

Hayavadana and Tughlaq: Portrayal of Problem of Identity

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Abstract: Girish Karnad's second play is Tughlaq (1964). Karnad wrote this play in Kannada and later on translated it into English. This play also met with immediate success, and this brought him name, fame and glory. In the period after this publication, Karnad established himself as a first-ranking Indo-Anglian dramatists. Girish Karnad was told by someone that there were no good history plays in India and so he decided to write one. He delved deep into history beginning with Ishwari Prasad. According to Karnad, Tughlaq was the most extraordinary character to ascend the throne of Delhi. The staging of Tughlaq was tremendously successful event. Tughlaq is basically a play about the overambitious, yet righteous king Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. Karnad's Tughlaq is also considered as a persuasive allegory on the Nehruvian era.

Karnad's Hayavadana (1971) is an experiment on a theme from folk-tale. Karnad has taken the plot of the play from Kathasaritsagara, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. However, it is chiefly based on Thomas Mann's retelling of the story of The Transposed Heads. Hayavadana by Karnad poses the problem of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. Karnad has successfully made use of conventions and motifs taken from folk-tales and folk-theatre.

Key Words: Problem of Superiority, Incompleteness, Identity and Imperfection

INTRODUCTION

Hayavadana:

The main theme in Hayavadana is the problem of the superiority of mind over body, and greed. The supposed gap between the body and the mind leads to the problem of the struggle for supremacy of one over the other for there is a tendency to differentiate between the two.

During the ancient times, human beings were believed to have a perfect unity of body and mind as he lived in the midst of nature. Human life was then thought to be simple, straightforward and devoid of any complexity. However, with the development of civilization in due course of time, both, body and mind were believed to have lost that unique oneness leading to the birth of suffering since human beings tore themselves always from the cosmic unity that nature provides them.

Hayavadana begins with the worship of the Lord Ganesha, who is a god with the head and trunk of an elephant, and is, thus, seen among non-Hindus as one representing incompleteness. Even so, in the Indian tradition every good beginning is considered to be incomplete without invoking him. The Bhagavata, thus, offers a prayer to him:

“May Vigneshwara, the destroyer of obstacles, who removes all hurdles and crowns all endeavours with success, bless our performance now. An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly- whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Vakratunda Mahakaya, with his crooked face and distorted body, is the Lord and Master of success and Perfection?”

The incompleteness is to be found in the case with Hayavadana too, though with a difference. Hayavadana is not a god but a horse-headed man. He was born from the union of his mother with a white stallion whom she had married. The typical state of his existence is the source of a crisis of identity for him. Even other two characters Devadatta and Kapila also seem to lack the unity of mind and body, for if the former has intellect, the later enjoys physical prowess. Though the transposition of heads seems to solve the problem for a while, this relief is short-lived. Devadatta achieves completeness with an intelligent head and powerful body, but with Kapila's head on his shoulders, he loses his intellectual edge and grows a muscular body. Similarly, Devadatta's head

over Kapila's shoulders lead to his loss of interest in the gym and sports and he transforms into a poet that Devadatta who develops interest in reading and writing, a profession which Devadatta has inherited from his elders. Padmini who had ended up transposing the heads in heart-broken that her dream of achieving a cross between Devadatta and Kapila, lies shattered, and she is once again back to square one.

Devadatta and Kapila are friends though each is unlike the other. In the beginning of the play, the Bhagavata describes them as one body and one mind. It is not as if they differ from each other only in body and mind, for if Devadatta is a Brahmin, Kapila is an ironsmith, making them unequal in terms of varnas. Kapila kills himself and this act of killing is taken to be the product not of friendship but one born out of the fear of the possibility of being accused of having an illicit relationship with Padmini, and for killing Devadatta. Padmini falls in love with Kapila in desperation because Devadatta is unable to respond to her love but soon realizes that Kapila can satisfy her physical needs but is unable to rouse in her feelings of deep love she had for the intellect in Devadatta. This can be explained in terms of what we know about Hayavadana's mother, who felt it better to be a complete mare than to go with her stallion turned-Gandharva husband to his heavenly abode. Goddess Kali transforms Hayavadana, a horse-headed man into a horse and not a man in an act of mercy.

