CHAPTER – VII

Hayavadana
The first phase of Indian Drama in English was clearly characterised by the Tagore-Aurobindo-Kailasam tradition of poetic drama and blank verse drama exploring mythology and the Indian sociological problems.

The second phase of the Indian drama in English was clearly characterised by the prose drama with Asif Currimbhoy dominating the scene of drama in this phase. The prose-plays are larger in number. Infact the post-independence drama belongs to the second phase of Indian drama in English. Asif Currimbhoy known as the dramatist of the public event wrote plays whose range and variety of subject matter are indeed amazing. History and current politics, social and economic problems; the east-west encounter psychological conflicts and religion, philosophy and art – 'everything is grit to Currimbhoy's dramatic will.'

Girish Karnad who wrote plays like Tughlaq and Hayavadana also belongs to the second phase. Karnad's trend-setting play Hayavadana, strikes a significant note by exploring the dramatic potential of the ancient Indian myths, legends and folk traditions. As Tutun Mukherjee points out, in Hayavadana, "Karnad has made available the rich resources of both, the Great and Little tradition, the classical and folk elements of Indian literature."¹

¹ The page nos. in the parentheses refer to Girish Karnad's Hayavadana, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
Hayavadana, in many ways, reminds us of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream where a comedy of errors takes place so hilariously. When Hayavadana begins, a mask of Ganesha is brought on the stage, and the Bhagavata sings verses in praise of ‘Vakratunda-Mahakaya’ with the crooked face and distorted body who is the Lord and master of success and perfection. In the play, the image of Lord Ganesh, “Suggests a major development in the action as well as the central theme of completeness of being.”

The world sees these two young men wandering down the streets of Dharmapura, hand in hand and remembers Lava and Kusha, Rama and Laxmana, Krishna and Balrama. Two friends they were one mind one heart.

The Bhagavata’s narration is interrupted by a Nata (Actor) who rushes on to the stage in fear and informs the Sutradhar that outside in the street he has met a talking horse. This is Hayavadana, who has a man’s body and a horse’s head who has all his life been trying to get rid of his head and become a complete man.

Hayavadana requests the Bhagavata to help him in getting rid of the horse head. The Bhagavata feels that it may be due to the error committed in the last birth which is responsible for such a shape. Hayavadana says that it has nothing to do with the last birth and further narrates that his mother was a
princess of Karnataka, who was a beautiful girl. When she came of age her father decided that she should choose her own husband. So princes of other kingdoms in the world were invited and they all came from China, from Persia, from Africa but she did not like any one of them. The last one to come was the prince of Araby. Hayavadana’s mother took one look at the handsome prince sitting on the great white horse and fainted. Her father at once decided that this was the man and all arrangements for the wedding were made. When Hayavadana’s mother woke up she said that she would not marry the prince but marry the horse. No one could dissuade her. Ultimately, she was married off to the white horse. She lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she woke up and there was no horse, in his place stood a beautiful Celestial Gandharva. Apparently, this Celestial being had been cursed by Kubera to be born as a horse for some act of misbehaviour. After fifteen years of human love he had become his original self again. Released from his curse Gandharva asked Hayavadana’s mother to accompany him to the Heavenly Abode. But she did not agree. So he cursed her to become a horse herself. Hayavadana’s mother became a horse and ran away happily and his father went back to his Heavenly Abode. Only the child of their marriage was left behind and that was Hayavadana himself.

The two plots come together when Hayavadana, in his quest to become complete being, meets the five-year old son of Padmini, who is also in search of completeness.
In the central episode, Kapila promises Devadatta to be his cloud messenger to find out the house and also the name of the lady Devadatta has fallen in love with. Devadatta swears that if he ever gets her as his wife, he will sacrifice his arms to Goddess Kali and his head to Lord Rudra. So Kapila finds his way to Pavan-Veethi, the street of merchants, and meets Padmini, who is the girl Devadatta has fallen in love with. But Kapila too falls in love with Padmini, observing that she is not for the likes of Devadatta. However, Padmini is married to Devadatta, settles in his house and is soon to deliver their first baby.

The feminine principle, Padmini, “Born of Kalidasa’s magic description-as Vatsayana had dreamt her,” (p. 13), takes the ‘Other thing’ of Kapila on ‘Trust’, Kapila who is acting as Devadatta’s messenger of love is himself in love with her. Padmini who answers Kapila’s call (knock on the door) humming the tune, “Here comes the rider-from which land does he come?” (p.16), suggests the unconscious craving of the female for completeness. Her desire for the body of Kapila and the mind of Devadatta comes to ahead:

**Padmini:** (back at the window) where is Kapila?

**Devadatta:** ......and drool over Kapila all day. (*p. 20)

The tension mounts in the dialogue between husband and wife. Devadatta is against Padmini undertaking the journey to the Ujjain Fair. Kapila
who is expected to bring the cart is the cause of Devadatta’s sexual jealousy and anger. Padmini is unrelenting.

