



## HAYAVADANA: A FOLK DRAMA FOR URBAN AUDIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

During the postcolonial period of Indian literature, the antiquated staging style of Parsi and Sanskrit 'court theatres' seemed unfit for theatrical presentation and to lure the urban population for box office hit. The urban dramatists wished to find how traditional folk music and dance could be utilised to revitalise the urban theatres. Girish Karnad conceived the frame work of his play Hayavadana to utilise the traditional theatrical devices like half curtains, masks, improvisation, music and mime for entertaining the city dwellers. Hayavadana, though originally written in Kannada and translated into English, reveals the playwright's ability to use the masks, music and seemingly unrelated comic episodes of the traditional folk plays in a western medium with its proscenium technique. This article deliberates on the dramatic dexterity of the dramatist in translating and reinventing the theme of an ancient Sanskrit story against the backdrop of a folklore of Karnataka, and presents how successful is the dramatist in his western adaptation to lure the theatre loving urban audience.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial period; comic episodes; proscenium technique; dexterity; urban audience

### 1.0 Introduction

The modern Indian theatre derives its organizational structures, textual features, and performance conventions from British theatre. However, a study of Proscenium technique of the European theatres would lead us to Italian Renaissance. The prominent feature of the proscenium stage is its having a large opening known as the proscenium arch through which the audience views the performance. The audience directly faces the stage, which is typically raised several feet above front row audience level. The parsi and Sanskrit plays already used these techniques in India, but with little success due to the monotony of the plays which centred around

anything the local dramatists considered modern. The back screen would provide the details which would support or enhance the imagination of the audience.

The adaptation of the western technique was a known but developing stage-craft with regional language plays getting translated into English because of the new found popularity of the English plays. The indigenous play wrights were carried away by the influence of the latter so much that the traditional folk theatre of India was relegating to extinct. Regarding this, Aparna Dharwadker (2005) observes that the influence of Western textual models produced a body of new literary drama and dramatic theory in several Indian

languages and led to a large-scale translations and adaptations of European as well as Indian canonical plays, and generated the first nationalist arguments about the cultural importance of a national theatre in India. The dramatists were involved in endless arguments to improvise the existing traditional forms and use them to revitalise the urban theatre for the city audience.

Around 1960s, Vijay Tendulkar and Asif Currimbhoy of Marathi theatre, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Girish Karnad of Kannad Theatre, Mohan Rakesh and Dharamvir Bharati of Hindi theatre and Badal Sircar of Bengali Theatre, began to give theatre performances which made daring innovations and noteworthy experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technicalities. They were using legends, folklores, myths, history with splendid results. Against this kind of backdrop, Karnad's Hayavadana acquires significance because it treats an ancient Sanskrit story on the line of its adapted version of a western dramatist. It also deserves consideration not only because of its adherence to the rules of drama as a genre but also the modernity in treating its characters as archetypes, narrating the story as a story within a story and using the traditional theatre devices like half curtain, masks, music etc. This article deliberates how Karnad fuses the western drama form and structure with the traditional theatrical devices used in Indian folk plays.

## **2.0 FUSION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL FOLK FORM AND CONTENT**

Generally speaking folklores abound with myths and mythological stories that can be assigned to no single author; as such they belong to a society or community that brings them down to generations as hearsay. The Indian folklores which were originally sung and dramatized by moving troupes give us an insight into the moral values, traditions and the culture of ancient India. The Indian folk tales and folk literature as the expressions of the different communities in different regions are the oral and written records of the collective Indian traditional beliefs. Indian folk drama, being a part of the life and culture of India's rural people has grown and evolved over the centuries along with rural people.

Though many such forms are extinct and some are languishing because of urbanization, Ram Leela, Rasaleela, Prahlad Natak, etc are still performed in the rural festivals.

### **2.1 Profuse use of songs and dances in folk drama**

Profuse use of songs and dances in folk drama has been a mark of rural tradition. The folk plays fascinate rural mass by their content, which is the shared myth of the people. Contemporary Indian folk drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical brilliances. However, when they are performed for the city audience, the urban dramatists use the forms as they are or by slightly improvising the original forms. Rajinder Nath (1985) observes that the plays which have made a complete fusion between traditional folk forms and content have resulted in satisfactory performance. Hayavadana is undoubtedly one such play.

