

**ELEMENTS OF MODERNITY IN  
GIRISH KARNAD'S NAGAMANDALA  
AND HAYAVADANA: AN INQUEST**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Girish Karnad is the most significant dramatist of post-independence Indian literature. He focuses on ambivalent relationship on classical and colonial past and contemporary problems of Indian society. He also discusses on 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 carrier with *Yayati*. He found his source of inspiration for *Nagamandala* 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.

Indian drama written in English by Indian playwrights makes extensive use of tradition, myth, 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 pictures 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 ethoses that represent the underlying values and principles of life, the rules and the codes of society. Girish Karnad has 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 the tale of responsibilities, sacrifice and self-realization.

This study is an attempt to bring forward the elements of modernity as presented by Karnad in his plays. The analysis gives special focus to the plays *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*. The initial chapter titled "Girish Karnad in the Indian Theatrical Space" discusses Girish Karnad's creative and performing abilities.

The second chapter "Nagamandala: A Modern Perspective" discusses the play *Nagamandala*. It deals with the estranged relationship between the husband Appanna, the wife Rani and the Cobra in *Nagamandala*. Stories are autonomous and independent of the person who tells them, although they live by being told and shared. In *Nagamandala* 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. *Nagamandala* is consciously anchored in the ancient theory and tradition of Indian theatre. The play thus reflects Karnad's respect for the technical elements of theatrical art and also for the Indian tradition of storytelling, even though he innovates and experiments by sharing twentieth century views. In this play, the author brings his drama into line with the changes occurring in Indian society and mentality.

The final chapter "Hayavadana: A Modern Perspective" concentrates on Karnad's play *Hayavadana*, which is richly symbolic and spectacular. It focuses on the story of a love triangle between Devadatta, Kapila and Padmin. 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. It is based on Thomas 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 tangled relationships and a struggle for perfection. His interest in story telling contributes to the success of his plays in Indian villages, as he proudly admits. Indeed, Karnad has felt challenged by the tension that exists nowadays between these two realities in India, the traditional and the modern, and has in developing a credible style of social realism.

Keywords: Hayavadana, Nagamandala, Elements of Modernity, Girish Karnad

## CHAPTER I

### GIRISH KARNAD IN THE INDIAN THEATRICAL SPACE

Girish Karnad Rangunath, son of Rangunath and Kasibai was born in 1938 in Maharashtra with Kannada as his mother tongue. He worked as an assistant manager (1963-1969) and as manager (1969-1970) at Oxford University Press, Madras. He was Director of the Film and Television Institute, Pune (1974-1975). In 1999, Karnataka gained a rare literary distinction when Jnanapith award was awarded to noted playwright Girish Karnad. Karnad was made Chairperson of the Nehru Centre in London.

Karnad is a modern Indian playwright who successfully staged his plays. Karnad takes up a theme from Indian history for it had a relevance to modern times. According to Karnad, a play realizes its full potential only through presentation in stage. He says, "When a story excites me, I want to share the excitement with others. As I analyze the components of its fascination, the form of the play gets shaped (The Hindu 2 July – December 1998.)

Karnad is a man of theatre. He has been actively associated with the stage and has written plays with an eye to their production. Karnad's plays are appreciated for an absorbing story, an intricate play, a logical dialogue, an impressive spectacle, a beginning, middle and a neatly tied up conclusion. He is faithful to the sources in presenting characters and episodes. There might have been anachronisms and deviations here and there. He takes care to conform to the spirits of the subject matter and at the same time the treatment of it is in keeping with his own ideas.

In an interview, Karnad observed that he was incapable of inventing stories and therefore he turned to myth, old literature and historical episodes. "Karnad has tried to depict that: Myth and folktales in a patriarchal society represent primarily the male conscious forces and wishes and are patriarchal constructs and "man-oriented". (Kurkoti, D.Kirtinath, *Contemporary Indian Drama* 32). In these stories, a woman's experiences, inner feelings, fears, anxieties and Psychological problems are not given much expression.

Karnad is influenced more by Henrik Ibsen, an outstanding figure of his age in dramatic art and whose works became the model for many dramatists since the late nineteenth century. Karnad has acquired much of the deftness of Henrik Ibsen; hence he allows symbolism to permeate his plays. By using symbols and myths, he manipulates an accretion of different meanings.

Karnad's plays reveal a healthy tension between tradition and contemporaneity. He goes back to local and old practices, which were part of his childhood environment. Karnad's return to the roots is a reaction to the usual social irrelevance of modern Indian Drama. His style is simple and the dialogues are suited well for the Indian sensibilities and ethos.

Karnad's works in the theatre reveal two outstanding qualities: a continuous experimentation with dramatic form and a deep involvement with the human condition in its contemporary as well as universal manifestation. His plays explore the human psyche and its social environment sometimes taking for their theme traditional Puranic themes.

When Karnad wrote his first play *Yayate*(1961), critics hailed him as the morning star of modern Kannada theatre. He described himself as belonging to the first generation of playwrights to come of age after India became independent.

Of his nine plays, six are based on myths and legends, two on history and only one on contemporary émigré experience. Many critics felt that he is not deeply rooted in Kannada culture. In fact Karnad himself accepts that, in a way, he is not as involved in Kannada culture as the other writers of his generation. His Sarawat community, which has always remained peripheral and the members of which speak Konkani at home and Kannada in public, could be partly responsible for his being an ‘outsider’ in Karnataka.

