

## Modern myth and magical face shifting technology in Girish Karnad Hayavadana and Nagamandala

Shyalaja KS

Assistant professor, Department of English, Shanmuga Industries Arts and Science college, Thiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, India.

---

### Abstract

This paper intends to focus on which Girish Karnad adopted the fine bi-technological blending of modern myth and magical face shifting ways in Hayavadana and Nagamandala. The embellishment techniques of art and imagination expose the mundane reality of the other. In fact the assumption of the form cannot find in reality. Girish Karnad employed his face shifting technique by choosing the title Hayavadana, as the name suggests, It is man with horse's head (Haya= horse and vadana = face). In Nagamandala, the characters Story, flames and Naga have an existence of their own by using the face technique. Both the dramas reconstructs without any modern gadgets or animation but with the re-enactment of the ancient myth. The face shifting technology made Karnad's characters to be ambiguous, diverse creatures that seem rigid stereotypes at a glance but turn out to be imbued with myriad shades of personality. Chastity becomes a myth to Rani and Padmini. Their chastity is spiritual or psychological. The playwright seems to convey a new revolutionary attempt of chastity for these two women. Karnad's clever shape shifting technology confront electronic images. It grapples with technology by the animal which triumphs over the best in man. Thus both the plays is a triumph of technology and timings. The mixture of Mythological and historical, turned out to be technological with the tool of face shifting. He has blended issues such as love, identity and sexuality with mythical folk culture and modern technology.

**Keywords:** Modern myth, face shifting technology, Hayavadana and Nagamandala

---

### Introduction

The fine bi-technological blending of modern myth and magical face shifting found to be worldly, naturally and visually in the drama "Hayavadana" and "Nagamandala". Most of the readers were fascinated by these modern creative techniques from which he recreated *Hayavadana* (1971) from *The Transposed Heads*, a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, Whereas *Naga-Mandala* was based on a folk tale related to him by A. K. Ramanujan. Though Karnad's characters were posed with reality, the embellishment of myth and magical face shifting adores the literature with art and life. The two folk drama are deftly blended in presenting the shape shifting nature of the art and imagination. Both the plays expose the mundane reality of the other. In fact the assumption of the form cannot find in reality. It is perhaps indicative of the permanent alliance between Art and Imagination from that of classical myth.

In mythology, folklore and speculative fiction, shapeshifting, or metamorphosis is the ability of an entity to physically transform into another being or form. This is usually achieved through an inherent faculty of a mythological creature, divine intervention, or the use of magic spells or talismans. The idea of shapeshifting has been present in the oldest extant literature and epic poems, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Iliad. The idea remains a common trope by the transformation of a human being into an animal or conversely, of an animal into human form.

Shapeshifting is used as a plot device, in Hayavadhana and also in Nagamandala. Girish Karnad employed his face shifting technique by choosing the title Hayavadana, as the name suggests, It is man with horse's head (Haya= horse and vadana = face). Hayavadana is desperately seeking to get rid of this strange head when he stumbles on to the stage about the transposed heads is about to be performed. The Bhagavata of

the play, then guides him to the same temple of Kali where the characters in the play will get their heads transposed. It reconstructs the drama without any modern gadgets or animation but with the re-enactment of the ancient myth. The face shifting technology with the transposition of heads, fails to solve Padmini's universal problem of identity, of *Who am I?*

The two friends, Kapila and Devadatta, dreams despondently of Padmini. Devadatta is a learned Brahmin, writing poetry and is physically unfit, whereas Kapila, a Kshatriya, is a wrestler and is physically stronger. Although Kapila is attracted to Padmini when he meets her, he nevertheless arranges the marriage between Devadatta and Padmini. The plot eventually thickens when Padmini starts to 'fall' for Kapila merely for the physical strength that she finds lacking in her husband, Devadatta. The existentialist crisis occurs when Devadatta and Kapila's heads are transposed to each other's body. The importance that one places body over the mind is explicitly expressed by Devadatta, who now has Kapila's body, "I'd always thought one had to use one's brain while wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body does not wait for thoughts, it acts."

