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The Perplexity of Human Existence in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

Mahadeb Roy
Assistant Teacher,
Jitihar F. P. School.

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Abstract:

A condition of confusion or bewilderment known as *aporia* (pronounced “o”), according to ancient Greek philosophers, is the basis of philosophy. When that happens, we are at a loss for answers since our queries have come to a standstill. A significant epistemic function for *aporia* is played in Plato's Socratic dialogues. Socrates's interlocutors may only start to advance when they hit this dead end in their efforts to analyze a notion, such as wisdom or virtue. *Hayavadana*, regarded to be Girish Karnad's best work, depicts a confused state of mind and human predicament. The epic drama in Indian English literature conveys the genuine character of existence in the universe and casts doubt on the coexistence of earthly life and heavenly life in the minds of readers or viewers. We may determine the underlying ambiguity in the drama's perimeter by examining the narrative and the characters. *Hayavadana* is a multiplex work that projects binary themes such as mind and body, desire and disappointment, completeness and incompleteness, perfection and imperfection, ancient and modern, primitive and contemporary, mythical and factual, ambiguity and certainty, trust and distrust, sacred and profane, and so on” (Karthiga 57).

Plato believed that to achieve knowledge and virtue, bewilderment was a prerequisite; according to Gareth B. Matthews, “... you cannot advance philosophically without being genuinely perplexed” (Matthews; Cruz 210). The creator of this masterpiece, Karnad, was in a dual mind during his creation; his perplexed mind helped him to create this masterpiece. To create neither a “Western” nor “Indian” play but rather the combination of both, Karnad combined the structures, aesthetics, and strategies of the playwright-initiated, message, and narrative style of the colonial theatre with “Yakshagana,”

Keywords: Perplexity, ambiguity, *Hayavadana*, bewilderment, *aporia*.

The epistemic feeling of perplexity has a significant influence on philosophical investigation; according to Adam Morton, perplexity is a particular type of affect, more

specifically, an epistemic emotion, as defined by cognitive science and philosophy of mind (Morton). Epistemic emotions are emotional experiences that reveal information gaps and contrasts between our subjective experiences and the external world that we perceive. They are self-reflective and focus on the individual's own mental abilities and thought processes. We experience confusion, uncertainty, and doubt when we encounter problems or paradoxes that go counter to our preconceptions. We are inspired to seek fresh viewpoints, challenge our presumptions, and consider other approaches when we are perplexed. According to psychologists, confusion is the state of being when one possesses “a sense of lacking immersion in the world, lack of spontaneous grasping of commonsensical meanings, puzzlement, and alienation” (Parnas, Raballo, and Handset 200). A perplexed individual is no longer able to “find everyday taken-for-granted meaning in the world” (Humpston and Broome 245) to make sense of his/her surroundings or himself/herself.

The considered work of Girish Karnad, *Hayavadana* stands with perplexed human condition and mentality. The epic drama in Indian English literature carries the true nature of existence in the world, and, it makes the readers or the spectators doubtful about the amalgamation of the earthly life and the heavenly life. By analyzing the plot and the characters we would conclude the underlying perplexity within the periphery of the drama; as R. Kalidasan and R.K. Jaishree Karthiga postulate “Hayavadana is a multiplex work that projects binary themes such as mind and body, desire and disappointment, completeness and incompleteness, perfection and imperfection, ancient and modern, primitive and contemporary, mythical and factual, ambiguity and certainty, trust and distrust, sacred and profane, and so on” (Karthiga 57).

If confusion, uncertainty, and doubt are the basic characteristic features of perplexity then we should first consider the most confused decision of offering an incomplete god for completeness; “Vakratunda Mahakaya Surya Koti Samaprabha/ Nirvighnam Kuru Me Dev Sarv-KaaryeshuSarvadaa” (Singh); as Karnad specifies, “he seems the embodiment of imperfection ... could it be the image of purity and holiness?” (Karnad 1). The common belief or mythical knowledge suggests that heavenly beings are symbols of perfection; therefore, how is it possible that an imperfect god, such as Ganesha or Ganapati, has been given the precedence to be served at the earliest chance rather than the other Divine powers? Lord Ganapati, who is described as having a “crooked face” and a “distorted body,” mounts an Indian bandicoot mouse, another symbol of a lowly animal, and once more sports an elephant head with a single tusk. He also has four hands, a huge exposed belly, and

enormous. He is the “Lord of Perfection,” the “Master,” the “destroyer of incompleteness,” and the “Lord of Success”, nevertheless.

