



Psychic Fissures and Fissions Dramatized in Girish Karnad's Plays: a study on and about transformational identity

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Girish Karnad (1938-2019) is widely regarded as “the most important dramatist of the late contemporary Kannada (Indian) stage” (Dass 72). He, very much like “the God of Creation” (Joyce 215) has forged a vast array of “individuals and groups” representing “themselves to themselves” and thereby constructing “their own identities” (Gagnier 7). So, the defining weight of the “common pursuit” (Leavis) of Karnad scholars like Shyam Asuani, K.D. Verma, Abha Dahibhate, K. V. Surendran, Vanashree Tripathy, Mohit K. Ray, and M. K. Naik has been inspiring critics to put Karnad's dialects on identity under dramaturgical scanner(s). Yet Karnad's art of dramatization of identities- fluid, incoherent, divided, unstable, fragmented, discontinuous, and deracinated has not been studied, till today, with scrupulous scrupulosity. Hence this paper intends to attempt a clinical analysis of Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Tughlaq* from the perspective of the politics of identitarian fissures and fissions.

The Karnadian dramaturgy of differences.

Karnad is an avowed existentialist. So, the radicalization of the alienation of individual is not an alien subject for him. That is why, very much like his co-pursuer of existentialism (Sartre, Kafka and Camus), he has put human beings in situations and sites (of struggle) in no way, normal and identifiable. He “uproots” his characters, makes them visible *déracinés* and makes them (dis)appear to appear in estranged/quaint form(s). So, in Karnad's plays on/about deracination, both willed and enforced, human self is never unitary; it is unstable, incoherent, divided, dissolved, and incongruent.

Karnad's politics of doubt and of uncertainty and the poetics of incoherent identity.

Karnad is as much as *Incertus* as Seamus Heaney is/has been. So, received identities- fixed and coherent, have lost their foundation in the Karnadian world of “doubt and uncertainty” (Mercer 257). In the process, in his works, Karnad has been questioning “the essentialist notions of identity” (Brooker 131). He is/has been critiqued from this perspective of fluidity of identity. Hence, from the perspective of the identity de-factored and de-focused, deconstructionist, he has played with the norms of the conventional charactero-logical constriction. This attitude of Karnad puts him in the league of the exponents of vivisection of the erstwhile stable self. So, Karnad has goaded himself to create a host of “living contradictions” (Barthes 21). That is why, it is re-avouched that for Karnad, the post-structuralist, no individual is “undivided” and “not divisible”, and no one is namable. That is why, in his existentialist deconstructions of identity, most of the identities are divided, fragmented and “unnamable” (Beckett).

The dissolved and dissolving core of the core identity.

The post-structuralists have been questioning the validity of essentialism. Naturally, the essentialist notion of identity has been discarded by them. In their opinion, “identities are constituted differently in different historical (socio-politico-economic-cultural) contexts (Moya 3 → with my weighted additions). So, in the post-structuralist writings, identity is not stable, fixed and congruent. There is no “fixed and coherent identity” (Kupiainen 3), no “monolithic identity” (Bose 183). In this context, it is suggested that G. Karnad has been acutely aware of all these theories of deconstruction as identity in terms of *otherness*. So, in his works, he has tried to show how and why some characters suffer from bearing the brunt of incompleteness, whether physical, psychological, spiritual, or of any other nameless/unnamable kind. Hence, he has experimented with the poetics of identity. In the process he has delved deep into various nuances of transformational identity in plays like *Hayavadana* and *Tughlaq*. To be specific, in terms of Karnad's theory of transformational identity, it can be said

that this kind of is NOT monolithic, essentialist, foundationalist, typical, stereotypical, fixed, stable, nuanced, and " transactional" (David McClelland).

Hayavadana

In the play, *Hayavadana*, both the "Actor" and Bhagavata have transactional identity. Both of them transact certain dramaturgical function as it is imposed on them. So, right from the first dialogue given to "Bhagavata" in Act I to the one given to him before the entry of Debadutta, the text abounds in standardized linguistic constructions, such as declarative and interrogative sentences, words at once monosyllabic and polysyllabic, both finite and open-ended. Also, in the textual portion, specified above, one finds 28 number of standardized constructions like "I saw it clearly", 42 declarative sentences, like "it's an order", 12 interrogative sentences, 18 monosyllabic words, 10 polysyllabic words, 22 modifiers and 4 *broken* expressions. In this portion, subjected to a Volos Novian analysis, there is only one deviant construction in the linguistic construct "A talking horse". In the contrast, in the portion of the text, highlighting transformational identity, the number of deviant constructions used is 8 and the number of standardized constructions used is 14. Similarly, the number of declarative sentences used in this portion is only 24 and that of the interrogative sentences used is 32. Karnad has used more polysyllabic words and broken expressions in this portion of the text of *Hayavadana*. Since transformational characters search for their respective illusive completeness, they are vastly aware of the realities of imperfection and completeness. That is why, they do ask, very often, "How can I call myself complete? What should I do, Bhapavata Sir?" (*Hayavadana*, Act II).

