



Hayavadana –Quest for Completeness

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Abstract:

Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana was published in 1970, exactly six years after Tughlaq. The story of Hayavadana comes partly from Thomas Mann's story titled "Transposed Heads" which in turn is based on one of the versions of the story in "Vetal panchavimshati". Hayavadana is an enigmatic play. Critical opinion is divided about what its main theme is. Kritinath Kurtkoti, who wrote a brief introduction to the English translation published in 1975 says:

The original play poses a moral problem- while Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. The human body, Mann argues, is a fit instrument for the fulfillment of human destiny.

Karnad's play poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationships.

Another critic U.R. Anantha Murthy in his "A note on Karnad's Hayavadana", says that the play exposes to the audience the significant theme like incompleteness in a comic mode.

The play opens with Ganesh Puja—with the offering of worship accompanied by singing to the God Ganesha. The use of elephant headed God is remarkable because Lord Ganesha with human body and animal head aptly expresses the central theme of incompleteness of being.

Hayavadana is a man with the head of a horse: "Haya" means horse and "vadana" means face. Bhagavata is something of a chorus, commenting upon the theme of the play. He proceeds to tell us the story of the two youths, Devadatta and Kapila. Devadatta is the son of the Reverend Brahmin, Vidya Sagar. He represents the intellect. On the other hand, Kapila is the only son of an iron-smith. He is dark and plain in physical appearance, has no equal in strength.

The story is interrupted by an Actor who comes terrified by horse speaking like a man. After Hayavadana has gone off the stage, the thread of the main plot is picked up. Kapila and Devadatta talk about wrestling but Devadatta is engaged in the thought of a girl by whom he is fascinated. Kapila eventually succeeded in getting Padmini married to Devadatta. Padmini is the daughter of leading merchant in Dharmapura. Devadatta-Padmini-Kapila are the admiring citizens of Dharmapura like Rama-sita-Lakshmana. All three go on a trip while Padmini is pregnant so it is difficult for Devadatta to show his unwillingness for journey. But at the eleventh hour they all set out for Ujjain by a cart driven by Kapila. On

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the way Padmini is strongly fascinated by Kapila's skill in driving a cart his strong muscles and his ability. Padmini's attraction towards Kapila could not remain hidden from Devedatta when Padmini expresses her desire to go to the temple, but Devedatta refuses to accompany her due to disgust and asks Kapila to escort her. He says "Good-bye Kapila, Good-bye padmini, may the Lord Rudra bless you. You are two pieces of my heart. Live happily together. I shall find happiness in that". This remark clearly indicates that Devadatta is deeply hurt by Padmini's attraction towards Kapila.

But as Padmini and Kapila set out for the temple, he also goes to the temple of Kali to fulfil his promise, where he finds a sword and cuts off his head to offer it to Goddess Kali. Kapila goes in search of his friend but finds his dead body. So, Kapila also cuts off his head in repentance. After seeing it padmini also proposes to go their way but Kali forbids her to do so, and asks her, "Put these heads back properly. Attach them to their bodies and then press that sword on their necks. They will come up alive, is that enough?". However, Padmini keeps the heads on the two bodies, but in her excitement she puts Devadatta's head on Kapila's body and vice-versa. Then she presses the sword on their necks exactly according to the instruction of the Goddess when they become alive the two friends make claims and counter claims to the hand of Padmini. Finally Devadatta takes her away.

The second act of Hayavadana is largely Karnad's creation for he develops it from a question that he asks himself as he arrives at the end of a traditional story. His development of the second act is based to a greater extent on the story of by Thomas Mann, but the conclusions offered are to be interpreted differently. The second act shows that the solution Vikrama gave to the problem is insufficient in the present situation. Padmini's act of going with Devedatta's head is based on the same solution. But if the head controls the body it logically follows that it will transform the body. That is what happens and so far as padmini is concerned she again remains with Devedatta, her husband. Worse still, she is forced to watch the transformation taking place and thus loses Kapila bit by bit. Ultimately, she finds herself faced with the same problem which faced her in the first act. She misses Kapila's impulsiveness and his physicality consequently. Devadatta loses Padmini to Kapila once again.

The emphasis of the play is on padmini, the woman who is faced with this impossible situation. Here Karnad takes a leap from the original story and develops it further. Padmini's predicament is the predicament of a modern, emancipated woman in our society who is born between two polarities, a woman who loves her husband as well as someone else for two different aspects of their personalities. She is fascinated by both Devadatta and Kapila and this creates the problem. The two men cannot accept each other when it comes to sharing a woman and all the three destroy themselves in the process.

The two have to die and reduce their beloved Padmini to ashes. Devadatta makes it clear that there are "No grounds for friendship now. No question of mercy. We must fight like lions and kill like cobras".(61)

The play ends with Devadatta and Kapila fighting with each other when both are dead, Padmini decides to perform Sati. Before sacrificing herself, padmini makes it clear that she cannot hope to get perfection even in her next life. As she prays to "kali, mother of all nature", she says: 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 have not left me even that little consolation.(63)

While padmini has a child. The child connects the thematic strands of the main plot and sub-plot. He grows up as Kapila's child in the forest and at the age of five is given over to a traveler going to the city to be delivered into the hands of his grandparents. The child is hopelessly incomplete because he has lost the child's natural privilege to laugh and enjoy. The child becomes complete when he laughs in response to Hayavadana's laughter.

In "Hayavadana", Karnad presents the conflict between body and soul. By using the masks, he has in some ways brought together the Indian idea of masks and Mann's hypothesis of body for fulfilling destiny. Regarding the use of masks, Karnad points out:

Western theatre has developed a contrast between face and the mask—The real inner person and the exterior one presents or wishes to present to the world outside. But in the traditional Indian theatre, the mask is character represents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype, the mask merely presents in enlarged detail its essential moral nature.

Hayavadana marked another major change of direction, not only in his writing but in post-independence theatre as a whole.

The story of Devedatta, Kapila, and Padmini in Karnad's Hayavadana follows elements of characterization and the order of events in Mann's Novella, closely enough to be considered in some respects, a 'de-orientalized' contemporary Indian theatrical version of it.

In fact, Hayavadana unites so-called urban and western aesthetics, techniques and visual practices. It means that Hayavadana is a play about more than style.

In addition to its thematic richness, Hayavadana is also a bold experiment in dramatic technique

which holds a revealing lesson for all practitioners of Indian drama. Hayavadana provides a model for modern Indian theatre.

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