

MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE WORKS OF GIRISH KARNAD WITH REFERENCE TO HAYAVADANA, THE FIRE AND THE RAIN AND NAGMANDALA

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Abstract:

Indian literature written in English language has its base nthe myth that has been passed on from generations. Like many Indian English writers writing in English GirishKarnad is of no exception. In his writings the mythological aspects echo throughout. His plays like 'Hayavadana', 'The Fire and The Rplayhain' and 'Nagmandala' are based on the myths but Karnad gives an approach to myth in a different way. His plays originate from the myths of Indian legends but in the course of the play hee insert some of the acts which make us rethink about depending on God, especially through the man-God encounter acts.

Key words:

Myth, Legends, Pooja, God, Naga ,Self Sacrifice

Introducton:

As India is filled with numberless of Gods and Goddesses it can be said as a land of myths. History bears proof that in every age, religion, place and dynasty Indians have expressed their ardent desire to be enriched by myths and mythologies. Mythology themes in Indian literature have been influenced by the two great epics--Ramayana and Mahabharata. G.S Kerk opines, "Myth seems to posse's essential properties like their fantasy, their freedom to develop and their complex structure". Northrop Frye asserts, "myth is primarily a certain type of story. The things that happen in myth are the things that happen only in stories: they are in a self- contained literary world". Myths are the tales that have been passed on from one generation to another and they have become traditional. Most of the mythical literature has been borrowed from the plots, sub-plots and further additional plots. It is quite amazing that the Indian writers have shown their talents by creating the mini parts of the plot into the major plays. GirishKarnad is one of such writers. GirishKarnad is a major dramatist of India who has significantly gone back to the roots of Indian myth, tradition and culture and has recreated the rich and vibrant picture of Indian society, culture and its people. GirishKarnad has used the ancient myth to

represent the contemporary society. It has to be noted that his use of myth is not only on positive aspects but on negative aspects as well. The explicit use of myth can be found in his plays---Hayavadana, The Fire and the Rain and Nagmandala.

The ancient Indian original of the main plot of Hayavadana is from 'Vetalpanchavimsati' a constituent of Somadeva's 'Kathasarithsagar'. There are 25 stories of King Vikrama and Vetala in it. Each of these stories poses a riddle at the end, which Vetala challenges the king to solve. Thomas Mann also wrote a short story "Transposed Heads" with the same subject of Identity crisis as in Hayavadana. While the Indian solution in "Vetalpanchavimsati" upholds idealism, the German solution n "Transposed Heads" is materialism. Aware of the extreme Nature of these options Karnad seems to hint at the middle course of humanism in Hayavadana.

GirishKarnad does not use Myth in his play in the entire story. He uses them as a part of the story but the whole story is based on those parts filled with myth. In HayavadanaKarnad used myth to show the weakness of man and the ignorance of the Gods and Goddesses. According to the folk drama convention, the image of the Lord Ganesha has to be brought to the stage for offering a pooja to Him for the success of the play. After his poojaBhagavatta sings a song in praise of Him. Though He is the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati, Lord Ganesha is incomplete and imperfect. Nevertheless he is 'the destroyer of incompleteness'. But in Hayavadana the image of Ganesha has another meaning. As Bhagavatta says "he has an elephant's head with a cracked belly" so is Hayavadana with a horse's head and a human body. Thus, the image of Lord Ganesha not only serves as a God for the success of the story but also as the curtain raiser which represents the further story.

It is during the middle part of the main plot of the play that the twist occurs in the life of the three characters---Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. The Kali of Mount Chitrakoot, who is the "Mother of all nature", appears in her own person as if to solve the problem but it is due to her carelessness that the identity crisis arises. When Devadatta and Kapila reach her temple and cut off their heads one after another separately, she is fast asleep. Later when Padmini is about to offer her head not only does the Goddess wake up and save her but also does she offers the boon to Padmini to restore life to the dead bodies of Devadatta and Kapila. In fact she wakes up from her sleep not because of Padmini's attempt to sacrifice herself but because of the noise made by Padmini. It has to be noted that the Goddess came to stop Padmini from Self sacrifice but she did not come to stop neither Devadatta nor Kapila when they beheaded themselves. Then after offering the boon to Padmini she fastens to go to sleep again and never to wake up. The Mother of all nature however does not pay heed to the helpless cries of Padmini to save her again when she had to undergo 'sati'. The Goddess's indifferent rather cruel attitude is a clear case of a divine malignity towards the human beings.

