Girish Karnad's Hayavadana: An Archetype of Experiential

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Borrowing few lines from 'Identity Of A Person' written by Sylvia Chidi, we can throw some light on the question of Identity or Existence around which a human being is revolving around throughout his life.

"Identity of a person
Identity signifies complexity
Identity identifies with reality
Identity is the bearer of all vanity
how does a person identify with identity?
You define yourself based on what?
They say, they say
you're kind or moral based on what?
Or
you're a genius and shrewd based on what?"

The term Existentialism was applied to the work of certain late 19th and 20th century philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences, shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject- not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual. In existentialism, the individual's starting point is characterized by what has been called "the existential attitude" or a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world. Soren Kierkegaard proposed that 'each individual- not society or religion- is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely.'

Jean Paul Sartre was the first prominent existentialist philosopher to adopt the term as a self-description. He writes in his work 'Existentialism is a Humanism':

"...Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world- and defines himself afterwards."

What makes this current of inquiry distinct is not its concern with 'Existence' in general, but rather its claim that thinking about human existence requires new categories not found in the conceptual repertoire of ancient or modern thought; human beings can be understood neither as substances with fixed properties, not as subjects interacting with a world of objects. In Literature, existentialism makes "the characters to experience some kind of mental or spiritual breakdown in which they begin to question the meaning of reality and existence."

Hayavadana is Karnad's one of the earliest plays that accomplishes a remarkable renewal of indigenous Indian Dramatic traditions. Its framework subsumes the most popular as well as obscure or even extinct classical, ethnic and rural theatre conventions. Myth, legend, mimes, ballad, mask,

magic,music,dance, parable, puppetry; scores of stage effects interest to construct the story of Hayavadana, a horse head man and the amatory story of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila.

Robert Browning's "And thus we half-men struggle" (Andrea del Sarto) could very well be the motif for Girish Karnad's experimental play *Hayavadana* is a memorable treatment of the existential theme of the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition. This theme is suggested in the play itself in phrases such as "search for completeness "and "this mad dance of incompleteness." Karnad's interpretation of the ancient Indian story not only differs substantially from his originals but also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with new meaning, which has an urgent relevance to present day thinking about men and his world.

Modern age dramas take up as their themes- the modern man's inescapable predicament in the present day society such as alienation, dislocation of personality, vacuity, angst. The modern man in his attempt to free himself from this dilemma ends up disrupting the natural order who ultimately finds himself entrapped in a more mazy situation that leaves him with no alternative other than suicide. This suicidal condition of the modern man is effectively dealt in Karnad's *Hayavadana.*

As J.W.Syed States in his 'Expressionism in the Twentieth Century Literature':

Expressionism as a literary and artistic movement, flourished in Europe, particularly in Germany between 1914 and 1924... Expressionism, like Romanticism, was a voice of protest against the whole materialistic and mechanical trend of modern technological and industrial civilization which reduces man to a 'robot' alienates him from his own essential nature and makes him a prey to purposeless, tedious and meaningless existence. The essence of Expressionist literature seems to be the depiction of man's predicament of sorrow and suffering and the purification that sorrow and suffering bring. Zola Ibsen's 'Naturalism' exhibited man as the product and victim of heredity, environment and instinct; and naturalistic drama presented environment, and instinct on the stage, the beast in man, degradation, disease, poverty and sexual license.

The plot of *Hayavadana* comes from 'Kathasaritsagara', an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. But karnad has borrowed it through Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in 'The Transposed Heads'. The play tends to exhibit the confused state of the modern man- his dislocated 'self' and his 'alienated soul' as also the disintegration of his personality both ethically and morally- in this modernistic society. Thomas Mann has himself pointed out the significance of his version of the story thus:" the world is not made that spirit is fated to love only spirit, and beauty only beauty."(Mukherjee 137). If Mann's aim was to stress the ironic impossibility of uniting perfectly the spirit and the flesh in human life, Karnad tries to pose existential ideas like the problem of 'Being' and the metaphysical anguish of the human condition. For this he combines the transposed heads plot with the Hayavadana story, which is entirely his own invention.