Unlike his contemporaries, who develop deep into the problems of middle class society, Girish Karnad goes back to myths and legends with a view to making them a vehicle of a new vision. By employing the various myths, he shows the absurdity of modern life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man’s eternal struggle to attain perfection.

Karnad discovered himself as a dramatist under the influence of Jean Anouilh whose *Antigone* served as a model for his first play *Yayati*, and *Tughlaq* owed a great deal to Albert Camus’ *Caligula*. Yakshagana, the most popular form of Drama in North and South Karnataka was a natural choice and he used it in *Hayavadana*. He continues his experiment in *Nagamandala*, where he makes use of two stories told to him by A. K. Ramanujan.

Karnad has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. Karnad in all his plays moved away from tradition. Karnad used many techniques for the success of his plays. They are mainly conventions and motifs of folktales and folk theatre, masks, curtains, dolls, the story within the story. These elements have not been used much by the other playwrights, while Karnad emphasized them in his works. About his style and technique Kirtinath Kurkoti writes;

“An intellectual playwright whose work has the tone and expression of a great Drama. He has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience the quality of which to use Joyce’s vocabulary would be ‘static’ rather than ‘kinetic’”. (Kurkoti, D. Kirtinath *Contemporary Indian Drama. Indian Drama Collection of Papers*, 108)

Dialogue is the most important element of the drama, for words put on the page are put on the same as words put on the stage. Dramatic speech has its origin and basis in common conversation. But it gets weight and pressure when put in a context. Girish Karnad gives importance to the dialogues in his plays to convey the meaning clearly. For this reason, he translated some of the words from Kannada to English.

Karnad’s practice of drawing source from myths and tales lends the play an immediacy of appeal. Another important fact is that since the audiences are familiar with the theme they curiously watch or read the play, to know the perception and focus handled by the dramatist.

“Karnad’s theatre foregrounds the power of mythical imagination which exhibits his creativity”.(Nemi Chandra Jain, *Indian Theatre*, 238) For Karnad, drama is essentially a ritual and consequently his plays contain properties, modes and techniques of the traditional Indian

theatre and are non-representational inform and technique. As the stage is the space for celebration, there is an extensive use of song, dance and mask in his plays for spectacular effect. Reality undergoes a magic transformation, a miraculous shape shifting in the theatre in the theatre. It is characterized by a sense of mystery.

“While I was writing a play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back I am amazed at how much precise the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment at all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future...The myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of value that I had been unable to arrive at rationally”. (Joshi, R.G. *Myth in Indian Drama* 238.)

Myths preach moral values directly. But Karnad’s treatment of it in his plays is different. He used myths as a framework for some of his plays. Girish Karnad believes that the usage of myth, folklore and moving back to the traditional themes are the resultant of western concept, which came with colonization. Karnad took Indian library and mythology liberally to tackle contemporary themes in his plays, when he started as a dramatist, later moved to folk-theatre.

Karnad can be compared to Shakespeare in utilizing the sources for his plays. Shakespeare borrowed sources from Greek legends, Holinshed chronicles, Plutarch and Roman history. He handled the themes in his own style to mock the society to revive the political situations and to transform the people to be aware of the political situations and to transform the people to be aware of the political unrest. According to him, all his plays are like a test-game. With his logic, he develops each scene. He inspires and excites everyone with his presentation of possibilities especially in the end. Karnad follows the ancient Sanskrit tradition while Shakespeare followed the Greek tradition. Regarding this, Karnad says, “Just as you can’t go through Karnatic music without learning Thyagaraja, if u want to write plays you have to go through Shakespeare read the Greek, study Kalidasa and Bhasa”. (Joshi.R.G. *Myth in Indian Drama*, 21)

Karnad admirably succeeded in his attempt to show the Indian playwrights as well as the world Theatre Community at large how our past and present can coalesce to give present-day existence meaning and to theatre activity a direction. For *Yayati*, he was given the state award. In 1972, he received Sangeet Natak Akademi’s award for playwriting. For *Hayavadana*, Bharatiya Natya Sangha honored him with Kamaladevi award. “His plays have pioneered a style, which unites the elements of traditional Indian theatre, such as ‘Yakshagana’ and strikingly modern sensibility for contemporary socio-political realities”. (Naik.M. K. *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*.73)

President’s Gold Medal for the best Indian film for *Sanskara*, National Award for excellence in direction for *Vamshavriksha* (shared with B. V. Karunath), National Award for the best script for *Bhumika* (shared with Shyam Benegal, Satyadev Duby-78), Golden Lotus for best non-feature film for *kanakapurandara*(89), Homi Bhaba fellowship for creative work in the folk field of theatre (70-72), Karnataka Sahitya Academy for the most creative work for *Nagamandala* (92), Sahitya academy award for *Tale-Danda* (94) and so on.