The sub-plot too is no less affected by the myths and supernatural beings. Among all the references that Hayavadana makes to the supernatural beings, his heavenly father, is noticeable though not acted by any character in the play. Hayavadana's father is a Celestial Being. Cursed by God Kubera for some act of misbehavior he turns into a horse. He comes to the Swayamvara of the princess of Karnataka, carrying the Prince of Araby. But the Princes did not like any of them. She looked at the handsome Prince sitting on his great white stallion and fainted. When she woke up she said that she would marry that horse. She didn't listen to anyone and married the horse. Such was the true love of the Princess. Hayavadana is the result of this marriage of fifteen years. But one morning the horse changes into his original shape of Gandharva (celestial being). Released from the curse he asked his wife

to accompany him to the heavenly abode. She agreed but on the condition that he should become the horse again. This enraged him and cursed her to become a horse herself. This is another instance of a supernatural interaction with the humans in 'Hayavadana' but proves to be unfavorable to the mortals. Hayavadana's father, despite being a father didn't perform his duty neither as a true husband nor as a true father. In fact he cursed his wife to be a horse herself. This was the gift she received from her husband whom she loved avoiding his physical features. She received a curse in return of love.

Goddess has her divine score against the human beings again when Hayavadana goes to her seeking completeness. On the advice of Bhagavatta, Hayavadana goes to the temple of Kali. He too threatens to chop his head similar to the main plot. As in the main plot Kali's boon created problem instead of solving, here too in response to Hayavadana's prayer, "make me complete" the Goddess makes him complete horse and not a complete man. Before he completes his prayer for complete man, the Goddess completes her sanction rather hastily and whimsically. Hayavadana becomes a complete horse much against his will but with a human voice. Hayavadana goes to the temple in order to seek the solution of his problem but instead of the ending his problem further increases. It is only when Hayavadana tries to make to five year old son of Padmini to laugh that Hayavadana starts neighing, finally making him a complete horse. This completeness of Hayavadana reminds of the image of Lord Ganesha, the destroyer of incompleteness. Thus, GirishKarnad has ironically used the supernatural characters as ignorant and irresponsible towards human beings. The main characters Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini and Hayavadana seek the help of God which represents the weaknesses of the human beings.

A Socio-cultural practice like sacrifice and self sacrifice can be found in Karnad's another play "The Fire and the Rain". Here too, he has twisted the myth into a superstitious belief. In "The Fire and the Rain" GirishKarnad has found his subject in the rather obscure myth of Yavakri that he had encountered decades earlier in C.Rajagopalachari's prose retelling of the Mahabharata. The myth of Yavakri occurs in chapters 135-138 of the VanaParva (Forest Canto) of the Mahabharata. It is narrated by the ascetic Lomasha to the Pandavas as they wander across the land during their exile. In "The Fire and the Rain" or "Agni Mattu Male" Karnad re-imagines the world of Hindu antiquity and constructs a story of passion, loss and sacrifice in the context of Vedic ritual, spiritual discipline and ethical differences between human agents and inter-related forms of performance still close to their origin.

The story of Yavakri in the Mahabharata is a cautionary tale about the misapplication of powers that human beings receive from the Gods after great penance. Yavakri, son of Bharadwaja acquires Universal knowledge of the Vedas from Indra after ten years of "tapasya"— rigorous spiritual discipline but uses it to molest Vishakha, daughter-in-law of Raibhya. But this act of Yavakri, the seeking of Universal knowledge directly from Gods and not from any human gurus can be regarded as an unjustified or immature act of Yavakri. But Knowledge doesn't bring wisdom to Yavakri. Therefore, through this play Karnad points out the danger of knowledge without wisdom. In the elaboration and alteration of the myth, Karnad forges between the principle characters and give them rounded personalities and inserts an ambiguous intentionality into their actions. Yavakri and Vishakha are not strangers in the play "The Fire and the Rain" but lovers whose relationship both precedes and follows Vishakha's marriage to Parvasu. This makes her more than merely a passive object of Yavakri's lust. It is only because of this thirst of Universal knowledge that Yavakri leaves Vishakha. For his selfishness he sacrifices his love Vishakha leaving her to marry Parvasu. After ten years of tapasya he returns back to her not other than for physical reasons. Instead of using his powers for something good he misuses it that ultimately brings his death. It has to be noted that the powers of Yavakri short lived with his death.

