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Devastation Caused by Aberrant Desires in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

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Abstract:

Man is always fascinated in the circumstances and works according to his own choice or will. Karnad's characters capture reader's attention with their skill of struggle for existence thereby successfully emerging out of their dilemma. Therefore, they are engulfed in both action and contemplation. In order to achieve the quest of meaning in life, these characters reflect and reveal their perceptions and their vision of life.

In *Hayavadana*, the characters are trapped in a state of agony and suffering due to a peculiar complexity of relationships. Padmini tries to have a perfect or an ideal man. She ultimately gets tangled in aberrant desires resulting in a state of confusion. After all the efforts, she finds herself only in distress because of her unnatural desire which remains unfulfilled. On the contrary she becomes prey of her own bizarre wish resulting in immature death by committing suicide. The present paper outlines how an abnormal desire produces ultimate despair in response to temporary glee.

Keywords: bizarre wish, complexity, sensibility, spiritual crisis, suffering

As culture defines society, Karnad's plays are a reflection of the Indian culture deeply rooted in the society. He takes inspiration from mythology, folklore and focuses on folk culture. In perspective of *Hayavadana*, Karnad moves us to the myths and legends of the Hindu religion for redefining and searching something that is normally called 'mind' or 'soul'. Mind is just a projection of soul. Soul is whole consciousness, the force of life. Developing this idea in further, the play tries to inquire the question – where does the 'self' sit: in the mind or in the body? It has various cultural implications, which are relevant even today. A Man's search for his own self among a web of complex relationships is represented through a 'tangled relationships'. On one hand there is Devadutta, a man of mind and intellect and on the other is Kapila, a man of steel like body. They both love Padmini, emblem of beauty. This creates an unnatural desire in Padmini. At a time, she is fascinated for handsome, intellectual Devadutta and robust body of Kapila. This great dilemma in her mind leads her to keep relationship with both. Padmini is the wife of Devadutta in turn she loves Devadutta's mind but Kapila's body makes her passionate and she gets attracted, even makes illegal love with him. Without

any fear of morality, she wants both of these qualities assembled in one. Thus she is responsible for own misery.

In this play, Karnad exhibits characters' feelings of alienation, their spiritual crisis, their inner chaos, tension and complexes, their sensibility, their problems and their creative impulses. For him the outer weather, the visible action or the physical geography is less compelling than the inner climate, the climate of sensibility. The agonies, ceaseless struggle to find meaning and psychological complexities in the behavior of his characters symbolize man's concern with the external human situation. Devadutta is symbol of mind. He loves through feelings and emotions more than body. He falls in love for fifteen times and even sixteenth attempt with Padmini is hapless. It is Kapila who easily leaves love of Padmini for Devdatta. Kapila represents body. He cannot feel deeply as Devdatta. He is not much emotional while arranging marriage of Devdatta and Padmini. Kapila's mind is not rapid enough to feel the sensations of his body. On the contrary, Devdatta's body does not respond as effectively as his mind eagerly loves. This contrasting combination of mind and body affects Padmini to choose one. She is more sensible and passionate than both Devadatta and Kapila. She wants love combining sensible mind and passionate body which is the root of crisis in relationship.

Two levels on which plot works: The primary plot and secondary plot; the primary plot is that of two bosom friends, Kapila and Devadatta of Dharmapura, who dreams of Padmini. Karnad skillfully portrays caste boundaries and how one is confined to it. Devadatta is a learned *Brahmin*, who represents 'mind' or 'intellect'. He is physically weak, writes emotional poetry. Whereas Kapila is a *Kshatriya (blacksmith)*, who represents 'body', a good wrestler with strong physique. Devadatta falls in love with Padmini, a beautiful and free-minded girl who desires the husband as an ideal and complete man bearing talent, good-look and steel like body. Even though, Kapila gets attracted towards Padmini in the first meet with her, as a loyal friend, arranges the marriage between Devadatta and Padmini. The plot takes twist, when Padmini too gets attracted towards Kapila even merely for his physical strength that lacks in her husband, Devadatta.

The strong physical attraction develops between Kapila and Padmini, which causes painful jealousy in Devadatta. Finding no other option Devadatta goes to a Kali temple and cuts off his head in sacrifice. Kapila too shows his loyalty to Devadatta by cutting his head. Left alone, Padmini decides to die, but she is saved by Goddess Kali who promises her to resurrect the men to life. But in her excitement, Padmini transposes the heads. The question as who is her husband now, resolved by a hermit, who declares that as the head rules the body; the man with Devadatta's head is the real husband of the woman. This causes the identity conflict. Even, it becomes important for both from existentialist point of view. Kapila finds it difficult to deal with the raised problem

logically. Devadatta, who now has Kapila's body, expresses his intense feelings in the words as follows;

“You know, I'd always thought one had to use one's brain while wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body just doesn't wait for thoughts, it acts!”