Frenny Prakash in his critical study writes about Girish Karnad as: “He is a man of large presence for larger than his physical frames and his novelty; anyone can be caught by his charisma, the resonant voices the persona and his dramatic flair. Karnad the challenging dramatist sums up the modern Indian English Drama”. He says it is not untrue the modern writer feels, alienated from one’s background from one’s language, for he has personally undergone this experience and today stands as a witness before us. Karnad’s plays are existential in theme. Karnad’s acquaintance with colonial history brought a disgusting temperament within him due to the imbalance between native and alien theories of art. This made him to consciously adopt Kannada local forms. However, this suggestion carries a tri-dimensional and a polemical analysis. In the first place, he attempts to oppress the dominance of western form over native arts. Because of this alien interference, the native individuality of Kannada art is completely buried. On the other hand, the colonial imperialism made the westerners gain an authorization from the local population by surpassing the establishment of native culture. In the second place, Karnad strongly condemns the luxury of the western theatre, which stood as an impermeable hindrance for proletarians and lower class people to enter into the world of dreams.

Karnad’s experience with the Yakshagana theatre made him feel the ignorance of his people with the modern technology. So, he intended to compete with the popular forms by exhibiting that rustic beauty of Kannada local forms. This made him to establish great familiarity in Indian literature. This study conducts a detail analysis on the prosperity of native forms. It also ponders over certain themes and contents of two chosen texts, to highlight the significance of Karnad’s prodigy and on the richness of native cultures.

Karnad uses myth in order to emphasize the beauty of our traditional forms. India follows almost a similar tradition throughout and mythological stories are popular among the people. Karnad took the known content and presented it in his own style. He does not stick to a particular traditional form; he uses all local motifs and conventions of Karnataka in his plays. In order to reach the local mass, he gave typical Karnatic names to his characters.

## **CHAPTER II**

### ***NAGAMANDALA: A MODERN PERSPECTIVE***

*Nagamandala* of Girish Karnad presents the deplorable state of women in Indian Society. The play is written in two acts with a prologue. The playwright says in the prologue that man is a bundle of weakness, he is either not aware of them or he cannot get rid of them. The man fails to realize the significance of this prediction. He takes it literally and breaks into a laughter because he thinks that keeping awake one night is not a task, failing to realize that keeping awake will rather be a Herculean task for a man who dozes off the month, which can be the last night of his life also, he awakes up to the fact that he has to do something to avert his death.

He comes to dilapidated temple with an unidentifiable statue to pass his last night. But this temple is a favorite haunt of the flames that come from different houses so exchange notes on the present conditions of the society. The first flames come from the house of a miserly fellow

who retires to bed early to save spending on lamp oil. The second tells in which the old mother has died neglected and third flame tells about the story of Rani whose predicament reflects the human need to live by fiction and half-truths. The drama is enacted in a temple at night, in the presence of three naked flames, in front of a man cursed to die within a few hours. The new flame has a different story to tell. The old mistress has seen young women dressed in a Sari coming out of the room in, which her husband is sleeping. However this story also comes to the temple and desires that it should be heard by somebody who can pass it on to others. Flames cannot do it because they are non-living objects. Thus the prologue describes the aberrations of man and woman to give the message that men in general are slaves of passion and are asleep to the hard realities of life.

According to Karnad the sources material of *Nagamandala* is from a folktale, which he heard from A. K. Ramanujan. The folktale is about a prince whose extreme mistrust of women prevented him for loving any woman, and whose encounter with a woman's desire for love has Ramanujan writes about these tale as many as forty variants.

The existential problems found throughout Karnad's play are more comprehensive. *Nagamandala* is not only about the male difficulty to trust and love women. It seem to be about the socialization process of both men and women, particularly in the Indian marriage which is more often than not, the first experience of sex and love for most people.

Act I presents the story of a young girl named Rani, who is the only child of her parents. She is also called Rani because she is the queen of long tresses. When her hair was tied up in a knot, it was as though a black cobra lay curled on the nape of her neck. Her father finds a match for her and gets her married to a young man who is rich and his parents are dead. Rani's husband Appanna, proud and jealous, ill treats her, coming home only during lunch and staying away with a concubine at night. Kurudavva a best friend of Appanna's mother is blind but her regard for her deceased friend outweighs her disability. She tells her son Kappanna, "He keeps his wife locked up like a caged bird". Kurudavva is moved with pity. She asks Rani not to worry and sends Kappanna to bring the roots, which produce the magical quality of love in the heart of the man that eats them. Kappanna gives the roots to Rani with the instruction. "Grind it into a nice paste and feed it to your husband and watch the results. Once he smells you he won't go sniffing after that bitch. He will make you a wife instantly". According to Kappanna's instruction she pours the paste into the curry. She pours this curry into the ant-hill. As she turned out of the ant-hill a cobra lifts its hood, hissing out of the ant-hill. Thus the cobra comes to love Rani.

The second Act presents the love story of Rani and the cobra. Appanna has brought a dog to keep the blind Kurudavva away from his wife. The dog is tied to the door. The cobra assumes the shape of Appanna to make love with Rani. He comes every night when Appanna is away. Rani gets confused on observing the nature of Appanna. Appanna becomes angry when he comes to know of the pregnancy of Rani. When Rani is the position of proving her loyalty and chastity to the villager, she takes the, cobra in her hand. The cobra does not bite her, but slides up her shoulder and spreads it hood like an umbrella over her head. The crowd gets stunned while the elders declare her as a God, a divine being. Appanna asks her forgiveness and takes her

fondly into his arms. Rani gives birth to a beautiful son, but Appanna knows the fact that he is not the father of the son. The cobra, could not bear the separation, ties a tress of Rani's hair around his neck and strangles itself to death hiding in her hair. The dead cobra falls to the ground when Appanna combs her hair, Rani who now understands all about the cobra. Appanna accepts the wishes of Rani as he takes her as an incarnation of the goddess. The playwright's vision of the human and non-human worlds is revealed in this play.