Devadatta and Kapila are distinct one from the other, and hardly seem to have any common traits that would bind them in friendship for long. Padmini, instead of devoting herself to one of the two, desires for what she finds best in each of them. Padmini's yearning to get the best in one creates complications in the play. A clear message that emerges from her experience is that perfection is illusory and next to impossible in the world.

Thus, the play presents the theme of incompleteness in rather humorous way. Every now and then, readers are made to realize that perfection is impossible.

Hayavadana carries this particular theme in the play. He is not at all comfortable with his imperfection and goes out in search of completeness and, in doing so, loses even what he possesses i.e. human body. The play seems to suggest that one must be satisfied and content with whatever one possesses and that no search for perfection would ever be complete.

Hayavadana revolves around two problems. The moral problem found in the main plot and the philosophical problem in the sub-plot. The problem of identity is to be considered as moral problem. The transposition of heads raises the question about which of the two men is her real husband. Since the Indian philosophy accords more importance to the head, Devadatta is able to get back Padmini. It appears as if, Karnad were refusing Thomas Mann's philosophy, which says that the body is capable of achieving human aspirations. Karnad applies the Greek mythos to circumvent problems of ethics. The second problem operates at philosophical level. Whenever an individual fights against the moral code of conduct, he is faced with conflict. The same is the case with Padmini. Each of us has one or the other limitation and must learn to accept it. No modern civilization would accept the practice of polyandry. Padmini must exercise her choice and select either Kapila or Devadatta because she cannot choose to have both of them. This is the point that triggers feelings of jealousy in the men, causing them to kill each other for the love of Padmini. Their old friendship ends due to their desire to have Padmini exclusively.

Another theme in the play is one of responsibility. As Devadatta's wife, Padmini was expected to be true to her husband- a responsibility she chooses to ignore. As a mother she was expected to take responsibility for her child but she chooses to throw herself into the funeral pyre of her husband and her paramour. After transposing the heads she tells Kapila:

"It is my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I am going with your body. Let that cheer you up."

The play also projects the theme of karma which states that as you sow so you reap. The Bhagavata asks Hayavadana about what he did in his previous or the present birth to deserve what he got by way of present punishment.

Tughlaq

Karnad presents the problem of identity as the main theme of the play Tughlaq. The problem of identity in Tughlaq operates at several levels. It operates at the level of characters as well as at the thematic level in characters Aziz and Sheikh Immamuddin. Aziz is a Dhobhi who, learns early in life that one can earn wealth only through foul means. He chooses to adopt foul means to earn name and fame and lead a life of comfort. He

continues to change his identity throughout the play to achieve his goal in life. Thus, we find him performing several roles. When the play opens, we find him as a Hindu Brahmin, Vishnuprasad. He chooses to change his guise again and again for his own benefit like, for example, for getting a Government job. Thus, the money that should have gone to the real Vishnuprasad ends up with Aziz, who presents himself in the court as Vishnuprasad. He plays the role of Vishnuprasad with such finesse that his constant companion, Aazam also fails to recognize him. Aazam is also mistaken when he inches close to "Vishnuprasad" to pick his pocket.

When Tughlaq shifts his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, Aziz changes himself into to a robber. Very soon he had a meeting with a holy man named Abbasid Ghiyasuddin. He kills Abbasid secretly and takes his place as Abbasid Ghiyasuddin. Dissatisfied with merely the Government job and silver dinars, he wants the sultan to salute him and he knows that he could manage that only if he were to become Abbasid Ghiyasuddin. This is an example of Karnad's satire on contemporary political scene in India after independence. Aazam tries to convince Aziz that he should remain satisfied with whatever he has got. Aziz responds this saying:

"You are a hopeless case, you know pathetic! You have been living in Delhi for so many years and you are as stupid as ever. Look at me only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world politics! My dear fellow, that is where our future is politic! It is a beautiful world, wealth, success, position, power and yet it is full of brainless people, people with not idea in their head when I think of all the tricks. I used in our village to pinch a few torn clothes from people. If one uses half that intelligence here – one can get robes of power. And not have to pinch them either yet them: It is a fantastic world."