Hayavadana is also one of the most-performed plays of the playwright Girish Karnad. Written originally in Kannada, the play was translated into English by Karnad himself in the early 1970s when it was first published in the theatre journal, 'Enact'. The stage premiere of the English version took place in 1972 in a production put up by The Madras Players in Chennai (Arundathi Roy 2002).

"The central episode in Karnad's play, Hayavadana — the story of Kapila and Devadutta — is based on a tale from Somadeva's 'Vetalpanchvimshika', but also draws on Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in 'The Transposed Heads'. Interwoven into the main plot is the story of Hayavadana — a horse-headed man whose quest for wholeness underscores the play's exploration of identity and reality. Being a fusion of the folk story (content) and the form (folk drama) with which the people are familiar, Hayavadana incorporates elements from poetry, music, dance, mime, and various decorative arts and crafts. The alteration among the singing of the female chorus, the casual narration of the story and the elicitation technique practiced by the Bhagavata and also his speaking for

the characters is so worked out that the dramatic piece becomes virtually a conjunction of recitation, miming and singing which were part of ancient and traditional folk-drama.

## 2.2 The two act segregation

The western theatrical conventions are used in the execution of 'Hayavadana' sparingly as and when the playwright feels them necessary. As the dramatist was mainly interested in the fusion of traditional folk play techniques, wherein the scene changes took place in full view of the audience, the segregation into five acts was a needless exercise. Moreover, the story line is not what happened before and after catastrophe or the evolution or the end of the protagonist analysed psychologically. The play has only two acts: Act one is till the heads are beheaded and transposed; Act two is the aftermath. There is no scene demarcation but the different settings are introduced through the stage directions to stage hands and the dialogues spoken by the characters.

## 2.3 The story with in the story

The play is named after Hayavadana, the horse headed man, who wants to shed off the horse's head and become a human being. As in a mural, it provides the outer panel for the story of the two men with transposed heads. Hayavadana's story actually replicates the story of the Princess of Karnataka who wanted to marry the stallion not the Prince of Araby who was riding it. The story stretches to inform the princess lived with the horse for fifteen years only to know on a fine day, the horse was a Gandharva. Both, the Gandharva and the princess, who had turned a horse left the world while their child, the horseman was left all alone to fend for himself. On the stage, Hayavadana wishes to become a complete man. Hayavadana is directed by Bhagavata to go to the same Kali in Chitrakoot for a boon to become complete wherein the protagonists with transposed heads behead themselves to end their life. Hayavadana the half man is turned into a horse fully that he gallops on the stage.

The parallel ending of the story of Padmini and her lovers is thus: Padmini's child who was

dumb like an animal starts speaking and becomes a complete human to fend for itself all alone in the world. The dramatist has introduced the hearsay story of Karnataka region not only because it resembles the Sanskrit story, but the story within the story or the parallel story in a drama is a technique that makes the main story poignant in the Shakespearean plays. The treatment of the story in the genre of drama with its appropriate format eventually brings the Indian counterpart on par with its western model.

In her review of the play's performance in Kolkatta, Arundhati Roy (2002) observes, "The play provides the ingredients that would stimulate any innovative, intelligent troupe: a plot and sub-plot that intertwine to explore the tricky questions of identity and the nature of reality; the clever incorporation of motifs from traditional theatre — Yakshagana, a play within a play, dolls, masks; the irreverent inversion of mock-heroic mores. This is a text that begs experimentation and challenges players and audience alike dare step "out of the box" into a whole new perception of reality".

## 2.4 Chorus

The dramatist mixes the choice use of chorus of the English plays in the form of female chorus and the Indian story telling tradition in the form of Bhagavata, to fill the space and location. Their assistance informs the audience about what, where and how things happen externally. Introduction of chorus and Bhagavata show the playwright's ability to adapt the western tradition in the Indian context.

