here elaborates the every individual's desire for getting perfection.

In Act II Karnad shows his concern for the major problem that who is the husband of Padmini when Bhagavata says:

“What indeed is the solution to this problem, which holds the entire future of these three unfortunate beings in a balance” (CP-150) and then offers the solution in a logical and rational manner when King Vikrama replied to demon Vetala: “As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore the man with Devadatta's head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini.” (CP-151)

At last Kapila moves to forest and Devadatta and Padmini live happily in their marital life. But with the passage of time Devadatta and Kapila regain their original shape and they become just like they were before. They fought with each other and died. At the later stage Karnad explores the eternal quest of human beings for perfection when Padmini hands over her child to Bhagvatta with a wish that he must be put in the care of hunters until five years as the son of Kapila and afterwards he must be handed over to Devadatta's parents. Then she becomes Sati on the funeral pyre of Devadatta and Kapila. Here again Karnad highlights the quest for perfection.

In the sub plot Karnad enriches the play with the comic element when the horse headed man Hayavadana acquired completeness by attaining a complete horse shape but still talking like a man. Padmini's son gets delighted to see a talking horse. All of a sudden the horse starts neighing. It depicts that plot and sub-plot lead to the theme of longing for perfection till the end of life.

### Conclusion

After a thorough reading of Karnad's *Hayavadana* it is concluded that he created a masterpiece play and gave a contemporary resonance to it. The plot of Hayavadana explores the theme of quest for perfection and loss of identity in entangled relationships in life and underlines the reality that everyone in this world is half incomplete. Here Karnad would like to transmit this message that perfection can't be achieved in this manner. Our half incompleteness is

the specialty of our existence but with this the efforts must be done throughout the life for the improvement or completeness.

It is easy to show a dream scene in movies but it is very difficult to show a dream scene in the drama. Girish Karnad used two dolls on the set of the play for starring the characters. They describe the dream of the person sleeping on the stage. It was really a genius touch of Karnad's creativity. He had a deep study of Indian theatre and he was well-acquainted with the western theatre also. The play was considered as the best Indian play and won both the annual Sangeet Natak Akademy award and Kamaladevi award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972. Hence Girish Karnad is a great dramatic genius and his sudden demise is a huge loss in the literary field. He will stay where he was and his characters will keep coming amongst us. May the departed soul rests in peace.

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