

The Man-Woman Relationship in Mohan Rakesh's *The Great Swans of the Waves*

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Modern Indian playwrights have gone back to tradition for their themes and techniques and also fuse with contemporary reality in the modern context. Mohan Rakesh's *The Great Swans of the Waves* based on Ashvaghosha's 'Saundaranand', it portrays the internal conflict of Nand whose mind wavers like the great swans of the lake. He is unstable and irresolute and is obsessed with Sundari's beauty and by the end of the play, with his head shaved; he has a begging bowl in his hand. He can neither liberate himself from the trap of Sundari's beauty nor go to Buddha with an undefiled mind.

While preparations for the love feast are being done, Sundari tells Alka that Siddhartha left home secretly one night to become Buddha, not because the forest was more attractive to him than the home but because Yashodhara was unable to bind him with her charms. She says;

Sundari : Prince Siddhartha has become Gautam Buddha today. The credit for it goes to lady Yashodhara.

Alka : The credit for it?

Sundari : Yes. If lady Yashodhara could have bound Prince Siddhartha with her charms wouldn't he have remained Prince Siddhartha to day?

Alka : Don't say that, my lady!

Sundari : Why not? Isn't it the truth? Why did Prince Siddhartha leave home secretly one night? Why was the forest more attractive to him than the home? It's a simple thing, Alka. The attraction of a woman make a man masculine, while her repulsion makes him enlightened. (P.3)

Thus, Sundari says that the attraction of a woman makes a man masculine, while her repulsion makes him Gautam Buddha. Sundari is totally against the suppression of desires and concepts such as salvation sound preposterous to her. She boldly expresses her feeling without any hesitation like a modern woman.

In act-II, when Nand is involved in Sundari's toilette, Alka tells him that Lord Buddha had come to their doorstep for alms and has now gone. Now, Nand is upset and anxious to go and begs forgiveness. As he holds a mirror in his hand for his wife, he hears a chant, "Buddham Sharanam Gachhami", suddenly the mirror falls. His thoughts of going to seek forgiveness, the breaking of the mirror and the flickering shadow in the lake symbolize his unstable mind.

However, Nand returns in Bhikshu's outfit with his head shaved and when he looks at his image in the broken mirror he wonders why he has got his hair cut and it does not matter at all because his heart has not changed. He says "my heart still possesses the same love for you (Sundari) and my eyes reflect the same image of your beauty. As

Sundari sees Nand's shaved head, she screams. In this situation Nand finds himself absolutely helpless and lonely. In this extreme mental agony he goes without meeting Sundari in search of his lost hair.

Nand wants to question Buddha, about what he has done to his hair. Sundari who had once said that the repulsion of a woman makes a man into Gautam Buddha and is greatly distressed to see Nand dressed up as a Bhikshu, overwhelmed by her defeat. The play portrays the image of fragmented characters struggling with their relationships and circumstances. However, in this context Nand expresses his emotions as;

Nand : I don't wish to hear further about the Wayfarer's commands, mendicant. By his command you shaved my head. Out of respect for my brother I did not stop you by force. I was hoping the look in my eyes would let him know what I thought of that undesirable initiation. But knowingly he did not wish to know. So by rejecting the begging bowl offered by him I gave him my answer and came away.

Anand : You have not given him an answer and come away. You're still giving it. Not accepting the begging bowl was part of your answer. Another part was your not coming here but going away to the jungle and fighting with the tiger. The third part...

Nand : Go on counting the bits as much as you like, mendicant. The Wayfarer, however, knows I've given him my final answer.(P.13)

Nand is the central character of this play, the first act centers around Sundari in which Nand is merely her charmed and admiring husband. In the second act, the focus shifts to his inner conflict, though its outline is very dim. This act is remarkable for its very sensitive and controlled projection of the subtle love-hate relationship between Nand and Sundari. In the third act, the nature of the conflict begins deeper or more intense level.

Nand's going to the Buddha was his own mental choice, along with an inner doubt and conflict. He did not want to hide from the Buddha like a coward. Nand's hair being shorn, his return home and his second departure, all these illustrate his doubts and inner conflicts. His state till the end is like that of swans swimming on the waves. Sundari and Buddha are two individualities and two views of life or two vital forces and Nand's mind swings from one to the other.

At the end, Nand leaves home out of disgust, which arose out of his inability to understand the words of Sundari. Sundari is angry not because Nand's head is shaved, but because at that point she lost her belief in him. Nand believes Sundari is irritated by his hairlessness. That is why she says in the end, 'that's all they can understand!' in the conflict of the material and the nonmaterial view of life.

On comparative line, it is observed that Karnad, in *The Fire and the Rain*, explores modern woman's desires through the torture of the youthful woman Visakha, who openly denied Parvasu's orders and wants Aravasu not to track her. The character of Visakha not only presents the conditions of elite women in ancient India who were fettered by the man-made laws of society, worshipped, abused and exploited but also provides an example of certain shades of her personality which are recognized to the

feminist movement in the modern times. Sundari is just like Visakha who boldly expresses her desires and open thoughts.

In the context of man-woman relationship is concerned, the female characters are brighter and more energetic and dominating than their male counterparts in the play of Mohan Rakesh. Women in this play, besides being objects of pleasure, seek something other than what society permits them. *The Great Swans of the Waves* deals with clash between the egos of the husband and wife, the tension, suffocation and disintegration of a relationship in the context of traditional Indian culture and modernity. To conclude, the portrayal man woman relationship in the family bears strong relevance to the modern man's predicament in the context of familial problems.

Works Cited:

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