In the scheme of dramatic structure, the use of the chorus is very important. There is a chorus in most of the forms of the traditional theatre; chorus in Hayavadana is a group of singers attached to the play in a secondary capacity and less involved in the action of the play than in a Greek play. The female chorus and the Bhagavata introduce the characters, their function and the consequence of their action in a figurative narration. They also give a picturesque description of the costume, the qualities and dramatic functions of the characters and the situation in which they are placed. Bhagavata's narration makes the episode

humorous and infuses a sense of attraction to the audience that they are glued to the story line.

In the first act, the story gets introduced as follows:

Bhagavata introduces two friends: Devadatta and Kapila (Sings) Two friends there were/ One mind, one heart "Each one to his own fate. Each one to his own desire. Each one to his own luck. Let us now turn to our story....."

When the heads are transposed and the question of right over the woman and the supremacy of the head over the body are endlessly discussed, Bhagavata gives a break for tea of ten minutes requesting the audience to find a solution for the problem. When the Act II opens he says that the characters met a 'rishi' who gave the solution as

"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 rightful husband of Padmini"

When Devadatta and Padmini leave for Dharmapura happily, and when Kapila stands mute for a while, Bhagavata says,

"..... Don't grieve. It's fate Kapila.... So the roads diverged. Kapila went into the forest and disappeared. He never saw Dharmapura again. In fact he never felt the wind of any city again. As for Devadatta and Padmini, they returned to Dharmapura and plunged into the joys of married life".

Bhagavata either sings or speaks the dialogues which are literally spoken for the characters. His dialogues create the space and locale. For example, in Act II after Devadatta had left for Ujjain fair, Padmini is speaking to the child; Kapila enters the stage;

Bhagavata in an astounding voice asks if it is Kapila; Kapila says "yes" Bhagavata continues, "Where are you now?"; for which Kapila replies, "Here". Bhagavata asks, "Here, in this jungle....." (So the audience need to imagine the scene is happening in the jungle, where Padmini has gone

with her child already and Kapila is there, wherefrom he had never ventured out!)

Bhagavata asks Kapila, "Have you had any news from the city?"

Kapila, "Long ago..... (Meaning many years have passed since his self-exile in the forest).

Further, Bhagavata becomes the mouth piece of the characters and says either what runs in the mind of the character or about it.

When Kapila meets Padmini, his mind is portrayed by Bhagavata as follows:

"Now because you have a child at your breast, a husband on your thighs, the red rust on the lips of your late – opening mouth, I pick a picture here, and there a card of fate, and live for the grace of a grain – an astrologer's bird."

While Kapila and Padmini are so close that she rests her head on the former's chest, – Bhagavata sings to denote Devadatta's body is reminiscent of the earlier days of its togetherness with Padmini

"While the scarecrow on the bank

Has a face fading

On its mudpot head

And a body torn

With memories".

When the audience stand witness to the animal pleasure tossed out human beings killing each other, being incomplete and incompetent to face the challenges, Bhagavata sings the commentary in a poetic but prosaic expression, as they "fight like lions and kill like cobras"

At the end, after the two men are dead, Bhagavata questions Padmini to know about her next move, (employs elicitation technique)

"Bhagavata: And you?

Padmini: Make me a large funeral pyre. We are three.

Bhagavata: You mean you are performing sati? But why, child?

Padmini: (Puts the dolls on the ground.) Give these dolls to my son. I won't see him. He may tempt me away from my path....."

the female chorus depicts her as a '*pativrata on a journey to eternity*'.

"Our sister is leaving in a palanquin of sandal wood..... Good bye, dear sister. Go you without fear. The Lord of Death will be pleased with the offering of three coconuts".

The religious sentiments such as offering cut coconuts to the deities in the temples is evoked in these lines.