(Act II, pp. 43).

Padmini gives priority to the physicality of the body, she finds herself in passionate excitement when she combines the head of Devadutta and the body of Kapila. Thereby according a high degree of sexual freedom, which she was expecting from long time, attains a complete experience through Devadatta's clever mind and Kapila's powerful body. But the bodies gradually change to their original form according to the orders given by their heads. This causes great disappointment to Padmini. In desire of Kapila with physically powerful body once again, Padmini goes into the deep forest with her child. The story ends in bloodshed as the two friends agree to fight to death and Padmini committing approved suicide or *Sati*.

The sub-plot is posed by the philosophical problem. In the play, the search for completeness, reinforced through the story of *Hayavadana* is Karnad's own creation. A beautiful Karnataka princess falls in love with a white stallion. She marries him and lives with him for fifteen years. On a fine day the horse turns into a *Gandharva*, a celestial being and asks her to accompany him to his heavenly place. When refused, he curses her to be a horse herself. She happily gallops away, leaving her horse-faced, yet human-bodied child, Hayavadana. He is trying to seek 'completeness' by fully emerging as a man. He is the offspring of a Celestial Being and a Princess, who seem to dislike his appearance. Accordingly, Hayavandana becomes symbolic of a split identity, which is very relevant today. Karnad successfully explores existentialism by escalating the motif of incompleteness, posing a broken identity. Whichever way a look at Hayavandana is the embodiment of incompleteness and imperfection, represents modern man of the today's world.

The two plots come together at climax where Hayavadana, in his quest to become a complete being, meets innocent son of Padmini who is of five-year age only and in search of completeness too. Through the story of Hayavadana, who aspires for completeness, Karnad conveys the existential crisis of modern man confined in intense psychological and philosophical conflicts. Hayavadana also deals with self-alienation and the search for completeness that individuals are facing in the modern world. Karnad introduces in the play the pattern of triangular desire, the love between one woman and two men. These contemporary concerning problems are examined by Karnad, using the techniques of the folk art form of *Yakshagana*. It also uses the devices of *Brechtian Epic* theatre, revealing the hybrid nature of drama. Through this skill, Karnad has made

literature easily accessible. He has blended issues such as love, sexuality, identity and existentialism with folk culture combining his imaginative ideas. He provides us a glance of the past in relevance to understand the current, modern world of bizarre desires.

The plot revolves around incomplete individuals, indifferent Gods, dolls that can speak but children unable to express their emotions. A world that is indifferent to the unnatural longing, joy and lust, frustration and sorrow of human beings. What is real is only the incredible, absurd energy of the horse and its rider who move around the stage symbolizing the powerful but boring rhythm of modern life.

All the three characters are driven by an unyielding primordial force. But, that is as much absurd as it surrounds them. Karnad discovers these absurdities and makes us to examine them by his technique and persuades us to accept that how they are mistaken in their estimate of themselves. The theme of excited and wild sexual energies slipping into bottomless void in human realm is very difficult to sustain. Their passionate longings end in the smoke. We can observe that folklore has been not only a mechanical but a powerful device, which objectifies, evaluates the material in a systematic way.

The Conflict between Convention and Free-ill: The whole action of *Hayavadana* is presented against the background of rigid world of convention which wonders at their violations. Before Devadatta's marriage with Padmini, Devadatta's great learning, Padmini's shining beauty in the practical world is established well with conventional morality.

Karnad asserts that the marriage institution in the society is established for social convenience. After marriage both husband and wife have binding to avoid extra marital relationship. No other person can claim easily for any one of them. It avoids issues of quarrel based on the subject. It is a kind of coverage and support provided by the society. But after marriage, finds no interest in Devadatta basically because of lack of strength in his body. She is more passionate and sexually excited. She realizes that this kind of appetite cannot be fulfilled by her husband, Devdatta. Out of this frustration she expresses the words for him;

You are my Saffron, my marriage thread, my deity. Why should you be disturbed? I like making fun of Kapila - he is such an innocent. Looks a proper devil, but the way he blushes and giggles and turns red, he might have been a bride (Girish Karnad: I 129)

The above expression comes through Padmini's mouth because of her awareness that now she cannot easily break relation with Devadatta, as a husband. Actually she is more attracted towards Kapila and interested to be in his company. She understands well for her it's compulsory to be with her husband and cannot be freely enjoy with Kapila.