On the next, the primary character, upon which the drama has been named, is also perplexed; not only in his appearance but also in his inner-self, he is fighting with his dual confused identity. As he is half human and half animal, firstly, he is confused about his position in human society and secondly about his identity – whether a horse or human. He bemoans his inappropriate identity and asks Bhagavata for assistance. As a result of his frustration and desperation, Hayavadana bowed to Bhagavata, confessing to him that he was now fully alone, he “took interest in the social life of the Nation- Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist Pattern of Society ...” He has attempted everything; “But where’s my society? Where? You must help me to become a complete man” (Karnad 9). The Lacanian concept of incompleteness is perfectly portrayed in Hayavadana. Because Hayavadana’s mother lacks a signifier, a child in the fictitious state feels unified with her mother rather than separated from her. The newborn may only separate from the mother and society at the symbolic level before entering the realm of speech and the father's law. As a result, the infant's inability to communicate through language caused him to feel alone in the world. Hayavadana does not belong in any group since he is a dual entity with human language and an animal body. Bhagavata wished him that he may overcome his perplexed identity: “May you become successful in your search for completeness” (Karnad 11).

The following perplexed plot is the subplot of the drama. This plot is perplexing, due to the human desire, for the purity of human nature, and friendship. Padmini is the representation of the Vatsyana’s “trope”: “Padmini is Vatsyayana’s trope for a most desirable woman, a paragon of beauty. Padmini with ethereal beauty and name (lotus) –the sacred flower displays raunchy desires” (Tripathi 72); and as well as Sigmund Freud’s “Eros”: Sigmund Freud defined Eros as the need to create life and to encourage production and creation, “Its purpose is to form living substance into ever great unities, so that life may be prolonged and brought to a higher development” (Lear 83-84).

Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle from antiquity introduced the idea of confusion to the discipline. Socrates frequently engages his interlocutors at the right time in the right debates in Plato's dialogues, pointing out the errors and contradictions in their interpretations of essential ideas like justice, bravery, or wisdom. These arguments are intended to create a condition of *aporia*, or confusion, when the participants become aware that they don't know as much as they thought, they did and become receptive to new information. Mind-body dualism as Karnad included in the plot is the most aporic phenomenon to the characters. The

clever and self-willed Padmini decided that “Kapila's body with Devadatta's head” atop it was the superior combination when the Sage said that a man is what his mind is; “a fabulous body, magnificent brain, marvellous Devadatta” (Karnad 43). Act I's last scene is about Padmini getting pregnant. They all went to the “Rishi” (sage) at the start of Act II to find a solution. Rishi proposed the dominance of the head, which shortly became a reality. Devadatta began to lose Kapila's herculean frame and his muscles began to sag, while Kapila began gaining strength as a result of Devadatta's slack muscles. Once more, jealousy and possessiveness forced these two lovers to engage in a sword duel, which resulted in the deaths of both. The perplexity of the situation is Plato's suggestion of errors and contradictions in their interpretations of essential that took both lives and Padmini decided to perform “Sati”. Scholars are also perplexed regarding the inclusion of this traditional malpractice; Neelam Mansingh Chowdhury concludes, “I knew Girish Karnad very well. He was a complete post-modern being and an intellectual, but why he resorted to such a conventional ending is quite mysterious to me, perhaps, he was being tongue-in-cheek and making a satirical comment” (Sharma); whereas, Satish Kumar redirects the fact of Girish Karnad's skillful framing of the plays as to “understand current political and social realities” (Kumar 2).

On the other hand, it was pretty tricky for Hayavadana to accept his appearance. Even Bhagavata and the Actor both remain in awe when they come to know that a horse is speaking like a horse; “It's no use continuing this nonsense. So, you saw a talking horse? Good. Now go and get made up ...” (Karnad 4). However, uncertainty set in as Hayavadana began yearning for completion. His voice was unequalled despite the goddess' blessing for him to grow entire and perfect as a horse, but he has “only one sorrow ... [he has] become a complete horse but not a complete being! This human voice this cursed human voice – it's still there!” (Karnad 68). Psychophysical parallelism failed at this stage because Hayavadana's mind was searching for a horse's voice in a horse's body, but his voice remained human. Eventually, though, he learned from the child's smiling technique and attained the directed principle.

Plato believed that to achieve knowledge and virtue, bewilderment was a prerequisite; according to Gareth B. Matthews, “... you cannot advance philosophically without being genuinely perplexed” (Matthews; Cruz 210). He contends that perplexity is the core of philosophy and that it has its roots in Socrates, who utilized perplexity to reveal the stupidity and inconsistency of those with whom he had conversations. Additionally, Matthews looks at the various ways that Plato and Aristotle attempted to resolve, accept, or

normalize ambiguity. Although Aristotle acknowledges the importance of perplexity in philosophy, he underlines that it has its roots in our inborn sense of wonder and curiosity about the universe. He asserts that confusion about the essence of the cosmos, including the reasons behind motion, change, and being, is where philosophy got its start. Aristotle views puzzlement as a catalyst for theoretical explanation and scientific inquiry.