When the play opens, Devadatta and Kapila are the closer of friends-'one mind, one heart', as the Bhagavata describes them. Devadatta is a man of intellect, Kapila a man of the body. Their relation gets complicated when Devadatta marries Padmini. Kapila falls in love with Padmini and she too starts drifting towards him. The friends kill themselves and in a scene, hilariously comic but at the same time full of profound dramatic implications, Padmini transposes their

heads, giving Devadatta Kapila's body and Kapila Devadatta's. The result is a confusion of identities which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. The sub- plot of 'Hayavadana', the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. The horse- man's search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the UTTAMANGA, the human head!

The play starts with the Praise of Lord Ganesha who is described as the destroyer of all obstacles. Words cannot adequately describe the glory of this God who has an embodiment of imperfection and incompleteness. Yet the mystery about him is that he is regarded as the Lord and master of success and Perfection and an image of purity, holiness and kindness.

"O Elephant- headed Herambha

Whose flag is victory...

O Single- risked destroyer of incompleteness,

We pay homage to you and start our play." (Pg-1)

Karnad begins to decolonize a way of seeing when he begins *Hayavadana* with a Ganesha puja. To see Ganesha as a deity in the context of a ritual is to receive darshan. Karnad asks the spectators to see Ganesha in four different ways simultaneously: on stage Ganesha is a mythological figure who is the subject of some wonderful stories that provide an interesting comment on the central story of the play; he is a character in karnad's play; he is a 'murthi', or actual manifestation of a deity, and he is, in karnath's production, a little girl wearing a red mask who sometimes "breaks character". None of these ways of seeing Ganesha cancels out the other. This form of multiple viewing is what cultural critic 'Henry Jenkins' refers to as "double viewing", which happens when a spectator sees from several perspectives at once or simultaneously perceives many realities. (Mukherjee 152). In Karnad's *Hayavadana*- Ganesha, representing a perfect blend of three different realms of experience- the divine, the human and the animal- is also "the destroyer of incompleteness." Though Ganesha is known as the ' remover of incompleteness', he is neither mentioned nor listed among the Gods appealed to by Hayavadana in this matter.

Hayavadana conjures an idyllic and pastoral ambience where many characters, backgrounds and speech types meet. The playwright behind the character draws upon a vast pool of scripts. What surfaces nonetheless is a language resonant with pleasing rhythm and highly controlled and balanced prose, more colloquial than formal in its effort to grant individual human status to the characters.

In the parable dealing with human longing for perfection, Hayavadana, neither a complete man nor a complete horse, is a counterpart to the story of Devadatta and Kapila. The horse comic- pathetic story provides us with a fairytale romance. The love story of his mother is a variation of the on- going love story of Padmini. Hayavadana's mother was a princess of Karnataka, a very beautiful girl who in a swayamvara, instead of choosing the Prince of Arabia, chose to marry his white stallion. Hayavadana, the offspring of this marriage is doomed to suffer a pathetic isolation- the tragedy if not belonging to either the race of horses or the humans. The main problem posed by Karnad through Hayavadana is not simply how he seeks completeness to become either a man or a horse; it is more of 'why' he is that why? Who is responsible for what had happened to him? When Hayavadana says that "Only I- the child of their marriage was left behind", there is a sort of intense dislike expressed about his parents.

He possesses all the qualities of the humans but has an equine face. As a result he belongs neither in the human nor in the animal world. He asks Bhagvata:

"...but where is my society? Where? You must help me to become a complete man, Bhagvata sir. Buthow? What can I do?"(Pg-9)

He goes to the Kali temple and threatens to chop off his head (a motif which establishes a firm link between the Hayavadana story and the transposed head plot) and once again, as in the main plot, the goddess ambiguous boon creates another problem while solving one.

The lines by Kranthi Pothineni in 'Die to Live' tell the plight of Hayavadana:

"My identity is questioned

My existence is questioned

Questioned to erase me

From this globe forever

By my own creators...

I may lose my image

And existence forever

Whatever may happen

I will fight the tyrant

And will die with honour

So at least my name remains."

