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CLASH BETWEEN TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL FULFILLMENT IN *HAYAVADANA*



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forces of society , social reality .

ABSTRACT

Man often finds himself struggling against the dominant forces of society to fulfill his individual desires. Moments come in life when man has to choose between his own desires or the conventions of society. However, man feels a strong urge to choose both, which, instead of resolving the dilemma, further aggravates it with catastrophic consequences. It is such clash between human desire and the overarching social norms, which has been dealt with by Karnad in his *Hayavadana*.

KEYWORDS : *Tradition and Individual Fulfillment ,*

INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad has brought to the front the age-old conflict between tradition and desire, perfection and imperfection, mind and body, repression and expression, social reality and individually-experienced reality, rational truth and experiential truth and Dionysian view of life and Apollonian view of life in his play *Hayavadana*. To dramatise this conflict, Karnad has based his *Hayavadana* on the story of transposed heads as given in the Sanskrit *Vetala-Panchavimasati*. In modern times Thomas Mann used this story in his *The Transposed Heads*, which he called "metaphysical gust". Whereas in the Sanskrit story of *Vetala-Panchavimasati*, the superiority of mind over body has been established, Thomas Mann ridicules this superiority and stresses that the human body is a device for the completion of human destiny and that even the transposition of heads cannot liberate human beings from the psychological limits imposed by nature. Girish Karnad invents the sub-plot of *Hayavadana*, the horse-headed man, in order to give a new twist to this age old problem, and presents the absurd situation in which modern man finds himself due to such conflicts.

The opening of the *Hayavadana* brings to the fore the underlying conflict between perfection and imperfection as a mask of Ganesha is presented on the stage. Lord Ganesha, who is considered to be the Lord of success and perfection, is Himself imperfect as He has crooked face and distorted body. The play starts with the worship of Lord Ganesha. The Bhagvata (the Sutradhar or Commentator) gives a vivid description of Lord Ganesha as the elephant-headed god, who is the Lord and Master of

Success and Perfection:

An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly- whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Vakratunda–Mahakavya, with his crooked face and distorted body, is Lord and Master of Success and Perfection. (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 1)

Girish Karnad creates the mythical figure of Hayavadana, the horse-headed man on the lines of Lord Ganesha in order to make this conflict between perfection and imperfection all the more striking. Just as Lord Ganesha, who is worshipped as the Lord of perfection and success, is full of imperfections, that is, crooked face and distorted body, Hayavadana too is imperfect as he is a horse-headed man, who wants to be a perfect man. Ironically at last Hayavadana emerges out not as a complete man but as a complete horse. Hayavadana tells the Bhagavata that in the temple of Kali he prayed, "Make me complete" (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 68) and even before he could complete his prayer, "Make me a complete man" (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 68), the Goddess Kali fulfilled his prayer by transforming him into a complete horse. However he still possessed the cursed human voice. He sheds his human voice and starts neighing only after the five-year old son of Padmini, who has acquired the characteristics of the character of Kapila, laughs for the first time on seeing Hayavadana, a complete horse now, talking and laughing like a human being. The conflict in Hayavadana is left unresolved. The desire of Hayavadana to be a complete man is thwarted and what is achieved is absurdity of human situation. In his "Introduction" to *Hayavadana*, Kirtinath Kurtkoti remarks:

The horse-man's search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the Uttamanga, the human head. (Karnad, *Three Plays* 70)

The play centres on the main theme of conflict between mind and body, which is epitomized in the character of Padmini. Whereas the story in *Kathasaritsagar* as well as in *Vetalpanchavimsati* concludes the superiority of mind over body, Thomas Mann in his *The Transposed Heads* puts forward his opposite view and suggests that body is as important as mind is. However, Karnad presents the absurd situation man finds himself in due to this division between mind and body. Traditionally Indian view of life believes in the subjugation of body over mind, and if Padmini accepts this view of life, she has to stay contented with the intellectual beauty of her husband, Devadatta, suppressing her physical desire of getting a "man of steel" (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 43) like Kapila. However, Padmini is not ready to surrender her physical desire on the altar of tradition. The poetic description of her beauty by her poet husband Devadatta is not adequate enough to satisfy her physical desire. Therefore, she wants both—the intellectual beauty of her husband, Devadatta and the bodily pleasure of Kapila. She wants to choose both but the social order expects her to stay cheerful with the intellectual beauty of her husband alone. She finds herself in an incongruous situation which, instead of settling the problem further aggravates it. P. D. Nimsarkar remarks:

Padmini does not publicly admit her love for Kapila because she is aware of the socio-cultural restrictions which prohibit a married woman from developing extramarital relationship which would otherwise have been taken as a breach of social condition and violation of marriage institution. Moreover, Kapila is a Sudra, a lower caste person and inter-caste marriage would not have been approved and accepted. (Nimsarkar 104)

