

Torii Gateway and Enclosure – Dark Secrets /Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

An important lesson I learnt from doing this show was that when an idea starts to take the shape of an object a dynamic external entity may completely hijack your carefully planned art work.

Surrealism as the means of escape in Girish Karnad's Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala

It is very easy to remain in the pragmatic world of apparent realities. Seeing is believing but if this were the ultimate truth, people would never have felt the need to escape the bondage of the so called empirical reality and plunge into a land of possibilities which does not comply with the parameters of tangible realism and yet has immense possibilities of excavating the depths of inner human psyche within which lies the unadulterated truth of their lives. What is the reason for the real world often becoming fake when it comes to projecting human conscience? It is because reality occludes people from presenting themselves as they are with their personal beliefs founded on unconventional notions that more often than not disregard the fundamental principles of propriety or righteous behaviour assigned to them. Girish Karnad's plays *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* explore deep recesses of human conscience that often remained unexplored by

practical human efforts.

In *Hayavadana*, Padmini's secret desire is that she wants a man with a sound brain and a good physique instead of a weakly built Devadatta, her husband. In *Naga-Mandala*, Rani's secret desire is that she desires a loving man in her life instead of the tyrant husband she has in reality. Both these heroines are essentially tabooed by the society from expressing their wants openly and they are intelligent enough to comprehend the fact that crossing the boundaries of morality for them both would typify them as adulteresses. It is therefore that another world altogether different from the real one is recreated by both these women in which their desires are met, rather subtly but conspicuously. Moreover, despite the fact that they manage to fulfil their wants, they aren't stereotyped as illicit or wrong in their conduct. This is the speciality of their created worlds that are far removed from the realistic life.

Padmini's world includes Kali, the goddess who wakes up suddenly from her sleep and grants her the incredible boon of a man with brain and brawn. This is actually impossible in reality. Nonetheless, when we read the play or watch it, we accept this improbability whole heartedly as we are somewhere aware that the deliberate use of surrealistic setting acts as an apt device to counter our expectations of a 'good Indian woman' who is known for her strong ethical values. When Kali makes an impossible phenomenon a reality with her trick Padmini does not have two men but has only one man with two distinct qualities of two men. This apparently magical reality is accepted readily by the us because we are indoctrinated so strongly to accept anomaly in imagination but not in our reality. It is therefore that educated readers and audiences of the play do not dismiss the story as absurd or unreal because there is no need for providing any official approval to the heroine for her conduct of desiring intelligent Devadattta and the able bodied Kapila as she has them both in one man because of a divine intervention. We are practically

saved, I would say, from the onus of giving our opinions on the legitimacy of the choice. Similarly, when Rani makes love to a serpent disguised as her own husband in *Naga-Mandala*, we are absolutely free from being judgmental about her in any sense of the word. Rani is shown as an innocent village girl who hardly has the calibre to deduce the reality of the man who appears to her every night in the guise of her husband. It is so comfortable for the proponents of morality to convince themselves that Rani is to be acquitted from the blame of fornication. Thus, surreal acts as the device of escaping reality that is stringent and demands an absolute insistence on ethical conduct. While we know that Rani has a tyrant husband who does not love her and the serpent has brought a lot of love to her, we cannot apparently approve this extra-marital relationship of her. Nevertheless, it becomes a lot easier to bypass the illicit element in the relation of the two if we accept the imaginary folk tale of the serpent lover as true.

The point here is, not only does surreal drama acquits the protagonists from the blame of disloyalty; it relaxes the recipients from the cumbersome task of giving an honest verdict for the two. As soon as the readers/audiences are released from this requirement, there germinates a whole range of viewpoints in relation to both these characters that are far removed from the idea of stringent categorization of good or bad. This is what the playwright Girish Karnad intends to execute in both these plays. He seems to provide us the luxury of freely interpreting Padmini and Rani as victims of patriarchy or shrewd creators of their own desired reality. Ultimately, this dual interpretation dismantles conventional bigotry in a very intelligent way without dismissing the ethical notions value education we study in our lives. Karnad does not undermine ethics and morals; he dislodges the fetish for these that often we have in our lives. In addition to this, he gives those the emancipation to liberate themselves from these notions completely who feel that they do not