## 2.5 Dolls

The old world's phased out life which is not hurried for anything else other than the courting and marriage and the birth of a child despite the conjugal disharmony in the life of archetype Padmini is narrated by the Bhagavata from the start of the play to the end. If Bhagavata and female chorus sing to narrate the story that happens in between and exhilarate what is happening, dolls narrate the workings of Padmini's mind. The dolls, a rare commodity in the local market were bought in the Ujjain fair, and Devadatta has left for Ujjain fair to buy new dolls. The customary sentiments that old and broken dolls should be replaced with new dolls is part of Padmini's dialogue. But she intends to meet Kapila who demanded her to be with him because he had the body of Devadatta which enjoyed the conjugal rights with Padmini as its wife. The dolls curse Padmini as real people would do in such a context, they reveal her mind which longs for Kapila. The dolls which are mute spectators of a selfish woman's mental designs speak their mind out in a kind of folk theatrical interlude which diminishes the seriousness of the situation in a backbiting behaviour of rural women.

## 2.6 Masks

Girish Karnad (1988) says in his introduction to 'Three Plays' that the story initially had interested him for the scope it gave for the use of masks and music and because the story was new to the urban audience. He further says his characters are ethical archetypes and they are not

for psychological analysis and that his intention is neither psychological nor moral analysis. The names of his characters in Hayavadana are not real names, they themselves are masks for the human characteristics. As such, they represent the human beings with whom one can find the similarity; 'Padmini' is not the real name but it is after one of the six types into which Vatsyayana classified all women. 'Devadatta' is a formal mode of addressing a stranger and 'Kapila' is a dark person.

Usually in a folk drama, as presented in the temple festivals of Aiyana, a form of village deity, the actors wear a traditional mask, the dummy figure of a horse's body which is made of light-weighted materials such as jute, paper and decorated with glass) and the cloth at the sides of the dummy swings to and fro covering the legs of the dancer. The dancers tie wooden legs to their feet so that sound is evoked when they are tapped on the floor, which sound like the hooves of the horse. The dancer brandishes either a sword or a whip. Here also, the actor who wears the mask of a horse's face and the introduction of a perfect horse at the end of the story are all adhering to the Poikal Kuthirai (dressed as a horse), Kaalai Attam (dressed as a bull), Karadi Attam (dressed as a bear) folklore tradition of men wearing masks depicting animals. Karnad uses the conventions and motifs of folk tales and folk theatre such as masks, curtains, dolls and the story within the story to create a horrible but strange world. The masks are found at different contexts:

The horse man or Hyavadhana also wears mask to the amusement of the audience. Bhagavata instructs him to

"take off that stupid mask! You won't? – Then I'll have to do it myself."

When Goddess Kali gives Padmini a chance to revive her dead husband and lover, "Eagerly Padmini puts the heads-that is, the masks- back. But in her excitement she mixes them up so that Devadatta's mask goes to Kapila's body and vice versa".

After the transposed heads, the actors wear the face masks to show the difference in their appearance.

## 2.7 Music and songs

In the first act: The stage direction is as follows:

The musicians and Bhagavata sit on a table kept centre stage; Bhagavata sings verses in praise of Ganesha, accompanied by the musicians.

“O Elephant headed Herambha..... We pay homage to you and start our play”

The ‘elephant headed’ Ganesha seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness: yet that ‘mangalamoorty’ intends to signify by his very appearance that the completeness of God is beyond human comprehension.

Both music and songs are profusely used in the course of the play that they become prologue and epilogue of every action in the play.

The female chorus foretells Padmini’s action in the very beginning of the drama by songs sung in blank verse.

“Female chorus: (sings) why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many petalled, many flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?

Bhagavata: (sings) They forgot themselves and took off the bodies. And she took the laughing heads, and held them high so the pouring blood bathed her, coloured her red. Then she danced around and sang.

Female chorus: (sings) A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm. I have neither regret nor shame. The blood pours into the earth and a song branches out in the sky”.

## 2.8 Mime

For miming: When Padmini asks Kapila about ‘that glorious tree’ of a lady’s fortune, Kapila climbs the tree like an ape and brings the flowers.

Kapila comes in, miming a whole load of flowers in his arms and hands. He pours them out in front of her. There are many instances wherein Padmini, Bhagavata, Devadatta and Kapila are miming.

## 2.9 Curtain

The half curtain/ white curtain is quite often used and removed. The painted curtains are also used for the purpose of creating scenes. The stage assistants are given instructions to change the curtains every now and then. Screen with the funeral pyre painted placed as the backdrop to show the ‘Sathi’ committed by Padmini.