Before he could use his power for great things it vanishes. The real Vishakha also brings about Yavakri's death because of her very desire to keep him alive. The magical art of vengeance in the myth of "Mahabharata" turns into tragic irony in "The Fire and the Rain".

By killing his father Parvasu commits both patricide and brahmicide and thus pollutes the Yajna. Parvasu kills his father Raibhya though he is the Chief Priest of the holy Yajna. The Yajna is a holy or sacred activity but he pollutes it. According to the Hindu ritual, people can sit in the yajna only when they have bath and also they must have a non-vegetarian food or sometimes even without food (upwas) but Parvasu commits a great sin by killing his father. This creates an irony to the status of Parvasu as despite being the Chief Priest of the yajna he commits a sin. This act of him would have created an agitation among the public as the yajna is meant for pleasing the Gods so that they will get the rain. But after this sin he commits another sin by hiding his crime. He tries to put the blame of killing his father to his brother Arvasu but his self realization makes him to expiate himself in the same fire of yajna. But it is doubtful whether the people get rain because of the self expiation of Parvasu or not. The self sacrifice of Parvasu is an important part of the play but as a part of the yajna it is only a personal atonement. Through this scene GirishKarnad shows the self realization or the feeling of guiltiness among the people after committing a sin.

The same quality of active volition extends to the play's supernatural characters. In the Mahabharata version the demon (rakshasa) is a device for bringing about Yavakri's death. But in Karnad's play his return to the spirit world becomes entangled with painful ethical choices in the human blood. Raibhya creates the Demon to kill Yavakri. The Demon succeeds in killing Yavakri but in the later part of the play when the Demon requests Arvasu for his release it is quite puzzled. As India is filled with myth the people have been accustomed to the concept that the Demons are cruel, violent, bloodthirsty and loves to harm the human beings. But here the Demon himself is seeking release from the human world. When Nittilai is killed by her husband and brother Arvasu holds her and cries, pleased by Arvasu the God appears before him and offers a boon to him. At the time when Arvasu was about to ask for the life of Nittilai the Brahma Rakshasha interrupts and requests Arvasu for his release. Arvasu could not help but used the boon for the release of the Brahma Rakshasha. Thus, Arvasu sacrifices Nittilai for the sake of the well being of the people at large. Finally the redemptive act that ends the crisis within the community is not performance of either kind but—the yajna or the inner play but Arvasu's decision to sacrifice his happiness with Nittilai for the sake of the Brahma Rakshasha's release.

In the broadest sense, "The Fire and the Rain" is a drama of sacrifice and expiation. The fire sacrifice or the yajna is a ritual intended to end the community's suffering. But it is corrupted by Parvasu in multiple ways. His death is a form of personal atonement but the communal crisis is resolved through other painful resignation. Thus, GirishKarnad shows how the people depend on the Gods for sustenance which has both positive and negative results. Fire is used as a myth in "The Fire and The Rain". 'Fire', that is, 'Agni' is worshipped as a deity in Indian mythology all the rituals and rites are to be performed in the presence of this deity.

GirishKarnad's other play "Nagamandala" is of no exception from the mythical aspects. In this play he has twisted the myth of Karnataka even in a more complex way. The mythical plot and structure of the play has been presented through the life of the central character Rani. Similar to his "Hayavadana" GirishKarnad opens "Nagamandala" with the invocation of the God. But in this play the God's identity has not been disclosed,

“The presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified”

The broken idol of the God in the temple can be guessed as that of Lord Ganesha's because according to the Hindu mythology Lord Ganesha is worshiped in the opening of the play so that it would be a successful one. Similar to “Hayavadana” this play also revolves around the issue of identity crisis. In the course of the play Naga takes on the shape of Rani's husband and comes to visit her every night.