*Nagamandala*, the play by Girish Karnad has a title in English, which means 'play with the cobra'. In this play, the cobra plays the role of a lover as the original husband refuses to love her. Through this play Karnad reveals that he is a modern dramatist in proving that the cobra is better in loving. Which is a human passion where as a man is worse in treating his wife who is so innocent.

Dr.S. Subhash Chandran remarks: "Rani cannot comprehend the Situation since Appanna cannot be so affectionate and compassionate. Yet she willingly suspends her disbelief and enjoys the concern and affection of Naga who is in the guise of Appanna. She feels happy and secure in his company. He lays her gently down on the bed. He becomes a cobra and leaves". (*Indian Literature Today*, 195)

*Nagamandala* probes into the female and male development and their adjustment with the society roles, which are entrusted to them by the traditional society. Each flame is a female, a storyteller, sharing with the others her observations and new experiences. The author himself, enter into their conversation and listens to a "new" tale that has just escaped from an old woman's head.

Through the identification of the flames with young, sprightly and vocal women, Karnad used his creative ability in a particularly female context in the Man-oriented folk tale. Karnad says, a "distinctly woman's understanding of the reality around her, a lived counter point to the patriarchal structures of classical texts and institution". (Girish Karnad *Nagamandala: Woman's secret Longings and Sacrificial Sufferings*, 17)

In this story of marriage and love, Appanna's behavior is emotional. In fact the emotional aspect of his personality seems to be underdeveloped and also treats the Rani as a prostitute in an unfair manner. Whether the relationships are computer and satisfactory Rani and Appana are strangers to each other. Appana treats her with contempt, aggression and mistrust. He locks her in the room, the old lady Kundavva and her son Kappana attempt to become friendly with Rani.

Rani begins to build a world of stories around her. She imagines herself to be a princess locked up by a demon. "So the demon locks her up in the caste then it rains for seven days, and Rani says "come, Rani, let us go". (*Nagamandala Text Book*,35)

Next day Appanna comes in the morning. He unlocks the door and step in, Rani comes out running and laughing and she feels Appanna has changed for the better. In the second act Karnad should use of his knowledge of disguise of cobra in the form of Appanna with audience. This makes Rani get confused. And thus Karnad handled the theme tactfully proving that he is a modern dramatist. Suppose, Rani has identified the cobra, her mating with him raises a question of chastity. But Rani happily enjoys the company of the cobra, since she is an innocent female

character. The audience enjoys the play and they feel that Karnad shows his modern views in the play.

Karnad reduces the tension created in the minds of audience by the cruel behavior of Appanna towards Rani. That shows that Karnad uses modern techniques. This creates a kind of suspense and thrill in the audience. The dramatical situation gets increased when Rani feels sorrowful and says that she can say nothing if he spins a riddle like this. Now the cobra knows that his identity will be revealed unless he suppresses her reason and intuition by using patriarchal authority.

Karnad exposes the paradoxical nature and behavior of Appanna and it shows how the man's culture suppresses the intellect of the woman and also Karnad tells about the man's freedom in doing whatever he likes. Karnad laughs at the family lady's innocence. Sometimes innocence can be considered as bliss. But ignorance is always dangerous. Karnad shows that Rani has more ignorance, which is always dangerous. Since she has continual sexual relationship with cobra, she becomes pregnant and she feels happy that Appanna will not go to the concubine's house. When Rani becomes pregnant, the dramatist gives a serious turning point to the play.

The significance to the title of the play comes not from any human character, but from a snake. The story of the cobra suggests that the play not merely dramatics the folk tales in modern interpretation. Snakes are also the symbols of human maleness and strength. The play is interspersed with the analysis, observations and narrations, which continually reminds the spectator that he is only "watching a play".

Observing this shocking but natural truth, Rajinder Paul comments in his reviews that:

"Naga has his duels with the sentries and keeps on visiting Rani in the night. Rani duly become pregnant and informs her husband. Her husband calls her name in front of the village elder and that he says had not touched her. The villagers told her to put her hands in the ant-hill. If cobra doesn't bite her then it is proved that she is a chaste, otherwise she is dead any way" (*Nagamandala play with a cobra*)

In the previous night cobra asked Rani to become emotional. Though he is a human being Appanna gets nervous and starts shouting. Even she does not feel guilty and does not think that he deserves it. Karnad shows that Rani is a typical Indian lady who craves for love of man and in the intensity of their passion they accept any man who comes in to their life. Karnad shows the irony that Naga is true to his love though he is not a man. But Appanna is not a genuine husband to Rani. Indian epic does not permit a woman to have extra marital relations even if the woman is a deserted wife. Naturally, Rani could get shocked if she realizes that she has copulated with a cobra.

While Naga asks Rani to speak the truth she continues: "Rani: What truth? Shall I say my husband forgets his nights by next morning? Shall I say my husband brought a dog and a mongoose to kill this cobra and yet suddenly he seems to know all about what the cobra will do or not do?" (*Naga-Mandala, play with a Cobra*,34)

At last Rani takes the cobra in her hand and declares “since I came to the village. I have held only two- my husband and this cobra. I have not touched any other of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me”. Here the audience laughs and wonder at the effective dramatical statement which is possible only on the part of a real genius. Here we could see the dramatic irony since the truth is hidden from Rani. This is conveyed very effectively as well as convincingly to audience. People call her a “Goddess”. Immediately people start falling at her feet. This drama is found not only in books but also in real life. Some people have the habit of making others fall at their feet.