## 2.10 The space and locale

As in the traditional Indian theatre, Hayavadana creates the space and locale through the dialogues and songs of chorus and narration of Bhagavata. Repetition, superimposition, simultaneous speaking and alternation of the speech between the character and the chorus are some of the devices of speech delivery. For example, Kapila mimes the search for the double headed bird on the door on the street where Padmini lives. The temple scene where the friends cut off their heads is created with the curtain which has a picture of Goddess Kali on it and a sword is placed before it by Bhagavata himself.

## 3.0 Exchange of imagination

Like many rural folk plays, ‘Hayavadana’ depends on the exchange of imagination between the performer and audience. The dialogues help build up the imagination of the audience in visualising the bygone incidents and the past which could not be depicted on stage. The repeated reference to the present condition of Padmini informs the audience that she is pregnant with Devadatta’s child.

In Act II when the screen informs the audience about the sati that Padmini is performing, Bhagavata mystifies the entire lore as the tribal version of “full blossomed tree of the fortunate lady” while the female chorus hilariously justifies the lady’s love for two men and the aftermath

## 4.0 The Use of Images and Folk Tradition

The dramatist brings in the images of the river and scare crow in the chorus to denote the absurdity of human situation against the pervading potency of nature wherein the human being is as absurd as a scare crow.

Bhagavata sings, "Like cocks in a pit we dance – he and I... foot woven with foot, eye soldered to eye...." to narrate there was a severe sword fight.

In Act II, when Padmini wants her husband to visit Ujjain fair, she says, "..... It's unlucky to keep torn dolls at home...."- This is a customary practice in Indian households.

### 5.0 Comical treatment of the story and characters

A duel that cuts off the lives of the friends brings the riddle of life to a close. Neither the death of the friends nor the sati of Padmini is presented as tragic. The folklore of Vikram and Betal finds a different dimensional depiction in the hands of Karnad. The transposed heads of Kapila and Devadatta find arduous to cope with the demands of the human body. The problem which originated at the friends falling in love with the same girl (Padmini) ends up in killing each other in a duel. The act is hilariously comic but has profound dramatic implications, par se one cannot deny the scene shows futility of mortal life before the designs of nature. The play wright says the logic takes over that the head decides the limb!

The horseman's search for completeness ends comically with his becoming complete horse (Kurtkoti 1973). In the first scene, the actor and Bhagavata try to pull off the mask of the horse-man. But they fail to accomplish it. The act is hilarious but can be termed as coarse comedy; probably it is aimed at the lower rung of audience. Bhagavata questions the identity of the child brought to the stage and decides it is a child of this city to be taken away from the tribal habitat. In a dramatic turn as in modern cinemas he identifies the child with its mole as that of Padmini.

When Hayavadana is ready to offer his head at the altar of Goddess Kali, the Goddess asks "Why don't you people go somewhere else if you

want to chop off your stupid heads?" Even before the horseman completes saying his wish to become a complete man the Goddess makes him a complete horse. Awaking the sleeping Goddess Kali and her thoughtless boon are the dramatist's way of mocking at the people's belief of praying for boon from gods and showing Goddess Kali on par with the human beings. At its best it is a wild comedy. Thus, seemingly unrelated and farfetched comical scenes gets get introduced as stage comedy.

"While the stage hands hold a white curtain in front of the frozen threesome, Bhagavata and others relax and sip tea" is a stand alone comedy strip in the enactment of the story.

### 6.0 The urban consciousness

Written by an intellectual, Hayavadana expresses the urban consciousness of the town bred protagonists who are worried about the identity rather than the moral crisis that arises by the transposed heads. While the humans have left the mortal world in their struggle to seek identity and escape from the tangled relationship, the horseman has changed into a complete horse to gallop on the stage with his animal energy, which only seems to be real and possible in this mundane world.

#### 6.1 The social context/social wisdom

According to Bansi Kaul (1985) folk plays imbibe the social wisdom that can be realised in deep thinking and reflecting. It reflects the people's beliefs and social ways.