In response to Hayavadana's prayer, "make me complete", the goddess makes him a complete horse, not a complete man and in addition to this, Hayavadana still retains his human voice. His liberation is complete only when the five- year old son of the woman in the transposed head story, asks him to laugh and the laughter soon turns into a proper neigh. The significance of the fact is that his final, total liberation comes through laughter at the bidding of childlike curiosity, wonder and amusement at the sheer incongruity of life in order to achieve integration, though on a lower level of existence.

Padmini's child appears to be affected with the ongoing existential crisis. The boy refuses to communicate with any person but is passionately attached to his dolls, resisting fiercely any attempt on the part of anyone even to touch them. This suggests his absorption in a world, in which he has no desire to emerge. The sight of a laughing horse, however, suddenly breaks the barrier, as it is this laughter that restores him to normalcy, after which he drops the dolls. Both Hayavadana and the child have learnt the same lesson, but Hayavadana has learnt it rather late in life, and this has inevitably reduced the quality of his existence, the child's realisation has come in time and the future belongs to it. As Jon Evans in 'Identiry- the bully' says:

"They all try to look the same

All try to give themselves a name

Pick on the boy who is all alone

Just because his identity is his own

What has the world come to?

All this wrong that people do

Just for the image they want to show

Down the evil path they seem to go."

Padmini's child appears to be affected with the ongoing existential crisis in the life of his parents who always seem to be grappling with their own enigmatic existence. The son of Devadatta becomes an orphan and is initially accepted by the forest people as Kapila's son. Soon rejected by them, he is an alienated creature, dumb and morose. He is hopelessly incomplete, for he has lost the child's natural ability to laugh and wonder at things around him. The play presents a contrast in the personality of the child and that of the dolls- while the child is unable to speak anything, dolls are endowed with speaking skills and are aware to every other activity that takes place in the lives of the major characters. The child biologically belongs to Devadatta's head and body; however, it exhibits qualities of Kapila in its violence and unintelligible activities. Moreover, the child prefers the horse to human. Therefore, Karnad's primary motive was to ponder upon the significance of the body in one's identity and hence reverses the dichotomy head/body in his title.

The sexually explicit portrayal of Padmini upon the stage of Hayavadana invokes a representational mode of projecting female body as a sexualized object. Padmini's presentation through her changing circumstances from the figure of heavenly beauty to a figure of terrestrial inconsistency legitimizes a dominant patriarchal ideology. She seems to be a perfect character in her outward appearance but in fact her imperfectness lies in her indecisiveness in making an apt and correct choice. The two- headed bird engraved at the door of her house is sprightly symbolic of her own dual-mindedness or her double personality. The female song in *Hayavadana* by the female chorus brings into play the identity crisis which pervades the whole theme:

 "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. (Pg-64)"

The Freudian issue revolves around sexuality. Kapila notices at first sight the sexuality that informs Padmini's body and mind. That is why he thinks that she is too fast for his gentle friend, Devadatta. His apprehension turns out to be true. After marriage, Padmini remains unsatisfied sexually and therefore drifts towards the healthy and manly Kapila. After the transposition, Devadatta and Kapila naturally became fragmented creatures, while Padmini, torn between the two, is also like a house divided. Padmini's desire for a complete man raises a mark for the existence of both Devadatta and Kapila as she was the sole reason for their exchanged bodies. Their identities get messed up in the temple of the Goddess Kali when both kill themselves. Padmini is then told by the Goddess to join the heads of the respective bodies. But in her haste and confusion she joins Devadatta's head to kapila's body and vice-versa. A feature characteristic of the Indian ethos is the effortless bringing together on the same plane of the human, the supernatural and the inanimate worlds, "willing suspension of disbelief" being caused by endowing supernatural beings and inanimate creatures with human faults

and foibles. This Goddess Kali, who restores the dead friends to life, is presented as a sleepy, bored and cynical curmudgeon.

After the heads got mixed up, both Devadatta and Kapila were extremely happy. As the text says: " what a good mix!

No more tricks!

Is this one that

Or that one this?

Ho! Ho!"(Pg-35)

But soon they have to confront the question:"who is the real Devadatta and who the real Kapila is?" Kapila who has now got Devadatta's body, claims Padmini as his wife. His argument is that it was his hand which received her in marriage and it is his seed that is in her womb. On the other hand, the man with Devadatta's head on Kapila's body claims Padmini as his wife. His argument is that according to the scriptures the head is the supreme limb of the human body. Padmini also disputes the claim of Kapila, who has now Devadatta's body. With the help of some sage the decision is being taken and she goes with Devadatta's head and kapila's body bidding farewell to Kapila's head. Here at this point she was happy as she got the complete man with masculine body and sharp mind.