Aziz's make-over as Ghiyasuddin fools the Sultan, to recognize it. Of course, the Sultan has never formally seen Abbasid. He had seen Aziz in the guise of Vishnuprasad.

The problem of identity at the physical level operates through one more character, Sheikh Immamuddin. Immamuddin, who is a holy saint. Immamuddin openly criticizes the Sultan and his administration in his public speeches. He hates him for his sympathy for non-muslims. His speeches cause communal tensions in Kanpur and Delhi. It is a co-incidence that the facial features of Immamuddin are such that they make him resemble the Sultan. The empire is challenged by the sultan's rebellious friend Ain-ul-mulk, whom the Sultan wants to defeat. He requests Sheikh Immamuddin to go to Ain-ul-mulk as his envoy and to bring him round to sign a treaty. Immamuddin is putted up agrees to do the Sultan's bidding though the Sultan wants his look-alike to be mistaken for the Sultan himself and be killed.

Ain-ul-mulk kills Immamuddin, taking him to be the Sultan himself and is caught. There is also a character called Nazib, who is the vizier to Tughlaq. He is commissioned to advise the Sultan on the matters of state. Nazib wishes to see his Sultan rule his empire as only responsible king should. He is a friend, philosopher and guide to the Sultan, and shares his joys and sorrows. The problem with Nazib is that though he is a Hindu by birth, he converts to Islam. Tughlaq's step-mother knows this and is worried that Nazib may misguide her son (the Sultan) and create problems for him due to his Hindu origin. The reality is completely different. The result is that he is killed later on in the play.

CONCLUSION

Girish Karnad has proved his genius in creating effective and significant plays, which are a perfect combination of plot, characters, style, setting and language. The unity of all these features contributes to the creation of a complete drama which establishes him as one of the greatest dramatists in Indian English literature. He did have the skill of transforming any situation into an aesthetic experience, as pointed out by Kiritnath Kurkoti, Karnad achieved great success as a dramatist. Had he not devoted his time to the films, he would have surely been one of the most profile dramatists in Indian English literature, and would have got recognition for his technique.

Karnad's Tughlaq is one of the masterpieces and will have a long run in terms of being performed, read and enjoyed in the world of art and literature. It can be considered quite easily as a great classic among the Indo-Anglian drama. Karnad's depiction of political chaos in Tughlaq unconsciously reminds a large number of his readers of the Nehruvian era in Indian political history when it was published. Be it as it may, Karnad explains that this was mere coincidence since it applies to the Indian political scene even in the later years.

Girish Karnad's Tughlaq is a play that appears to be a search for historical relevance. Veena Noble Dass passing has made a passing comment on the historical relevance in Karnad's plays, stating:

“... Girish Karnad, the noted Kannada plays Wright went back to myths and legends and made them a vehicle of a new vision.”

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the study of the play is that Tughlaq deals with the search for identity. Tughlaq makes an attempt to find his identity in different ways in the play. First of all, he makes effort to base his actions on his high ideals. Then he goes on to making use of a highly imaginative plan in order to find his relevance in history. No matter what he does, he fails to make a mark, which is why his place in history is one of a confused ruler. His attempts to find relevance lead him to resort to murders and blood-shed rather than engage in good governance. Thus, Karnad has exploited a set of historical events in Tughlaq's reign to draw parallels with those that take place in modern history of India.

Similarly Hayavadana has won acclaim and will remain etched in Indian English drama. Karnad's use of myth in Hayavadana enables him to succeed in wearing a plot and putting a sub plot with it so as to give it great appeal to modern leadership.

Hayavadana also deals with the theme of search for identity and of human relationship. Karnad successfully projects the theme of the search for identity. Hayavadana, a horse headed man born of a Karnatic princess who ends up somehow choosing a horse as her husband. The horse is actually a cursed gandharva. This union produces Hayavadana, who carries human body from his mother and horse-head with the mane going with it from his father. Hayavadana wants to be complete being and, therefore, goes to places of worship, does everything to attain completeness, and a complete identity. Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini are also found engaged in a search for identity in the play.

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