The same face shifting technique is treated in Title of the play Nagamandala also which is otherwise called as "play with cobra" with that of the character story, man, flames. The characters have an existence of their own by using the face technique. The story assumed in the form of a young woman Sari and the conversation of the flames are also a fusion of myth taking forms like avatars with face shifting technique like animation which narrates story to flames and the man. This conventional style is imparted like the old women in the family usually narrate the folktales, either when the children are being fed in the evenings or when they are put to bed in the night.

The snake in the myth is believed to be a symbol of fertility. Here by the face shifting technique the snake takes the shape of Appanna and has sexual communion with Rani to solve the problem of her; it is through the snake that Rani understands the meaning and passion of love in marital life. Simultaneously, when the real Appanna finds that she is pregnant, he calls her a "whore". Appanna asks "Don't you feel ashamed to admit that you are pregnant. You Whore? Rani is asked by the village leaders to perform the ordeal of holding the hot iron rod to demonstrate that she is a chaste woman and faithful to her husband. The snake advises her to perform the ordeal of holding the snake instead. Rani follows the advice and holds the snake which spreads its hood on her head and sways it gently and hangs like a garland around her neck. The elders on the village judicial committee proclaim to be a Goddess. Appanna is a contrast to Naga, the snake-lover of Rani, Naga by his face shifting proves himself to be good companion to her first and then a lover. He fulfils her sexual needs and makes her gain in the marital life. Where as in Hayadhana we see that Padmini. Eventually, finds herself in intense euphoria when she combines the head of Devadatta and the body of Kapila to a high degree of sexual freedom. This transformation of Naga and Hayavadhana is reminiscent of Satan's transformation in to a snake. Girish Karnad draws a parallelism by taking shape which is called face shifting between Hayavadhana and Naga, with the intention of their love.

Girish Karnad's plays, Hayavadhana and Nagamandala prove that chastity is a myth. Its chastity is spiritual or psychological, Rani has not lost it though she sleeps with Naga before the trial. Padmini in Hayavadana enjoys Martial life with Devadatta who gets Kapila's body after the face shifting. In both the play women Padmini and Rani deceived by their face shifting lovers seems to have chastity. They prove their chastity because of the ignorance, which seems to be strong and powerful. The women in the above mentioned plays of Karnad seem to be aware of their oppression and repression in the patriarchal order but also know that they cannot do much about it. The playwright seems to convey a new revolutionary attempt of chastity for these two women. While Rani in Nagamandala and Padmini in Hayavadana indulge in extra marital relationship, though they do not express their desires openly, supernatural face shifting satiated and aided their desires. Hence Karnad's female seems to have marked an apogee.

Thus, Girish Karnad's techniques focuses with sheer brilliance of the fantasy creatures like Hayavadana and Nagamandala. Apart from the mind-body conundrum, the idea of imperfection relating to identity questions stand out markedly. Moreover both the fantasy creatures Hayavadhana and Nagamandala with their face shifting forms develop their love towards Padmini and Rani respectively. These techniques assisted him to develop story and solve the crisis present in both the dramas. Hence both Karnad's characters are ambiguous, diverse creatures that seem rigid stereotypes at a glance but turn out to be imbued with myriad shades of personality to thoroughly confuse the audience/reader. Masks, asides, puppetry and absurd elements altogether combine to impart both the dramas. To conclude Karnad's clever shape shifting technology confront electronic images. It grapples with technology by the animal which triumphs over the best in man. The image that he created is related to living environment. Thus both the plays is a triumph of technology and timings. Hence both these plays

which is a mixture of Mythological, historical, turned out to be technological with the tool of face shifting. This face shift world and technology can be considered as the metaphor for the new age. He has blended issues such as love, identity and sexuality with mythical folk culture and modern technology. He provides us with a glimpse of the past as well as its relevance in understanding the contemporary world.

#### References

1. Devika VR. Naga-Mandala in Minnesota, Span, 1993, 42-45.
2. Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava. Introduction, Collected Plays: Girish Karnad, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005; 2: VII-XXXIX.
3. Karnad Girish, Naga-Mandala. New Delhi: O.U.P., 1990.
4. Kurkoti, Kirtinath. Introduction to Hayavadana by Girish Karnad, Oxford University Press, 1975, V.
5. Karnad Girish. Hayavadana, Oxford University Press, 1975, 1.