require them at all and their life is a personal matter in all its entirety. Thus, both these characters expose our expectations for an orderly social living as well as our keen desire to break the set concepts of 'morally correct'. There is a Padmini and a Rani in all our lives who don't want to comply with the rules but our reluctance to accept them in public is also a matter of perception in these plays. If we secretly support extra marital alliance, why don't we have the courage to voice our feelings out in the open? Why do we have to have double standards in our lives promulgating loyalty in marriage on the one hand and carrying on a tacit affair on the other? Our perspectives of modernity are also challenged in the plays through the use of the surreal. We want the surreal as a means to escape reality of our misbalanced living that is both conventional and anomalous at the same time. Only surreal can divulge these inner secrets and can be digested by the people today who superficially cling either to their culture or to unconventional ways of living. If Padmini and Rani were vocal enough to claim their likings, am sure people would have then(when these plays were published) and even today would have comfortably judged them as wrong. At the same time, it would have been done by the same people whose notions of ethics and propriety are very vague and far from being culturally sound. Unlike these people, those that cling to ethics strongly would have completely dismissed both these characters as inappropriate in their desires. Surreal prevents both these extremes and gives us thankfully some space to think and decide which school of thought would we like to belong to – the ethical or the modern and how.

For any comments please send in the box given below

Memories of the Recitative Past



All of us are born with memories that we wish to forget and discard like faded photographs having hazy blurry images or the thrown pennings of blue inland letters and creamy pages fading with endearing attachments. We would rather regurgitate the past than carry it within us. Are we in the real sense of failing to remember or do we wish not to hear the words of the recitative past and not get the truthful recollection of the echoing sights? To be called only as a witness is easier than to bear and pour out the visions we wish not to see. The ability to see things as they are, are so difficult to break, that to escape into the light hearted day seems much easier and much more uncomplicated.

No one wants to resound pain, express trauma or grieve for a loss. The identity of the self to happily live only within the confines of the day, going from hour to hour and knocking down the doors of the minutes that dissolves then into seconds, is true serenity and peace. However, many times we need to

challenge the tranquillity we have falsely created and listen to the polyphonous sounds of the dead and buried. The graves of the bygone as much as you bury, as much as you decide the deepest depth the coffin should lay, needs the embalming, only and only to cleanse your soul.

To gain the convincing reincarnation of this lost spirit, is only possible if we allow ourselves to cry, lament and mourn for the forgotten memories. Just by dismissing the bygone and not evoking the emotions of sorrow, by not shedding the salty reservoir, we are creating only adulterated personifications of what we term as today. Its reason is enough to moisten the sodden earth of the buried past, so that the watering down can reach the submerged coffins. One has to sometimes open to see the enclosed skeletons and beat one's breast to lament for the faded photographs or tethered inland letters or torn creamy papers that are screaming to be heard.

So, hear the cries within, grieve for the past, sob along with the beats of your heart and let your tears become the pulse. It will only allow the recitative past to become beautiful, melodious verses of songs of your life you will want to hear again and again.



The Exodus Needs a Companion / Gouri Nilakantan

I see the human mind seeking and wandering eternally in the search of this unerring habitat. If our birth homes can define and allow such unconfined liberties, uncontested un-contemptuous ways, will only then, this never ending.....

The Prosaic Names the Profound

Vibrancy comes not from creating something new and novel all the time, but in the unchanging ways we have adapted ourselves into. The ordinary is the one that creates the true promise of the.....

Chronicle of my Curious Corona Case / Susmita Mukherjee

So for 21 days after possible infection I was sustaining without any medicine, only on fruits and coconut water.

Suddenly on 30th morning, I woke up with a panic attack and called my doctor in Mumbai who immediately prescribed some pills and asked me to take the RTPCR test. Now this test had been the bone of contention for a while. My younger son who is studying to be a scientist in New Zealand, along with his school classmate, My doctor,, who is in the frontline of Covid treatment in India, had been pleading with me to get a test done. I had dismissed it as medical haranguing. I had first heard the term from my very concerned older sister, and ofcourse I was determined not to go to any hospitals for testing (Pateli) But my Mumbai doctor was not going to listen to this insane patient in Orchha. A conversation happened between him and my husband and I was bundled off to to our small but clean hospital in the village where they stuffed some cotton up my nostrils and the dreaded RTPCR test seemed like child's play.

Aradhana's Pacific Adventures with Crustaceans

Her name is Aradhana and she is a prospective 7th grader at the International School of Panama. Her most prevalent learned behavior during these initial months of Covid-19 has been "Science Curiosity", be it in Physics, Chemistry, Biology or Zoology. We were pleasantly surprised when she was recognized as ISP's "Most Independent Thinking Student in Grade 6".

The stranger across my mirror- Have we met? | Ojaswini Trivedi

The continuous falling back into the comfort, the familiar sensation, the treaded path we walked for weeks together. We feel the urgency to crawl back into that. Our memory cells aching to sprint through those lanes, actions and people. Again.