The goddess Kali, though a deity but Karnad portrayed her as a perplexed, aporic supernatural force, to whom the human attributions have been imposed. The ambiguity in the characteristics of the mother of all nature, who resides at Mount Chitrakoot, and is revered, seems indifferent to people's welfare. She is more preoccupied with their devotion to her and the sacrifices they make for her than with their welfare. She tells Padmini that Devadatta lied, which shows that she has an ego. She does not step in to stop Kapila and Devadatta from chopping off their skulls and offering them to her, but she rises from her sleep and stops Padmini from taking her own life. Nobody would have been able to withstand any catastrophe, suffering, or identity crisis. She grants Padmini a desire but doesn't care how it makes sense. With the phrase "so be it," she fulfils the wish. She is the one who makes Padmini, Kapila, and Devadatta have identity issues as a result. In the second case, Hayavadana, who only has one other choice, goes to her shrine. He goes there in search of fulfilment. The goddess Kali grants his request even before finishing it at the Kali temple. He changes into a horse speaking like a human instead of fully evolving into a human being, staying an imperfect and disillusioned being. He was left feeling unfinished by her, and his desire for fulfilment persisted even if it appeared as though she had vanished.

Even if the creator of this masterpiece, Karnad, was in a dual mind during his creation; his perplexed mind helped him to create this masterpiece. To create neither "Western" nor "Indian," play but rather the combination of both, Karnad combined the structures, aesthetics, and strategies of playwright-initiated, message, and narrative style of the colonial theatre with "Yakshagana," a style of dance-drama popular in his native Karnataka state. This resulted in a new theatrical convention that is both greater than and different from the sum of its parts. Karnad purposely developed hybrid plays that challenge colonial cultural authority by interrogating the binary ideas upon which colonial creative power was founded, rather than by rejecting "Western" theatre or upgrading theatrical techniques and dominating theatrical discourse. His chosen characters and his use of props support the complexity and confusion of the plot which arises now and then in the readers'/spectators' minds. Karnad implemented several masks for every figure to illustrate hybridity. The Ganesha head prototype that is the mask has been left on the table for prayer

rather than the Ganesha statue. A horse mask and a light and dark mask are used to represent Hayavadana, the transposed heads of Devadatta and Kapila, respectively. The figure Hayavadana, whose every one-third represents heavenly, human, and animal, has been used to represent Karnad's distinctive worldview of the contradictory world. Hayavadana learned to neigh from the human kid to become whole/complete.

HAYAVADANA. Laugh again? – Let me try [tries to laugh]. Ha Ha

Ha! No, it's not easy to laugh – just like that ...

BOY [mimes whipping]. Laugh-laugh ...

HAYAVADANA. All right. All right. I'll try again. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! – Huhhuh ... Heahhh ...

[His laughter ends up as a proper neigh.] (Karnad 70)

Conclusion:

As a result, perplexity is a complicated and diverse phenomenon that can be interpreted in several ways based on the setting, goal, and extent of philosophical study. It might be interpreted as a challenge or an advantage, a barrier or a support, a flaw or a strength. In any event, it is a crucial component of philosophy's nature.

Numerous philosophers from diverse systems and viewpoints have examined confusion in recent times. Jane Addams, an American social reformer and pragmatic philosopher, for instance, saw bewilderment as a feeling that results from certain circumstances, such as taking part in a social settlement, participating in union activities, or attempting to defy gender stereotypes. Perplexity gives us a cognitive break from our everyday morals and habits of thought, which encourages us to think creatively about philosophy. According to Martha Nussbaum, confusion is a positive sensation that inspires us to seek wisdom and knowledge. She also looks at how confusion might influence our political and moral judgments and how it relates to other emotions like wonder, excitement, fear, and rage. The bewilderment of circumstances, the ambiguity of the plot, the aporic social context, etc. make *Hayavadana* a very interesting epic drama that has an abundance of new thoughts and insights at every step. Karnad through his complex plot also highlighted the condition of the subaltern women in the society which makes the plot more perplexing and special; “This mask of Padmini suggests the struggle of a subaltern, a postcolonial term used by Antonio Gramsci to denote a subordinate position, who is deprived of her basic right of choice in marriage in an Indian society” (Spivak 269). In the book, Padmini's mask illustrates how her pursuit of the ideal spouse runs against the Indian view of marriage. As a result,

Padmini feels alienated from society and plans to do “Sati,” or self-immolation. Devadatta and Kapila were Padmini's two true loves, and she adored them both.

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