Devadatta (mind) finally surrenders to the pulls of Kapila (body). The journey to Ujjain, which is a journey to a sacred place, a heavenly abode in traditional thinking, becomes an allegory of the sexual act. The cart, (symbolic of the phallus) driven by the oxen makes Padmini comment on the performance of Kapila and Devadatta:

How beautifully you drive the cart, Kapila, your hands don’t even move, but the oxen seem to know exactly where to go.. What a terrible road. Nothing, but stones and rocks - but one didn’t feel a thing in the cart! You drove it so gently - almost made it float. I remember when Devadatta took me in a cart-that was soon after our marriage… The oxen took every thing except the road. He only had to pull to the right, and off they would rush to the left! I’ve never laughed so much in my life. But of course he got very angry, so we had to go home straight! (p. 25)

Devadatta becomes suspicious of the relationship between Padmini and Kapila like Leontes being jealous of the relationship between Hermione and Polixenes in Shakespeare’s *The Winter's Tale*. Padmini, however, is different from Hermione, because secretly Padmini is wonderstruck by the swaying
body of Kapila and his curving limbs. Kapila informs Devadatta that there is a

temple of Rudra nearby and beyond the hill is the temple of Kali.

The inexactitude of language is further evidenced in the reaction of an
indignant Kali. Devadatta, who promises Rudra his head and hands to Kali,
ends up offering the latter his head. The incompleteness in the language of the
body (action) to reflect the language of the mind (thought) exposes the
profanity of vows and promises and even prayers.

Devadatta suggests Padmini and Kapila to go and visit the Rudra temple
while he will stay back and watch their cart. Immediately afterwards, we see
Devadatta swearing in front of Kali:

“Forgive me, Mother. You fulfilled the deepest craving of my

life - you gave me Padmini - and I forgot my word.... Here

Mother Kali.... My Head. Take it.”

Devadatta has sacrificed his head to Kali, the mask rolls off and blood

flows. Padmini and Kapila return to the cart. After looking for Devadatta for

some time, Kapila finds his footprints leading to the Kali temple. On reaching

the temple Kapila finds the body of Devadatta with his head truncated, he

moans: “Devadatta, I can’t live without you.... You spurned me in this world.

Accept me as your brother at least in the next.” (p. 30)
Kapila cuts off his head. Now Padmini finds her way to this temple, stares at the two bodies and picks up the sword to kill herself. Just then goddess Kali drops her arms, shuts her mouth and intervenes:

The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That fellow Devadatta—he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it—head to him and arms to me!... Then this Kapila. Died right in front of me—but ‘for his friend.’ Mind you!

Didn’t even have the courtesy to refer to me. (p. 33)

Kali asks Padmini to put the heads of the two friends back properly, attach them to their bodies and then press the sword on their necks. They will come up alive. Padmini puts these heads back, but in her excitement she mixes them up, so that Devadatta’s head goes to Kapila’s body and Kapila’s finds its way on Devadatta’s body.

Padmini who moves the goddess to grant her wish, commits, what appears like a Freudian slip, the transposition of heads.

When Devadatta, says that the head is the sign of a man, Kapila (with the body of Devadatta) claims that he has the body she has lived with all these months and the child she is carrying is the seed of his body.
The person with Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body is now Devadatta and the person with Kapila’s head and Devadatta’s body is Kapila. Each claims Padmini as his wife.

**Kapila:** This is the hand that accepted her at the wedding. This is the body she has lived with all these months. And the child she’s carrying is the seed of this body.

**Devadatta:** Of the entire human limbs the topmost-in position as well as in importance - is the head. I have Devadatta’s head and it follows that I am Devadatta.

**Kapila:** (Suddenly) why have you come away from him?

**Padmini:** What do you want me to say? (They freeze)

**Kapila:** (to Padmini) why have you come here?

**Padmini:** I had to see you.

**Kapila:** Why? (Not a reply) (pp. 36-37)

The “why” questions culminate in a crescendo of more questions than answers:

**Padmini:** Why should one buy anything?

**Kapila:** Why shouldn’t one? Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?

**Padmini:** Whose incompleteness? Yours? (p. 57)
The questions fade into and lose themselves into the choric song of the Bhagavata:

You cannot engrave on water
Nor wound it with a knife.
Which is why
The river
Has no fear
Of memories. (p. 580)

Act one ends with the Bhagavatha throwing the same question to the audience (some-what like Vetal of Vetalpanchvimsharthi): who is the rightful husband of Padmini?