Karnad gets irritated with the people who are very dual in judgment. Elders appreciate Rani to a great extent after she proves her innocence. The play here proves that people are very firm in their false beliefs. Even Appanna starts appreciating her. When she is questioned by the husband, people start questioning her but they start accepting the dramatical truth once it is proved.

Since the end seems incomplete, Karnad prolongs the story. Cobra comes and has a look at Rani. By narrating this, the playwright attacks the people who do think before doing. Here cobra has used the human instinct and Appanna has used the animal instinct.

Karnad finds out the satirical approach on the social evils, which take place in the society. The story has two ends. One is that after the cobra dies, Rani gets the permission from Appanna for their son to perform the rituals for cobra. This is the dramatic and it is accepted. The other end is that Rani allows Naga inside the third stress of her hair. The modern dramatist gets intensified now. Karnad laughs at the ignorance of the people, because Karnad comments all his views to make the play interesting and enjoyable. Karnad and *Nagamandala* bring out the human nature effectively.

In *Nagamandala*, Karnad has rejected the value of emotional identification. According to Bertolt Brecht, these conventions then allow for “Computer seeing”.

The significant part in *Nagamandala* is Kurudavva, the blind woman. She is connected with the plot of the play because the cobra falls in love with Rani through her magical root; but we can easily identify similarities between Goddess Kali of *Hayavadana* and Kurudavva in the sense that as goddess Kali helps Padmini in enlivening Devadatta and Kapila in the same way Kurudavva gives solution to Rani’s problem. But the entire story’s movement towards the fate or a result of human error is a matter of debate. In *Nagamandala* Karnad has delved below the surface to reveal the burning core of mental or spiritual reality.

The play is a folk drama, because the cobra is regarded as possessing magical powers. It leaves the audience to reflect and the social law which discriminates a woman from a man and which demands a wife’s faithfulness ever to her callous husband. Since neither Rani, nor Appanna nor the cobra is chaste. The world may ponder over the dominant the idea of a husband’s happiness as incompatible with purity. It uncovers the injustice of the patriarchal society. The name Appanna means “any man”. It comments on any man who tries to enforce chastity on his wife. The notable features of this drama are use of a chorus and music. The

flames sing all the songs. Flames are the metaphors of the women of the village who have gathered at this time of the night to tell tales and sing songs.

Karnad very cleverly and effectively used the shape shifting as another device. Shape shifting in Karnad is not merely a central structural strategy, but a means of reviving the ancient and sacred function of drama as ritual. *Nagamandala* has several examples of shape shifting. The main one is the cobra assuming, the form of Appanna to make love to Rani. The flame takes on human shapes to gossip at the temple after they have been “put out” in the houses.

Karnad further says: “Only a society which is honest enough to face the implications of this division squarely could produce meaningful drama of it” (84). Karnad seems to be torn between his western mind and his affinity towards his religion, his mythology, which is very well reflected in *Nagamandala* as well as in *Hayavadana*. Karnad writes that his English translation of the play must be “seen only as an approximation to the original”. Karnad admits Brecht’s influence on his play. He observes:

“And it must be admitted that Brecht’s influence, received mainly through his writings and without the benefit of his theatrical productions, went some way in making us realize what could be done with the design of traditional theatre”.(14)

Though Karnad does not fully exploit the Brechtian artifice of Epic theatre in *Nagamandala*, he claims that the play strikes a departure from the emotion- based world of traditional values. In *Nagamandala*, Karnad attempts at instilling an “alienation” effect by deriving the material of the play from the folk tales, and also by using the “non-naturalistic techniques” of the traditional Indian theatre. In *Nagamandala*, Karnad has rejected the value of emotional identification and catharsis.

The play *Nagamandala*, as the name suggests, revolves around a woman and a serpent. Martin S Day (1984) states that there exist a theory that serpents impregnated the mothers of great men in history such a Scipio Africans Alexander the great and Augustus Caesar. He also says that snake myths are found extensively in Brahmanism and Buddhist writings.

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 on innocent, ignorant Indian women.” The author seems to say that Matriarchy which according to Brechtian’s theory of Mother Right is the lost paradise of mankind will come again. Indian women were forced to accept the Chastity as a social value, which was invented by patriarchal culture, which enslaved woman since ages. Sita undergoing the fire ordeal to prove her chastity to Rama has been a cultural guide to the Indians. Every Indian family tied their daughter to patriarchy by imparting upon them that chastity was more important and any deviation from it becomes a social stigma. 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 *Nagamandala* deals with deeply psychological problems faced by modern Indian women in the present social milieu. This play powerfully portrays the anguish faced by women in the modern society.

### CHAPTER III

#### ***HAYAVADANA: A MODERN PERSPECTIVE***

Girish Karnad is one among the Indian dramatists and his plays have been super hits on the stage. Girish Karnad gives a special attention to his play, and he gives success to the management of stage. His play *Hayavadana* begins with stage directions. When the curtain rises, the whole stage is empty except one chair and one table in the back portion of the stage. Bhagawata and the musicians sit on the table and a mask of Ganesha is placed on the chair. The prayer to Ganesha, sung by Bhagawata and the musicians make a proper beginning in Hindu tradition.