Further Karnad weaves a web of incidents which result, not in the quiet acceptance of the tradition of subjugation of body over mind, but in the absurdity of human situation. Devadatta and Kapila chop off their heads in the temple of Kali. When Padmini sees the headless bodies, she wails and curses herself, "How selfish you are, how unkind!" (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 31). As she decides to behead

herself to avoid the stigma of being the cause of the death of Devadatta and Kapila, Goddess Kali comes to her help and asks Padmini to put their heads on their bodies. In her desire of achieving the both, that is the intellectual strength of Devadatta and physical strength of Kapila, she puts the head of Kapila on Devadatta's body and that of Devadatta on Kapila's body. M. K. Naik observes that the plight of Padmini suggests a woman's "vain attempt to unite Man as intellect and as flesh in order to further her creative purpose ... Integration cannot be archived by trying to reconcile the irreconcilable but by accepting cheerfully the fundamental disharmony in life" (Naik 196). This transposing of heads by Padmini results in an absurd situation as both men claim Padmini to be their wife. The problem is resolved by a Rishi, who decides that the person with the head of Devadatta is her husband. Rishi, considering the superiority of the head over the body decides in favour of the body having the transposed head of Devadatta. Karnad remarks, "The answer given in the *Kathasaritsagara* is; since the head represents the man, the person with the husband's head is the husband" (Karnad, *Three Plays* 13).

Initially Padmini feels happy as she gets what she desires, that is, the intellect of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. However she finds that each of the bodies gradually transforms itself in order to match the head to which it is attached. Padmini feels disappointed as she sees the changes happening. Kapila and Devadatta, at last, become their old selves again. Seeing such changes, Padmini says to Kapila:

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 must 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. (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 58)

The synthesis she desired is made impossible by the very logic that enabled it. She again finds herself in an absurd situation of conflict between traditional value of being faithful to her husband on the one hand and, on the other realizing her physical desire by crossing the limits imposed by marital bond. She chooses to go beyond the constructs of faithfulness and faithlessness and in order to realize her physical desire, sends her husband, Devadatta to Ujjain to bring new dolls for their child. In her husband's absence she goes to Kapila. As Kapila has suppressed his desire for Padmini, her visit disturbs his calm. Kapila, finding himself in an absurd situation, asks Padmini, "Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?" (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 57). Realising that Padmini is strongly inclined towards physical desires, Kapila says, "What she needs is a man of steel" (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 43).

Kapila finds himself torn between traditional value of loyalty as a friend and his desire for Padmini. The social order demands him to be loyal to his friend and thwart the advances of Padmini towards him, though deep inside he has strong feeling for Devadatta's wife, Padmini. Kapila decides to subjugate his feelings for Padmini to present himself as a loyal friend but the Dionysian view of life in him overpowers the Apollonian view of life and he finds himself wishing for Padmini. As he comes to know that Devadatta has cancelled his journey to Ujjain, he finds himself torn apart into two selves:

KAPILA. (*Aside*.) So it's off. What am I to do for the rest of the day? What am I to do for the rest of the week? Why should it feel as though the whole world has been wiped out for a whole week? Why this this emptiness ... Kapila, Kapila, get a tight hold on yourself. You are slipping, boy, control yourself. Don't lose that hold. Go now—don't come here again for a week—Devadatta is bound to get angry with you for not coming. Sister-in-law will be annoyed. But don't come back. Go, go! (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 53)

Both Devadatta and Kapila are close friends but both love Padmini. Padmini too wishes to get the intellect of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. The transposition of heads too has failed to realize the desire of Padmini of getting the best part of the two. The situation seems to be knotty:

Devadatta : Tell me one thing. Do you really love Padmini?

Kapila : Yes.

Devadatta : So do I.

Kapila : I know. (Silence) Devadatta, couldn't we all three live together - like the Pandavas and Draupadi?

Devadatta : What do you think? (Silence. Padmini looks at them but doesn't say anything.)

Kapila : (laughs). No, it can't be done.

Devadatta : That's why I brought this. Shows the sword. (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 60)

A duel ensues between them and both cut off each other's head. Ironically the same body chops off the same head again. Padmini entrusts her child to the care of Bhagavata and commits sati:

My son is sleeping in the hut. Take him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in this forest 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 rivers and the trees. When he's five take him to the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapura. Tell him it's Devadatta's son. (Karnad, *Hayavadana* 62)

The play does not round off with any certain answer to the conflict but leaves the conflict between desire and tradition unresolved. The chorus very well brings to surface this conflict when it comments:

Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many petalled, many flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower? (Karnad, *Three Plays* 82)

The play seems to play on the unrealizable search of human being of achieving completeness or perfection. Karnad seems to imply that life is full of opposites and the irony of human existence lies in the futile efforts of man to infuse the opposites into a single whole, which, instead of adding meaning to life, endangers the very existence. In her restless efforts to infuse the body of Kapila with the mind of Devadatta and in this way to achieve a complete husband, Padmini gives birth to incessant conflicts within and without which ultimately devour the very existence of Kapila, Devadatta and Padmini and, at the same time, leave her son to the mercy of society.

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