Act Two begins with the Bhagavata announcing the answer to the question he has raised at the end of the first act. As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among the human limbs. Therefore, according to a great rishi, the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta, and he is the rightful husband of Padmini. So the roads diverge and Kapila goes into the forest and disappears. Devadatta and Padmini return to Dharmapura and plunge into the joys of married life.
Padmini does not understand power of the head. So, she also mistakes juxtaposition of the head and the body of their unification. So, she feels elated to live with Devadatta’s new body. She does not foresee that her joy is short lived. The Brahminical hypothesis that the head is the supreme organ in the body reflects the social hierarchy in which the caste of Brahmins is supreme in the society.

Devadatta goes to the gymnasium and participates in sports. He even defeats a wrestler who challenges the people to fight with him. Padmini is happy about his physical prowess but warns him not to outdo lest his acquisition of Kapila’s body should be discovered. The two dolls that he brought from Ujjain for his son talk about his vigor.

Doll II: With his rough laborers hands
Doll I: Palms like wood…
Doll II: A grip like a vice…. (p.46)

Devadatta resumes his Brahminical life style and gradually loses the physical vigor of Kapila’s body. Padmini asks him why he does not go out. He replies that he has to observe his duty as a Brahmin and then he adds: “it was fun the first few days because it was new. All that muscle and strength. But how long can one go on like that? I have the family tradition to maintain – the daily reading, writing and studies?” (p. 46). The dolls also talk about this change of his body:
Doll I: His palms! They were so rough, when he first bought us here like a labourer’s. But now they are soft-sickly soft-like a young girl’s.

Doll II: I know, I’ve noticed something too.

Dol: What?

Doll II: His stomach. It was so tight and muscular. Now.... ... ...

Doll I: I know. It’s loose.... ... ..

Doll II: Do you think it ‘ll swell up too? (p. 47)

Similarly Kapila’s head carries the attributes of a craftsman and athlete. He does hard work and regains his physical vigor. Thus he gradually loses the softness and weakness of Devadatta’s body. Padmini loses interest in Devadatta on account of his weak soft body with a potbelly. Her unconscious mind longs for Kapila.

Time passes. Events so conspire that Padmini with her child in her arms loses her way in the forest. And there she meets Kapila, whose arms, once so slender and fair, have become tough and rough. Devadatta, whose palms, which were so rough, have become soft like a young girl’s, also comes here in search of Padmini and the child.

Unable to reconcile herself to this reality, she asks Kapila a tragic rhetorical question, “Must the head always win? and he answers: That’s why I
am Kapila now” (p.56). She knows that Devadatta became completely Devadatta because of the head’s victory. Actually, it is the victory of the cultural hegemony that has shaped the minds of Devadatta and Kapila. But Padmini still says: “Yes, you won Kapila. Devadatta won too. But I the better half of two bodies – I neither win nor lose” (p.57). In fact, the names and the personalities of Devadatta and Kapila are the products of the culture which is based on the deformities. It is their bodies, representing life or nature, which has lost the battle.

The conflict of the mind and the body is more acute in Kapila than in Devadatta. Devadatta, after discontinuing his physical exercise, often feels like going to the gymnasium. He gets bodily pains and decides not to do any physical exercise anymore. Thus, he overcomes the memories of Kapila’s body. But Kapila really has a very hard task to overcome erotic memories of Devadatta’s body though he succeeds in making the body strong through physical exercises. So he says:

One beats the body into shape, but one can’t beat away the memories in it. Isn’t it surprising that the body should have its own ghosts-its own memories? Memories of a touch-memories of a body swaying in these arms of a warm skin against this palm-memories which one cannot recognize, cannot understand, cannot even name because this head wasn’t there when they happened. (pp. 57-58)
He asks Padmini why she has come and why she has touched him. He then adds: “I have never touched you, but this body, this appendage laughed and flowered out in a festival of memories to which I am an out-caste”, (p. 58). Padmini intuitively feels that the conflict is due to alienation. She chides him for his stupidity and says: “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 much submerge in that river-the flow must rumple your hair, run its tongue in your ears and press your head to its bosom. Until that’s done, you’ll continue to be incomplete,” (p. 58). She means that the reunification of the mind and the body is the only solution of their physical deformity and its ill effects.

Kapila asks Padmini to go to Devadatta but she requests him to allow her to stay there and look at him for a while. Later, Devadatta comes and asks Kapila whether he also loves Padmini. Kapila answers him affirmatively and suggests that they live like the five Pandavas and Draupadi of the Mahabharata.

Devadatta, couldn’t we all three live together –like the Pandavas and Draupadi? (p. 60)

But Devadatta’s stand is clear, for, according to him, there are no grounds for friendship now. They must fight like lions and kill like cobras. The fight begins. Kapila wounds Devadatta who falls to his feet and stabs Kapila. Both fall and die.
Padmini still wants to achieve the unification of mind and the body through her son. So she wants to provide her son both physical and mental training. Padmini entrusts her son, who is sleeping in Kapila’s hut, to the Bhagavata.