Bhagawata starts telling about the introduction of the situation, place, characters and action. He introduces Devadatta, Kapila and the city of Dharampure, ruled by King Dharameshela. Devadatta is fair in colour. He has proved his talent in debate on logic and love. Kapila is the only son of the ironsmith Lohita. His complexion is dark and plain to look.

Next, the chorus is introduced. Bhagawata, actors, dolls and also the incompleteness of human beings is also introduced in this act. They all act as chorus. After that, all the actors appear on the stage. First on the stage he has heard a horse speaking man's language. Hayavadana is the most important character to the audience. He introduced such a character in his play. Then we hear the story of the incompleteness of man from the horse's mouth.

In Act II, Girish Karnad introduces the two dolls to comment upon the changes that have appeared in the character of Devadatta and Padmini, after the interchange of heads between Devadatta and Kapila. Both were in love with Padmini; Padmini also loves both of them. She loves Devadatta for his handsome face and is attracted towards Kapila for the sake of his physical appearance. Kapila and Padmini go to the temple of goddess Kali, because to find an opportunity to offer his head to the Goddess not in devotion, but in disgust at the love. Moving between Kapila and Padmini, Kapila's search of Devadatta and finding his head cut off from the body, he cuts off his own head. Unknowingly, she joined the head of Devadatta on Kapila's body and Kapila's head on Devadatta. Padmini desired a fusion of the two people for her husband with this new combination. But it is the head that ruled over the body naturally. After sometime this body loses its vigor. The changes that come over the body are to be highlighted in scenes; that's why Girish Karnad introduces the two dolls in the second act.

Girish Karnad first brings the two dolls to the house. They could observe the Devadatta character and also the same experience of Kapila. The two dolls play the role of chorus in telling the audience that it is the head that matters, not the body. Padmini, while living with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body get a dream of Kapila. Since the doll can see what Padmini is dreaming

about, the dolls find that a man has come in the dream of Padmini, but not her husband. She sees in her dream a man who is rough like a laborer once again. She gets Kapila in her dream. Devadatta suggests that the servant can sleep in the house for the security of Padmini. But she rejected it because she has an idea to see Kapila in the forest in the absence of Devadatta.

As the play began with the episodes of Hayavadana, it closes also with the episodes of Hayavadana to complete the symmetry of the plot. Hayavadana was asked to go on the pilgrimage for completeness of his form and in the end of the play; he comes in the form of a complete horse. His return symbolizes the completion of the pilgrimage for completeness. Thus the plot is rounded with appearances of Hayavadana and it also provides a proper ending with Hayavadana's achievement of completeness. The drama has achieved a great success because it has a proper beginning, middle and an end.

Virish Karnad's *Hayavadana* is based on Thomas Mann's story titled *Transposed Heads*, which in turn is based on one of the versions of the story in *Vetal Panchavimshati*. But Karnad draws heavily on Thomas Mann's story. But he uses the story to explore the theme of human identity in a world of tangled relationships and a struggle for perfection. At the same time he makes significant departures from Thomas Mann's story too. The sub-plot of *Hayavadana* is entirely different from Karnad's invention. In the play the stories of the sub-plot throughout supports the main plot.

*Hayavadana* is an enigmatic play. Kirtinath Kurkkoti says, "Karnad's play poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationships" (*Contemporary Indian Drama* 53). Another critic U. R. Anantha Murthy in his *A Note of Karnad's Hayavadana*, comments about theme like "incompleteness in a comic mode." A few paragraphs later he says, "The play tries to create an illusion in us that the head determines the being of man" Page No.56.

In *Hayavadana*, as in *Shankuntalam* and *Mrichhakatikam* the description of Padmini's affinity with nature resonates with erotic emotion. *Hayavadana* in exploring the realm of love, erotic man – woman, male bonding, and parent- child, offers us insight into the desires, hopes, fulfillment and frustration it breeds. Karnad's Bhagavata is the mediator. He fulfills many roles in the play from being the key to the play and a detached observer to the confidante of the heroine. The speeches of Bhagavata are resonant with image making that at the outset build upon the stage of *Hayavadana* invokes a representational mode of projecting female body as a sexualized object. Padmini's presentation is through her changing circumstances from the figure of a heavenly beauty to a figure.

In drawing Padmini, the playwright takes an irretrievably compromised position of a man bound to patriarchal concept of womanhood and in the process, the play regains the ingredients of a court drama. Karnad's Padmini is not allowed to attain the greatness of Kalidasa's Shakuntala who embodies the ideals of not only a woman's respect for self esteem but who also in her endurance posits the great illustration of the maternity principle.

*Hayavadana* is resonant with multilayered social messages and also tempts us to see it as a volatile autonomous being. Most critics have tried to come to terms with the problem of "incompleteness" that the conflicting situation and also the personalities in the play depict.

Padmini's free floating volitional and volatile consciousness demands a perfect man for her. *Hayavadana* nonetheless makes us encounter in Padmini a "spirited" "embodied" mind and more significantly illumines the notions of female subjectivity as embodied in her. Padmini is a transgressive erotic agency and a woman who desires to create a space beyond the pre-fabricated identity.