Stake holders in Artistic Practices: An Economic Model

When we hear the word stake holders, it reminds us of a company, with a marketing head looking into profits for the company. Do we see a theatre company to be functional as a profit making company, most unfortunately no! In India, with a strong tradition of socialism and the IPTA and the ideas of being the catalyst for change and activism we often fail to see a theatre company to have an economic model behind it. With increasing globalisation and now India adapting itself into a more and more global economy, theatre should also not fail to look at the most important aspect of being an economically strong and viable model. This hence will create more and more stake holders in artistic practices.

In India, the practices are dependent highly on grant giving bodies and neglect to get into even selling tickets for their

shows. The management practices are highly lacking and often times publicity is given the last minute emphasis and impetus. Often one sees that it is the management students, despite their little formal training students doing a much better job at marketing and public relations. What we really lack today is an equally strong focus on theatre management. Theatre in India should go much beyond waiting for the god in form to a government grant to arrive or to wait for a private benefactor to knock the doorsteps of the company.

The stake holders of a theatre company is thus not the role of only the producer and the director but the entire team. Unless and until the theatre company does not make profits it will impossible to give any monetary remuneration to the actors. The actors hence will be forced to look for work beyond theatre and get more and more into films (if lucky) or be forced to act in sometimes absurd television serials in which they might go largely unnoticed.

We lack a strong focus and determination to get beyond the mechanics of staging a play and not looking at marketing in specific and general terms. This input will also be able to not keep a record of all the old audiences but also create new ones and go to places that were unexplored before. Theatre management will also make sure that designing of the publicity, posters, brochures and handouts are created in most effective manner. One can perhaps see the role of the theatre manager as the most important person as he is the chief operative officer of the theatre company. His role is that of an COO like any other important company. Its time now to hence consider this role as a pivotal one and make sure that each theatre company has the focus and determination to start raking profits. The time is now to act!

What is “folk” after all? – Gouri Nilakantan

“Folk”, the ordinary, the mundane, the one without any purpose, that’s the first thing that comes to ones mind when we think of the word. Is that true, can we negate the voice of the common man, the arts belonging to the masses as just meaningless, not to be cared for? The recognition for folk arts, theatre, music, oral ballads, tales, stories now is a recognized study on its own. It is being now seen as strong discipline to be studied and understood. To categorize and delineate any dramatic performance as being folk, traditional or modern would be simply dispensing them off that can endanger our readings and interpretations for it. Our tradition has to be also be seen in through the eyes of the masses, the simple potter, the folk stories and the music of our villages, or cooking recipes and our theatrical shows all need to be studied in much more depth. While talking about theatre, all dramatic performances display set codes and conventions such as costumes, makeup, text, and use of diction prose or poetry and evolved choreography, movement or premeditated action. It can be said as one having a “traditional process” as pointed out Brynjulf Alver.

By definition it is the process of tradition which creates, alters and renews, chooses and works in new topics in an endless chain, by the interaction between the individual bearer and the community. (Alver, 47)

Folk drama is said to often belong to the common and non-

literate people. It is time to go beyond the 'folk' or the common and rethink about this dramatic form as an ongoing concern of contemporary life. As in the words of Steve Tillis,

...folk drama might be present throughout a culture, employing of any social rank who use texts that might either be freshly composed or have a basis in literature, and whose performances are an ongoing concern of contemporary life. (35)

Indian theatrical tradition goes back to antiquity and is deeply rooted within local culture and consciousness. Therefore, it has its own uniqueness and structure that is truly eastern in its orientation. The theatrical traditions of India are divided into Loka dharmi (the popular), the folk, which includes Nautanki of Punjab and Swang of Himachal Pradesh and the Natyadharmi (the traditional), the classical, based on ancient texts on drama, like the Bharatanatyam. Several characteristics delineate the classical and the folk. The classical performances of India are based on a set of codified laws, such as those of the Natyashastra, but at the same time are "open" to interpretation. The Natyashastra (800 A.D.) is an ancient Indian treatise on drama, written in Sanskrit that is the foundation for not just the classical dances but also most of the theatrical dance forms prevalent in the country such as Kuttiyattam of Kerala, Ankiya Nat, Ramlila and Raslila of Uttar Pradesh and Terukootu, of Tamil Nadu and Chhau of Eastern India.

This demarcation unfortunately has given the classical arts an "high and elitist definition. It's time to rethink and reconsider what is "high" and "low" after all? Its time for a change in thinking, for reconsideration and perhaps a redefinition to all arts in general. The future students and communities of practitioners now need to speak in favor of all arts, it's time to think act now and implement the much needed

change now!