Nevertheless, she has strong passion for steel like body of Kapila. Even though being married, in her acute excitement of fulfilling sexual desire with him, she is ready to break any kind of social bond. Marriage is nothing for her. In self-satisfaction, she neither cares social norms nor feelings of husband. She is so indulged in passion that she can't control her strange wish. Because of her this kind of possessive and selfish nature, narrator Bhagavata gives a threatening note before the marriage itself;

Two friends there were – one mind, one heart. They saw a girl and forgot themselves. But they could not understand the song she sang.
(Girish Karnad I: 116)

The female chorus adds to the same and involves in singing;

Why should love to the sap of single body? When the stem is drunk with thick yearning of many petalled, many- flowered lantana. Why should it be tied down to the relation of single flower? (Girish Karnad I: 117)

In the above lines Karnad holds the subject very close to the inner feelings of Padmini. Her mind is doubtful whether to be loyal with husband or enjoy with Kapila. It seems that rebellious against conventions. Even after marriage she leans more towards former lover and best friend of her husband. Padmini's misery of mind is registered once again at the time of journey to the Ujjain fair, visible in her words;

PADMINI: You mean it's dangerous to be with him? The way you talk one would never imagine he was your best friend.
DEVADATTA: (incensed): Why do you have to twist everything I say...
PADMINI: (conciliatory): What did I say? Listen, if you really don't want to go to Ujjain today, let's not. When Kapila comes, tell him I'm ill.
DEVADATTA: But... you will be disappointed.
PADMINI: Me? Of course not, we'll do as you tell. You remember what the priest said –
I'm your 'half' now. The better half! We go to Ujjain some other time... In another couple of months there is big fair. We'll go then – just two of us. All right? We'll cancel today's trip.
(Girish Karnad I: 129-30)

In the initial stage, Padmini's conduct was in keeping with the social conventions that attach her to her husband's wishes. The arguable point is that social conventions are operative, and clash with them is not emerging clearly. But when Padmini looks at Kapila, her control over her, domestic obligations, sense of right and wrong collapses, her

whole being vibrates at the sight of Kapila. She, all of a sudden, reverses her earlier decision to drop the visit. She is melting towards Kapila. Karnad is discovering and developing his experience dispassionately towards positive definition. Later, Padmini's logic of reflection of the proposal turns round to possible sexual jealousy which ultimately will lead to their mutual destruction, and leave her out again. The routine, dull and boring world about her, which she defined even through the dark and wild animal infested forest, is overpowering her. She at last is exhausted and burnt out. Her decision to perform *Sati* is simple enough to polish over her free-will without having her soul moved.

Thus, an individual with free-will attempts identifying through the group-consciousness of the society, escaping the responsibility of convention. But the freedom and responsibility that set apart can also be acknowledged in loneliness. Quest of meaning of life, existence and solution to the problems that always defines the values in the society and goals of human life. Finally nothing but disappointment is attained as a stranger or outsider in the world. There is a sense of loss not only of self but all others who are related to Padmini. Her innocent son is badly affected because of her wrong decisions. He is nervous and more thoughtful in the age of play. His condition is something like fall apart from the safer world of parents. This demolition of his mind is only because of his mother, Padmini. Even if she thinks that her life is concerned to herself, the existence of child is automatically affected. It shows that one cannot be separated from family or society. The right or wrong decisions mechanically affects family members and society as well. It affects present as well as future generation too. Life of Padmini's husband is in distress because of her mistaken steps. The child lacks love of father and mother which is another story. It is obvious that without love and care of parents the child will live aimless life. There is less possibility of developing humanistic approach in his mind. He will live life without principles, like an aminam. The change of immorality is more in his life. He is not responsible for his present condition. His fault is that he is son of a immoral mother.

Convention sets principles in human life for peaceful livelihood while free will rebels against it and tends in temporary fulfillment of wish without care of self and others. But it affects present and future of the concerned persons, family members and society too. This kind of modal of behavior is risky to the human race as such. Its consequences are long life as Padmini's one incorrect wish makes to suffer her husband, child and a friend.

Bizarre Desire, Cause of Destruction: Karnad does not provide a structure of moral because offering a coherent account of ethics in a fragmented social and intellectual world is very difficult. The half-man struggle could not have been better represented

without combining two plots together that bring out the existential theme of the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition.

The play deals with psycho-social dimension of human identity crisis and reveals the fundamental ambiguity of human personality which is actually shaped. Basically incomplete and imperfect, the human beings search and strive for achieving the unattainable ideal of completeness and perfection. In this regard, normally the assistance is sought of some supernatural elements. However, these external agencies, in their effort to help, seem to cause complication or crisis, leading to tragic ends.

Padmini, for instance, ruins herself and even those who are in her close relation. The child that she leaves under the Bhagavata's care is not normal because of her own compulsions. Hayavadana, for instance, does not bring destruction to himself as Padmini does but suffers the extreme consequences of his search for completeness by going down the ladder of existence from man to horse. Karnad's play presents the idea and suggestion that even God or Goddess can't help human beings unless the latter help themselves by accepting the psychological limitations imposed by nature. To overcome problem the best solution is reconciliation with one's own self and accept 'life' and live, according to the natural order. Conventions set by society and morality by divinity shows right path for man. But the power of free-will or raw, animal like passion in mind is the root cause of destruction which can be avoided by imposing self-restriction on desiring emancipation.

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