In Act II of *Hayavadana*, the questions raised "To whom Padmini belongs" could have been solved. Padmini's arrival drives in men the knowledge of the agony of love. The mixed up heads create multiple problems since Padmini as a lawfully wedded wife must go to Devadatta because as a mother the paternity of her child is dependent on whom she chooses as a husband. The days of bliss and happiness with Kapila have to reach a state of denouement. Padmini would like to accomplish the union that allows an undifferentiated unified body and mind. One may assume that *Hayavadana's* aesthetic – visionary wants to break the notion of the character Padmini as a sexualized object. In the body Karnad's Padmini seeks the corporeal ground of her intelligence in her perennial quest for fulfillment.

Karnad, through the confusion of the identities reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. *Hayavadana*, in many ways re-minds us of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When *Hayavadana* begins, a mask of Ganesha is brought on the stage and the Bhagavata sings about the Lord who is the Master of success and perfection.

Naik, M. K. observes Padmini's failure of the attempts and comments:

"Padmini's plight suggests woman's vain attempt to unite man as intellect and as flesh in order to further her creative purpose. But these two aspects of the masculine personality are basically at war with each other and hence the attempt ends disastrously in destruction for woman and man. Integration cannot be achieved by trying to reconcile but by accepting cheerfully the fundamental disharmony in human life". (*Dimensions of India English Literature*, 85)

Sharma and Ananthamurthy also say that Karnad fails to identify as a modern Indian dramatist because he confused the audience for a few seconds in Act II.

Vinod. V. B. remarks about the second wave of seeking in Padmini, when Padmini sends Devadatta for a fair and goes to the forest in order to meet Kapila. Kapila does not want her arrival first. There arises so many "why" questions in a series. Karnad comments that people are satisfied with questions and they do not bother much about seeking answer for their questions.

Karnad tries to find out the answer for many unknown questions, despite the physical identity crisis and the sense of alienation. *Hayavadana* seems to be superior to all the major and minor characters in the play. Horse head appears to symbolize plain common sense and with the blessing of Kali he is converted into a full horse. By a strange coincidence, he meets Padmini's son at the end of the play. It is during his amusing meeting with the little boy that *Hayavadana* loses his voice and starts neighing. The completeness of a horse is attained and irony is revealed though the play successfully.

Robert Browning comments about Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana*, "And thus we half-men struggle". He also feels that the theme of the play is memorable because it shows the

fundamental ambiguity of the human condition. Robert Browning suggested the theme of the play itself in phrases such as “search for complete men” and “this mad dance of incompleteness”. He says that the main plot of *Hayavadana* is based on the “Story of the Transposed Heads” in the Sanskrit *Vetala Panchavimsatiis* “that one of the two, on whom her husband’s head was fixed, was her husband, for the head in the chief of the limbs and personal identity depends upon it” (*Three plays Naga – Mandala, Hayavadana, and Tughlaq*43).

The modern source of the plot of *Hayavadana* is Thomas Mann’s long short story. “The Transposed Heads” which the author himself called a “Metaphysical jest”. In this story he talks about the two opposed forces: the spirit represented by Shridaman, the Brahmin husband and the flesh symbolized by the cow head Nanda, his friend, the wife Sita being the feminine principle. Thomas Mann develops it further by showing how initially Sita is extremely happy at the transposition of heads for it gives her exactly what she wants, her husband with an intellectual’s brain and a strong, working class body. But the original story ended with the two youths being restored to life.

Naresh Guha noted that the symbolism of the names “Shridaman”, the husband it literally means the “subduer of beauty” and his son, “Samandhi” is one who concentrates and his blind to the appeal of the flesh.

Naresh Guha comments on Nanda’s Character. He says that Nanda is named appropriately in more than one way, for it was the name of Krishna’s foster father and he was a cowherd; and secondly “Nanda” literally means “happiness”.

Thomas Mann himself points out the significance of his version of the story : “The world is not so made that spirit is fated to love only spirit, and beauty only beauty, Indeed the very contrast between the two points, with a clarity at once intellectual and beautiful, that the world’s a bliss no longer divided but whole and consummate. ‘The tale of our’ is Bart on illustrate of the failures and false starts attending the effort to reach the goal” (*A Note on Karnad’s Hayavadana*, 73).

Karnad is not a prolific writer and he is very much against writing in haste. Usually the idea of a play incubates in his mind for a long time and it is only when the total action of the play is clearly before his mind’s eye that he starts writing a play. In all his plays Karnad borrows from the original story and he develops it further. In the story *Yayati* as it appears in the *Adiparva* of the *Mahabharata*, puru’s acceptance of her father’s old age smoothly resolves the story. In fact the real program begins when it appears to be solved. With the theme of “incest” theme at its core, the sub-plot of *Hayavadana* is entirely karnad’s invention.

*Hayavadana* is an enigmatic play. Kirtinath Kurtkoti wrote a brief introduction to the English translation published in 1975. He says:

“The original play poses an oral problem while man used it to the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy, which holds the head superior to the body. The human body, Mann argues, is a fit for instrument for the fulfillment of human destiny”.