Subhangi S Raskar, one of the sharpest Karnad scholars, has dwelt upon the Karnadian search for completeness. In the process she has concluded that Karnad has trashed patriarchy in *Yayati*, race and gender in *Tughlaq* and essentialist personhood/unitary self in *Hayavadana* simply because he has become more aware of the contradiction within personalities. That is why, in the cogent cogitations of Raskar, Karnad, the poststructuralist, has put the dramaturgical lens on "disrupted selves" (Dhanwadker XXVII).

By the time Karnad has created *Hayavadana* he has demystified the politics, polemics, and poetics of otherhood, in other words, inadequacy of human life in the Westland of human life. That is why, *Hayavadana* does not glorify linear structures leading to any summative conclusion about the essentialities of any character. So, Karnad is the maker of the divided/fractured self, epitomizing psyche fissures and fissions wrecking apart the characters innermost core of being (soul) in *Hayavadana*. Really while writing *Hayavadana* he has moved himself away from the textured world of *Yayati*, an album of unitary selves. That is why, as has been showed by P. Dhanavel, *Hayavadana* is woven around the issues of human imperfection, human incompleteness, mind-body dichotomy/binary, and conglomerative identity.

Tughlaque

In the play *Tughlaque*, Girish Karnad has made the protagonist a veritable epitome of the fractured/divided self, carrying the weight of all sorts of fissions and fissures on his shoulder, sometimes strong and supple, some other times stooped and buckled. Really it is a dramatized sandwich between Karnad's *Yayati* and *Hayavadana*, hence in it, one comes across the character once stable and then divided/deformed. So, if *Yayati* is a unitary self and if *Hayavadana* is a fractured self, Mohammad (in *Tughlaque*) is a much fractured, much disintegrated self, virtually, a heap of broken images. So, he is at once the "persecutor" and the "victim" (Karpman). If in *Hayavadana*, there is a transposed head, in *Tughlaque* Mohammad does play many a part, many roles in no way strengthening and solidifying one another. That is why, in the opinion of Dhanwadker, Tughlaque personifies "contradictious and tensions" within the human psyche (1947). Hence Mohammad's acts of rescue do invariably follow his acts of perpetration of persecution and/or crime. He is really a hybrid, either powerfully powerless or powerlessly powerful, hence either foolishly wise or wisely foolish. He is a tissue of contradictions with a vast array of fissions and fissures telling upon the somethingness of his poor identity. Put simply, he has been a *supervacuo magnifico*, a schizoid character.

Mohammad is crowded around by a team of disintegrated selves such as Najib, Barani, Aazam, and Aziz. All of them epitomize human fragility. So, none of them, including Mohammad is anti-fragile. Perhaps born to be domiciled in the rose garden of dream and promise, Mohammad has stopped to drift and drift without being able to (re)anchor himself in any manner at any port of call. So, his life has ended with a "tortured scream" (Karnad 43) but not with a bang. Really Mohammad has screamed many times at many places and in varying pitches as the roles forced upon himself by himself have dictated. The idealist-turned-persecutor, Mohammad is, therefore, an enigmatic character with a hoard of hidden identities within the morgue of his apparent identity as the rescuer-victim. As he plays himself into the traps of idealism, impatience, cruelty, hegemony, superiority complex and hubris, he becomes a paradox (Asnani VIII).

Karnad has been able to project Tughlaque's "tortured and divided self" (Murthy IX). Very much like, Magnus, the hero of G.B. Shaw's *The Apple Cart*, Karnad becomes "an undemocratic guardian of extra-temporal values" (Meisel 402). Yet he is a more complex character than Magnus (Anurag Chauhan) because he is a hybrid/conglomeration of Richard II, Macbeth, Tamburlaine, and Hamlet. So, he fails to win the confidence of

the very people he reportedly lives for. His good acts are distrusted because they are mostly tainted with following acts of cruelty and barbarity and cunning. His four soft skills worsen his situation. So, he slithers and dithers. Unable to surrender himself to any Higher Lord, he fails to refrain from evil. He fails, resultantly, to "spread his branches" (Karnad 10). So, he cries out, "God..... please help me....I started in your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in the desert now?" (Karnad 67). So, Mohammad's story in the play *Tughlaque* is the "story of a torn self, oppressed by the burden of his own misdeeds" (Chandervarkar 76).

Really, Mohammad's transformation into a tyrant, "any alienated self-transpired into an anguished existential self which drove him toward extinction" (Chandervarkar 77). Entrapped in the shares of his own ego, he disintegrates himself from all others. So, he has lost the "integrated vision of life" (Naik 262).

II. Conclusion

Hayavadana and *Tughlaque* bear ample testimony to Karnad's art of responding to fission and fissure. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad's poetics of identity is interfused with his politics of doubt, mistrust, *angst*, and self-devaluation. Hence in it, core identities are not stable. In *Tughlaque* also, there is no core-stable identity. *Tughlaque* has become a heap of broken images, each image being unstable, incoherent, polymorphic, and inchoate. So, multiple polarities/schisms have torn apart the plot of both *Hayavadana* and *Tughlaque*. It is, therefore, concluded that both in *Hayavadana* and *Tughlaque*, Karnad has dramatized the psychic fissions and fissures of the protagonist's concern.

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