

Humanism and the idea of completeness: A critical analysis of the Girish Karnad's Play *Hayavadana*

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Abstract

The focus of the present paper is that Girish Karnad has dramatized the idea of completeness in the play, *Hayavadana*. Humanism is one of the branches of philosophy, which deliberate on such issues. In the introduction and the first, emphasis remains on the relation between drama and philosophy. The relation between the philosophy of humanism and drama is commented upon. *Hayavadana* appears to be foregrounding concerns of completeness and appeasement under Spencer's and Nietzsche's ideals of 'superhero' or 'superman'.

In the human world of Devadatta and Kapila, transposition offers a symbolic but temporary resolution to the problem of mind/body dualism: for a brief period of time, Devadatta-Kapila possesses the ideal mind as well as the ideal body, while the other hybrid being, Kapila-Devadatta, is deficient in both respects. But when each man's body reverts to its original qualities, the problem of dualism returns, and the human condition appears as essentially one of disunity and imperfection culminating in death" (C P Vol II xxvi-vii). The three characters are complete in every sense and send a message to everyone that God looks upon those who are only patient, righteous and innocent of sins. Padmini is the only character in the play who is left out without a proper validation. Padmini is the only character who is left incomplete in the play. Devadatta and Kapila forgive each other before death and die without even concerned about Padmini. The fruits of righteousness, patience and innocence are reaped by three characters.

Keywords: priority sector, commercial banks, RBI, economic development, small scale industries, nationalization

Introduction

A stimulation in thinking happens when it is observed that philosophers, such as Seneca, or Sartre happened to be the prominent playwrights of their time. These philosophers have raised philosophical concerns, like reality, truth, humanity, life etc in their plays. In other words, they have articulated philosophy in the attire of characters. Tom Stern observes that "many of the traditional concerns of philosophy—truth, reality and representation, action and its consequences, living the right kind of life—are explored in a variety of theatrical context" (158). However, the plays of philosophers, like Voltaire seem to be dramatizing philosophical issues, springing from the experiences of people, regarding their existence. Thus the dramatists have tended to focus on exploration of human experience in their plays. The focus of the present paper is that Girish Karnad has dramatized the idea of completeness in the play, *Hayavadana*. Humanism is one of the branches of philosophy, which deliberate on such issues.

Connections between Drama and Humanism

Stern observes a connection between theatre and morality. He states, "The best theatre combines actions which are worth watching with people watching those actions in the right way. The latter requires 'caring', which has a strong ethical dimension. which stands in a long line of treating theatre as a 'school of morals'" (160-61). Therefore 'performance' of a play on the stage is not just an enactment of "written dialogues" or "roles of characters", (Prasad 106-7) rather, it is in a sense the dramatic presentation of philosophy. Philosophy also undertakes various issues pertaining to human existence in the light of philosophical concepts, such

as humanism, idealism etc. *Dictionary of Philosophy* (292), in Plato's sense defines idealism as "the ideas or forms alone possess genuine reality" and "only minds and mental representations exist; there is no independently existing external material world." Idealism categorically rejects "materialism and naturalism in favour of a religious or otherwise value-oriented world-view." According to *Dictionary of Philosophy* (283), humanism is "an intellectual and cultural movement linked to the revival of classical learning in the Renaissance, which adopted an ideal of the full development of the individual, rejecting religious asceticism, narrow scholasticism and humble pity alike. In the English-speaking world, humanism has come to designate a non-religious world view, based on a belief in man's capacity for self-cultivation and self-improvement, and in the progress of mankind. In contemporary French philosophy, humanism designates a cluster which includes the conception of man as a transcendental subject". The conception of "an essential human nature grounds thought and action of man as an autonomous being, capable of self-determination. This also enjoins the assumption that "an individual's choice can make a real difference to a society or to the course of history".

Karnad's Thoughts on *Hayavadana*

The post-independent Indian English dramatists too, appear to be presenting, and dramatizing different philosophical issues, related to human existence. For this, the authors have exploited incidents, people and narratives from history, politics, mythology, religion, ethics, and folk dramatic traditions. Iyengar observes that a cumulative, philosophy oriented theatrical tradition has evolved with the plays of Asif

Currimbhoy, Lakhan Deb, Pratap Sharma (246-47). Girish Karnad too is one of the post-independent playwrights and he dramatizes issues related to philosophy of human existence. His plays are grounded in ancient history, (*Tuglaq, Tale-Danda*), folklore (*Hayavadana, Nagamandala*) and mythology (*Yayati, The Fire and The Rain*).