She therefore relates her will to Bhagavata:

My son is sleeping in the hut. Take him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in the forests and tell them it’s Kapila’s son. They loved Kapila and will bring the child up. Let the child grow up in the forest with the river and trees. when he’s five take him to the revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapura. Tell him it’s Devadatta’s son. (p. 62)

She asks him to make a large funeral pyre for the three of them. She will perform Sati:

Kali, Mother of all Nature, you must have your joke even now. Other women can die praying that they should get the same husband in all the lives to come. You haven’t left me even that little consolation. (p.63)

Padmini’s son grows among the hunters in the forest for five years according to their oral will and is then sent to the Bhagavata. The boy is as morose as Kapila in the forest. He does not play and does not laugh, as a child.
should do. They try to make him laugh but fail. Meanwhile Hayavadana comes and he is a complete horse now. He says that Goddess Kali has granted his wish to be complete. What he regrets is the retention of human voice. He tries to break his human voice by singing various patriotic songs but in vain. Padmini’s son sees Hayavadana, a horse, speak and laugh. He sheds his gloom and starts laughing and then clapping his hands and the dolls fall out of his hands. Then he accepts the request of Hayavadana to sing a song and Hayavadana gives him a ride while he sings a song. The boy then asks him to laugh. As Hayavadana tries to laugh, his laughter ends up as a proper neigh and thus he loses his human voice. Hayavadana and Padmini’s son become complete as if they were freed from the spell by each other. Both are very happy and the body enjoys riding the horse. The Bhagavata says: “So at last Hayavadana has become complete. (To the actors) You two go and tell the revered Brahmin Vidyasagara that his grandson is returning home in triumph, riding a big, white charger” (p.71). The boy riding the horse symbolizes the reunification of man and nature. Thus, Padmini succeeds in achieving her goal posthumously.

The play ends with the Bhagavata’s prayer:

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. (p. 71)
Hayavadana is a ‘Play’ in more than one sense of that word. It communicates both as ‘theatre’ and as ‘theme’. The play as theatre chooses for its narrative the ambience of folk drama. As folk drama, which incorporates the elements of Yakshagana, makes a few large statements. These statements become clear when set against the backdrop of classical Sanskrit drama, which has a longer tradition in India. Karnad’s choice of the ‘folk’ form instead of the ‘classical’ speaks about the deliberate choice with regard to the ‘mindset’ that dominates the play. Classical Sanskrit drama has inflexibility about it: be it the script, or the enactment or the communication of the message and maybe, even about the expected spectator response. One gets the standard idea of being inside a ‘concrete’ playhouse with ‘fixed’ seats from which to watch a drama whose thesis is pre-determined with a providential finality about cause and effect.

The choice of the Bhagavata to speak to the spectator on the one hand and, to act with the actors on the other, lends to the narrative of Hayavadana, an aspect of ‘folk’ drama that opens it up for a ‘free’ play of responses. It must, however, not be read as a free-for-all of responses. For, Bhagavata only allows a long leash on the narrative while he never lets go off the leash completely. As very articulate theatre, it must be said that the play does not insist on any ‘given’ idea but multiples them. After all, real life is not a series of well-calculated and laid out moves but a series of stumblings upon one
choice after another and the consequences set off by each one. As theatre then, the play is an invitation to look at the various options open before the individual before he can speak or think coherently. This is the ‘mindset’ of the play.

**Hayavadana**, as a theme, is a ‘play’ of ideas: it is ‘absurd in a Beckettian sense and ‘fractured’ in a Freudian sense. It is laced with Cartesian elements, the conventional hierarchical idea of society, the mythical idea about gods and goddesses, besides, the folk legends. Just as the characters on the Beckett stage are maimed, the characters in *Hayavadana* appear as ‘complete’ halves seeking their ‘others’ Devadatta as ‘mind’ and Kapila as ‘body’ must realize their completeness. But every effort in this direction only takes them away from this end.

Most of the critics, including M.K. Naik and Shubhangi S. Rayakar, argue that it is humanly impossible to achieve perfection. Of course, it is impossible to achieve perfection as along as physical deformity is sustained by cultural hegemony. A.Jaganmohanachary rightly points out that Devadatta loses his physical vigor only because he discontinues the physical exercise in order to pursue his Brahminical tradition. But Rayakar in her brilliant paper on *Hayavadana* argues that the unification of Apollo and Dionysus symbolized by Devadatta and Kapila respectively is not at all possible. Brown uses the words, Apollo and Dionysus, to represent alienation and unification.
respectively. Following the model of Brown, it can be concluded that the play deals with the three phases of human history and Karnad is successful in this as he cleverly exploits Indian myth and folk theatre.
REFERENCES