"...I am satisfied- I see, dance, laugh, sing;

As the hugging and loving bed- fellow

Sleeps at my side through the night..." (3-song of myself)

Padmini's quest brings her to some resolution and we gather from her silence to the question," could then she have accompanied Kapila (Devadatta with kapila's head), had the Rishi pronounced his judgment in his favour," makes us infer that in the " mad dance of incompleteness" body may be a loser sometimes but in love, Kapila the body wins after all rhetorics. The body is the consciousness of being made of sensation, inner tensions, aches, pains, the throbbing of blood and the object of beauty. It is as Thomas Mann says in his 'The Transposed Heads'," the instrument in the fulfillment of human destiny." (Tripathi 80). Padmini's juxtaposition of kapila's strong body and Devadatta's brilliant head miserably fails to achieve unification because their heads carry Apollonian ego in themselves. For the same reason, Devadatta and Kapila become their old selves again. Padmini desires completeness and in the discussion on the subject that ensues with Kapila, she doesn't hesitate to refer to

"Your body bathed in a river, swam and danced in it. Shouldn't your head know what river it was, what swim? Your head too must submerge in that river...until that's done, you will continue to be incomplete."(Pg-58)

Human desire for completeness represented by Padmini ends in a fiasco as the transposition of heads gradually proves that it is the mind that rules. In Act 2 of Hayavadana, the moot question,"to whom Padmini belongs," could have been solved, had Padmini consented to Draupadi like solution as Kapila had made a suggestion to resolve the issue. But she rejects it. Love of the two friends for the same woman dries them to extremes of frenzy and Bhagvata sings, "they forgot themselves and took

off their 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." (Tripathi 63)

Her identity or existence of a married woman is gone with the death of both. As she remarks: " O God! What's this? Both! Both (Pg-31)

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 personally are basically at war with each other and hence the attempt ends disastrously in destruction for both woman and man. Integration cannot be achieved by trying to reconcile the irreconcilable, but by accepting cheerfully the fundamental disharmony in human life.

The end of the play is quite interesting. A duel leaves both the friends dead and subsequently Sati of Padmini has been presented. But this end is not tragic. The deaths serve the absurdity of the situation. What Karnad wants to convey is that the world is of incomplete individuals, indifferent dolls that speak. The world is indifferent to the desires and frustrations, joys and sorrow of human beings. The play depicts the realm of incomplete individuals, magnanimous gods, of vocal dolls and mute children, a world apathetic to the longings and frustrations, ecstasies and miseries of human beings.

According to Krishna Gandhi, in Hayavadana:

"the theme of the play is an old one...man's yearning for completeness, for perfection. It is this yearning which makes people restless in their ordinary existence, and makes them reach out for extraordinary things... But the ideal of perfection itself is ambiguous. The character of Hayavadana is invented as an example of this ambiguity." (Chinnasami)

To conclude it can be said that the major reality of this world is self- division. Both man and society are self- divided and disturbing antinomies struggling for supremacy. The problem of Hayavadana, alienation, absurdity, incompleteness and search for identity are central of the plays of Karnad. Incompleteness is an inescapable and insurmountable reality. Through the story of Padmini- Devadatta- Kapila, Karnad seems to ask like Keats, (Lamia 229-230: part2)

"Do not all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy?" Out of the pleasure principle that fantasy provides them, they must learn to come to terms with the 'reality principle' of social norms and bear the tragic consequences.

About the Evolution of Consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says: "All evolution in essence is a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from mind into spirit. It is this that must be the method of our growth from a mental into a spiritual and supra mental manifestation, out of a still half- animal humanity into a divine being and a divine living." (Thakur 47) Therefore, evolution is not a visible concrete manifestation but rather a translocation of thought through a conscious move within, that result in an involution. Thus, an existentialist predicament of a modern man is conveyed through strong, though incomplete individuals, who are locked in intense psychological and philosophical conflicts.

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