In Act I, Hayavadana says, "My personal life has naturally been blameless. So I took interest in the social life of the nation- Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, ....." This is a kind of social wisdom the dramatist wishes the Indian population, especially those who would opt for public life for reasons known to them.

The treatment of the story in fact infuses the Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre proposal that a play should provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside. Brecht hoped to communicate that

the audience's reality was changeable. The actor's repeated reference to his intention of open urinating when the horse spoke in the human voice to disapprove the actor's behaviour is to instigate the audience against open urination. This, years ago when 'Swachh Bharat' was not in the air! When Swachh Bharat is the voice of the present day politicians, the dramatist lends voice against the open urination and raises the health consciousness in the urban audience.

Again when Bhagavata ends the play with puja to Lord Ganesha, the trio-Devadatta, Padmini and Kapila join the prayer to sing:

"Grant us O Lord, good rains, good crop,

Prosperity in poetry, Science, industry and other affairs.

Give the rulers of our country success in all endeavours and along with it, a little bit of sense."

While Gods are oblivious to human sufferings, awaking the sleeping Goddess Kali makes the audience laugh. Ironically, the Goddess tries to help the woman, but the woman fails in her nervousness and frivolously selfish desire. The 'exchanged heads' which thank Padmini initially are not to live in harmony with the bodies on which they are transposed show the changing perceptions of human beings.

The dramatic appearance of goddess immediately after the beheading is for the dramatist to laugh at the people who keep idle and approach her for every-thing in life. He makes her no different from the indifferent and insolent people who depend on her for prosperity to completeness. Albeit, the image of goddess Kali as a destroyer and preserver is made possible.

In this play, the dramatist describes Lord Ganesha as incomplete and laughs at the irony of invoking the blessings of an incomplete god for completing the stage performance of three incomplete protagonists of the main and sub-plot.

At times he presents himself as an atheist; however, we are shrewd to find out his motive behind his satirical and allegorical representations that he is a social reformer wanting people to think

on scientific terms. Karnad develops various folk conventions like music, chorus, and the amalgamation of human and non-human worlds in order to permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view.

## 6.2 Modernity in the Treatment of an ancient story

Through folktale and myth Karnad gives us an insight into the issues of modern life from an entirely new angle. Hence, *Hayavadana* is traditional yet modern. Vanashree Tripathy feels that "Karnad's confabulation of the classics with the folktales of the transposed heads and the story of a half-man, half-horse, playfully dilutes the prototypical themes (*Shakuntalam* and *Mrichhakatikam*), where the ideal balance between duty and passion is restored. *Hayavadana*, in exploring the realm of love: erotic man-woman, male bonding, parent-child, offers us insight into the desires, hopes, fulfillment and frustration it breeds". However, it is needless to say that the play slips into the realm of satirical comedy.

In a dramatic turn as in modern cinemas Bhagavata identifies the child with its mole as that of Padmini. Padmini says the child is that of Kapila because the child has the similar mole on its back.

"Kapila: Is that your son?

Padmini: Yes. And yours.

Kapila: Mine?

Padmini: Your body gave it to me."

Bhagavata questions the identity of the child brought to the stage and decides it is a child of this city to be taken away from the tribal habitat.

All these happen in the same act, and deliberately the five year old son of Padmini is brought to the proscenium to suggest the elapsed time and the close of the play.

The protagonist and his friend, the individuals with transposed heads find it so difficult to carry on the false identity that they commit homicide of their bodies in a sword fight. A world which bids adieu to the incomplete and incompetent victims of their own human passion is the ground for galloping animal energy which is the



future of this mundane and monotonous world in the days to come.

Hayavadana sings national anthem! The dramatist has drawn upon historical, folk and mythological theme to appease the drama fascination of the Indian audience. Hilariously he presents the contemporary issue of people singing the national anthem in hoarse voice, through the horse singing the national anthem.

As for the scenic descriptions, the dramatist is so conscious with the narration of the story that he is not oblivious to the other demands of the stage descriptions. The minute descriptions of stage settings prove the playwright's absorption of stage techniques for the effective presentation of the story along with its psychological inhibitions. The Bhagavata uses *varna* differences to describe Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, as belonging to different castes, which we consider as colouring the characters as belonging to medieval times when the caste system was significantly prevalent and in which Gods and men walked together; but the playwright says, "You cannot write about a family without writing about its caste" (The Hindu 2018).