About the play, *Hayavadana* Karnad states, "I remember that the idea of my play, *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in my head right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karnath (who ultimately produced the play) about meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre's relationship to music. The play is based on a story from a collection, *Kathasartistagra* and the story developed by Thomas Mann in 'The Transposed heads'. Two young men behead themselves and, when brought back to life, find that their heads have got mixed up. Karnad opines that the dialect should grow out of 'grosser ground'. He writes, "I sensed a third being hovering in the spaces between the divine and the human, a horse-headed man". The play *Hayavadana*, meaning 'the one with a horse's head. who wants to shed the horse's head and become human, provides the outer panel – as in mutual – within which the tale of two friends is framed" (*C P Vol One* 312). Thus desire to comprehend 'meaning of mask' and Thomas Mann's story of 'The Transposed Head', were the reasons behind the creation of *Hayavadana*.

In Karnad's *Hayavadana*, Padmani's desire to have both, Kapila and Devadatta seems a symbolic representation of Nietzsche's ideas of creating 'superman'. About the creation of superman, Nietzsche observes, "Just as morality lies not in kindness but in strength, so the goal of human effort should be not the elevation of all but the development of finer and stronger individuals. "Not mankind, but superman is the goal". The very last thing a sensible man would undertake would be to improve mankind: mankind does not improve, it does not even exist, it is an abstraction; all that exists is a vast ant-hill of individuals. The aspect of the whole is much more like that of a huge experimental work-shop where some things in every age succeed, while most things fail; and the aim of all the experiments is not the happiness of the mass but the improvement of the type. Better that societies should come to an end than that no higher type should appear. Society is an instrument for the enhancement of the power and personality of the individual; the group is not an end in itself. "To what purpose then are the machines, if all individuals are only of use in maintaining them? Machines" - or social organizations "that are ends in them-selves-is that the *umana commedia*?" (Durant 395).

Hayavadana appears to be foregrounding concerns of completeness and appeasement under Spencer's and Nietzsche's ideals of 'superhero' or 'superman'. In the human world of Devadatta and Kapila, transposition offers a symbolic but temporary resolution to the problem of mind/body dualism: for a brief period of time, Devadatta-Kapila possesses the ideal mind as well as the ideal body, while the other hybrid being, Kapila-Devadatta, is deficient in both respects. But when each man's body reverts to its original qualities, the problem of dualism returns, and the human condition appears as essentially one of disunity and imperfection culminating in death" (*C P Vol II* xxvi-vii).

Karnad's Approach to *Hayavadana*

Girish Karnad (10-7-17) cleverly uses Goddess Kali to judge the three individuals – Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. Kali emphasizes that Devadatta is noble but forgets his promise; Kapila hides his true feelings even before killing himself and Padmini is warned for being too honest during the reattachment of heads. It shows that Padmini might have known what she was doing despite the fact that there is no further discussion about it anywhere in the play. *Hayavadana* says that Kali asked of his wishes for which he said he wanted to be complete. She grants the wish and disappears. However, he says that the Goddess did not completely listen to the wish and made him a complete horse instead of making a complete man. Bhagavata feels sorry, but *Hayavadana* is happy and claims that being a horse is great. However, *Hayavadana* feels bad about the presence of human voice, which still makes him incomplete. Bhagavata cannot come up with a solution to this problem. *Hayavadana* becomes complete, when his human voice is gone.

When the second act starts, a sage is proclaiming that head is superior to the body. Indeed, it is demonstrated in three cases. Devadatta regularly loses the bodily strength of Kapila and becomes a Brahmin again. Kapila progressively loses the weak body of Devadatta and becomes a strong personality again. *Hayavadana*, who has a horse head, is granted the body of a horse instead of a human head and body. Padmini is the only character in the play who is left out without a proper validation. Despite the concealment her act of Sati with two men alone shows her nature. She is not the one to have a place in the list of dedicated wives in India. She is the one to be placed in the list of historical whores who ruined lives with absurd desires.

Bhagavata too has been smartly used by Girish Karnad to knit the play and his entrance at the right time at the right place helps the scenes to move forward. Goddess Kali shows indifference towards humans indicating that gods are not really interested in the matters of mankind. This is a contradiction to the belief that God watches over every person and comes to rescue in times of need. Padmini is the only character who is left incomplete in the play. Devadatta and Kapila forgive each other before death and die without even concerned about Padmini. The fruits of righteousness, patience and innocence are reaped by three characters.

Conclusion

Hayavadana, who remained righteous till the end without slightest of deviations was blessed with a complete body. *Hayavadana* finds a new friend in the boy and is very happy to live as a horse. The boy who is innocent of the sins of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila is rewarded with a grandfather and a precious friend – *Hayavadana*. The three characters are complete in every sense and send a message to everyone that God looks upon those who are only patient, righteous and innocent of sins.

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