## CONCLUSION

Modern Indian drama reveals two main tendencies natural to a historical development. One is that Indian playwrights have gone back to tradition for their themes and techniques and the other is making use of what are considered modern trends in the theatre. Karnad tries to make an attack on Nehruite idealism, which is a striking parallel. Karnad's sensibility is fine and he is deeply affected by the creator in him so we could view the dramatical note in this play.

Karnad's plays have new directions as compared to other playwrights in Kannada literature. Karnad's studying proposes to show concern as much with the metaphysical image of Indian art tradition as with finding in Karnad's theatre a continuous renewal of form and its representational and philosophical meaning. Karnad's transformation from metaphysical into the contemporary discussion and history into trans- historical perspective is not exclusively linked to the western philosophical matrix as has been the criterion taken by some critics. Karnad's deep reverence for his native tradition of drama does not proceed from any ideological or nationalist agenda. The three plays show the experimenter as a consummate theorist of drama in the contemporary times and who needs to be seen as having assumed not only the burden of making new artifacts, but also the responsibility of offering new justification.

Karnad's plays tries to evolve a symbolic form and a tension between the archetypal and mythic experience and a living response to life and its values. Karnad is the most important dramatist of the contemporary Kannada stage. He shows the Kannada theatre's richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor director. His stage plays show the depths to which the mythical theories could be taken in order to recreate a contemporary consciousness. He also shows to the Indian theatre community and to the world theatre community our present day existence and meaning. The story of the completeness of *Hayavadana* is in a lighter tone but the pathos of it is touching.

Karnad's *Hayavadana* that is based on the story of Thomas Mann has gained a mock-heroic dimension. The human body can be considered as a fit instrument, for the human destiny. *Hayavadana* is noted for its bold experience in dramatic technique. The play consists of two plots, Main-plot and sub – plot. Sub-plot of the horseman depends on the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. The main- plot is searching for completeness. In fact, the question of identity crisis is as the core of the main plot and the sub – plot and consequently it acts as a link between the two leading plays. This chapter is an attempt to have a fresh look at the play and see how Karnad employs the theme of identity crisis in the play.

Karnad's *Hayavadana* is one of the earliest plays that accomplished a remarkable renewal of Indian dramatic traditions. *Hayavadana* is also a bold experiment in dramatic technique, which holds a revealing lesson for all practitioners of Indian English drama. The modernity of the theme, is, paradoxically enough, admirably matched by its dramatic modes.

Lord Ganesha is to be worshipped in the beginning of Hindu tradition. Hence the writer says his prayer to God. This play deals with the theme of completeness and also praying to lord Ganesha is the embodiment of success and completeness. Karnad says that the perfection of man has nothing to do with his physical appearance. In this play the incomplete *Hayavadana* seems better than the complete human character such as Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini.

Goddess Kali is shown as very careless, quick – minded and she grants the prayer of Padmini half way. Moreover, she is presented as a sleepy and bold Goddess. So, even God and Goddesses have not escaped the eyes of Karnad. The dilemma of the female character is exposed through Padmini – The flash back of *Hayavadana* is purely dramatical.

The German playwright Bertolt Brecht is considered as a lyrical dramatic and satiric poet of fierce intensity. Karnad has got the influence of Brecht. So Karnad is much interested in satires. The theme of the play *Hayavadana* is “illusion of reality”. Karnad makes use of masks for the characters in order to bring reality in the plays. Karnad applies dramatic views by making the audience understand the passions of Padmini for Kapila. This mean mind of Padmini helps women to understand what not to do in the marital life.

Karnad has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience. This is the main theme of the play *Hayavadana*.

Girish Karnad’s next play is *Nagamandala*. The story shows a young woman in the bosom of a joint family. A woman sees her husband into two unconnected roles such as a stranger in the day time and as a lover in the night time Appanna’s harsh treatment of his wife and Naga’s endearing treatment of Rani. Rani in *Nagamandala* has sex with Naga in the guise of her husband. The drama here rises with the doubt about purity of Rani. *Nagamandala* is reviewed by a critic as follows.

*Nagamandala* retells a folk tale with added focal points with the result he re-creates it into a treatise on the unresolvable tension between the male and female principles.

The story tells about the married life of Rani and Appanna. Rani’s desire for identity gets negated by her husband, Appanna’s infidelity. The indifference of her husband is countered by Naga. The cobra in the ant-hill falls in love with Rani as she pours magic roots given to her by Kurudavva. Naga transforms himself into Appanna and visits Rani at night. But with the birth of her son, Rani faces problems of acceptability where Karnad’s complex vision surfaces an issue of identity crisis and a re-mapping of logic on the illogical plight of contemporary living.

The nativist and ethnic positions adopted by Karnad need to be worked within the same module chosen by the artist for the influence of the non-native traditional ere. Karnad admits Brecht’s influence on his play. It must be admitted that Brecht’s influence, received mainly through his writings and without the benefit of his theatrical productions, went some way in making us realize what could be done with the design of traditional theatre.

Though Karnad doesn’t fully exploit the Brechtian article of Epic theatre in *Nagamandala*, he claims that the play strikes a departure from the emotion- based world of traditional values. In *Nagamandala*, Karnad has reflected the value of emotional identification and Catharsis. According to Karnad, the position of Rani in the story of *Nagamandala* can be

seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles as a stranger during the day and as lover at night. Karnad proves to be a Modern Indian dramatist in *Nagamandala*, *Hayavadana* and in his other dramas with the use of sharp situations making the play a grand success.

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