### 7.0 Dramatic Dexterity of Karnad

In the post-colonial, independent India, writing a play, which was until then only a mere literary exercise, was understood fully by Karnad with the practical demands of a stage that required dramatic style and technique. Karnad's popularity as a dramatist lies in his ability to handle the traditional folk story on a stage imported from the west i.e the use of Proscenium technique of the European theatres. Certain scenes like the provision of 'a white curtain in front of Hayavadana in Act I and the instruction to the stage hand to lower the curtain, and in response which is "lowered by about a foot" are recurring instances through out the performance of the play. Further, when Padmini is said to perform sati, the dramatist brings in the proscenium for the rest of the play to be carried on. The curtain painted with the picture of blazing fire denotes the sati engulfs Padmini to take her away from this mortal world.

Karnad reflects in his preface, "At the most intense moment of self-expression, while my past had come to my aid with a readymade narrative within which I could contain and explore my insecurities, (the handicaps that he experienced as a creative writer to produce something concrete from what remained an abstract: only heard till then-giving space for each one's imagination) there had been no dramatic structure in my own tradition to which I could relate myself."

Talking of his use of techniques from folk theatre, Karnad says, "the energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values... the various conventions - the chorus, music, the seemingly unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds- permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view..... (Karnad, 1988)

If we read in between the lines, the original story which revolved on the ethics of marriage between a man and his wife, was adopted by Mann to ridicule the idea of the superiority of head over body (i.e) the mechanical notion of life which differentiates between body and soul. It is further carried on by Karnad not to imitate either the original or the adopted version but to question the ethical value of a married life when a partner is not sincere. Further, the gullibility of people in believing the narration is exemplified in the song of chorus which glorifies the woman as great pativratha when in truth she failed to be one.

One of the significant skills of Karnad, while dealing with myth is the transformation of religious myths into the non-religious ones. He transforms the religious myths to question as well as critique those myths. He makes certain changes in the names of the characters for he wanted the names not to be the reflection of the ancient myth entirely; he wanted the names to be generic/archetype. (Singh and Prabhabati Devi,2019)

He moved away from the regionalist tradition of Kannada literature and his plays reveal a modern outlook and spirit. What Girish Karnad says in his preface to 'Nagamandala' is also applicable to 'Hayavadana'; he says, "I write in Kannada. English is

the language of my adulthood. This translation must therefore be seen only as an approximation to the original." (Karnad, 1988)

To satisfy the postcolonial-Indian-urban audience's desire for knowledge and the practical treatment of actual human life and affairs in a drama, Karnad's play 'Hayavadana' projects the struggle for human identity in a world of tangled relationships. It is not only the physical and mental incoordination of the body and mind but the social stigma that nags the scholarly Devadatta, brings the drama to the gory end of the Seneca tragedies. However, the dramatist ends the play with a scope for reflection with his hilarious treatment of the parallel story of Hayavadana becoming a full-fledged animal with the thoughtless and hasty boon of Goddess Kali.

Interestingly, the main and the sub-plot of Hayavadana deal with the moral, psychological and philosophical aspect of the problem raising more important issues relating to the human existence. And hence his plays 'Hayavadana' and 'Naga Mandala' offer us a glimpse of the past to allow us to indulge in reflection to understand the contemporary world. (Singh and Prabhavati Devi 2019)

## 8.0 Conclusion

Girish Karnad, the playwright and actor, director and scholar, writer and administrator, translator and public intellectual is pragmatic when he observes in his interview with Bhageshree (2018), "Theatre is clearly not dead. One great strength of theatre is that you are responding to a live person, a live actor. It is an experience like listening to a live concert, which is very unlike listening to a tape". It is this perfect understanding of the theatre audience that has made Girish Karnad a perfect dramatist with a contribution of twelve plays which were originally written in English and a few more in Kannada of which Hayavadana is one and the most performed of his plays.

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