Rani's husband, Apanna takes her to his house after marriage. But Apanna treats her as a caretaker and as a servant, not as a wife. They have no physical union because Apanna is interested in a “concubine”. So he doesn't spend his night with his wife. He only comes to his home only for bathing and eating. Rani sacrifices herself faithfully as a wife. One day Kurudavva suggests her to spell a cast on Apanna so that she will get the pleasure as a wife. Kurudavva even provides her with the magical root. The taste of the root will open Apanna's eyes and will not visit the other women. The enchanting root is a ray of hope for innocent Rani. Later on, while cooking curry with the paste of the root she observes that it boils over, red as blood. She hesitates to serve the curry to her husband and puts it in that ant-hill where the cobra (Naga lives). It is after this incident that turns the life of Rani. As Rani has put the curry into that ant-hill, it happens that the cobra eats that curry. Thus the miraculous root to charm Apanna was mistakenly spelled on the cobra. All these activities of Rani are typical to an Indian wife who starves for her husband's love but this activity is utilized by GirishKarnad in such a way that it becomes ridiculous that the God or a cobra can fall in love with a human being. This is not quite possible in the practical life.

Nagas are serpent- genii figures in Hindu mythology. The Hindus worship Nagas as God. After this incident as Naga is charmed by the root he takes the shape of Rani's husband Apanna. He visits Rani at midnight. He praises her beauty as a “tender bud” and could not stop himself from loving her. But Rani was not aware of this shape-shifting. For Rani he was her husband though she was confused about her husband's dual nature. As Rani was now happy to get the love of her husband which she longs for she became blind in his love. Their meeting continued in the same way until one day she reveals that she is pregnant. This fact makes the real Apanna agitated and compels him to charge Rani of adulteries. Thus the extreme love of the God and a human being didn't bring happiness in the life of the human being. Rani was innocent. It was Naga who took the shape of Apanna and made her pregnant. But because of this act of the Naga innocent Rani had to face a tough time. Through this part GirishKarnad tries to show how the supernatural elements bring troubles in the life of human beings.

In the night Naga visits Rani and informs her about the Elder's decision to taste her chastity. Rani pleads him to save her from this humiliation. In Indian society only the woman are charged of adultery and had to undergo the chastity tests. Mythological history bears the proof that only the woman had to undergo the tests as we can take the example of Sita from Ramayana. Though Rama is a God he was helpless against his wife's chastity. Similarly, Rani had to face the same problem.

Although myth and traditional values are interlinked it focuses and questions the faithfulness of a wife and not of the husbands. Naga's words “I can't help it; that's how it has always been. That's how it will always be” represents the attitude of the husbands in the male dominated society like India. Rani is the image of an Indian woman- demure, unquestioning and uncomplaining. The empty house where Rani is locked symbolizes the restrictions of women which deny even her legitimate rights. She is one among the passive victims of a male dominated society while her husband Apanna is a very dominating and cruel husband who exercises absolute supremacy over his innocent and naïve spouse.

Conclusion:

Karnad has plainly suggested that reconciliation with one's self and one's environment is the best course of action for the incomplete and insatiable human beings. For the attempt of persons to achieve completeness and perfection usually end tragically or comically. To depend completely on God has no positive results. Through these plays what Karnad tries to show is that man should help himself. As shown in 'Hayavadana', to get the solution of their problems in life Padmini and later Hayavadana depends on God but instead of the solution they are made more puzzled for which they had to suffer the incompleteness of their identities. Similarly "The Fire and The Rain" is a cautionary tale about the misapplication of powers that human beings receive from God after a great penance. Karnad explores that knowledge without wisdom is dangerous. The magical art of vengeance turns into a tragic irony. The case of Rani is truly a typical Indian which has been collected from the myth. The transforming of Naga into the shape of Apanna is mythological but during Rani's test of chastity his leaving of Rani into her own is a typical attitude of man where only woman have to undergo chastity test. Thus through these plays GirishKarnad try to show the traditional believes of myths and its aspects on human life.

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