

Girish Karnad's Hayavadana: An experiment on mythology

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad's Hayavadana (1971) is an experiment on a theme from folk-tale. Karnad has taken the plot of the play from Kathasaritsagara, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. However, it is chiefly based on Thomas Mann's retelling of the story of 'The Transposed Heads'. Hayavadana by Karnad poses the problem of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. Karnad has successfully made use of conventions and motifs taken from folk-tales and folk-theatre.

Keywords: Myth, folk theme, transposition, problem of identity & completeness

Introduction

Hayavadana

'Hayavadana' is multidimensional play presenting a love-triangle involving Devadutta, Kapila and Padmini. These characters are

"motivated by their own desires. Each character represents not only a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype."

It is the motif of completeness and perfection in life that dominates the action in the play. The world in the play

"is not unreal. Rather, it is as real as the world of our dream. Actually, the entire play is a sort of manifest dream content."

Hayavadana, a horse after whom the title of the play is coined, symbolizes fulfillment of desire. As compared to animal, human being is condemned of suffering from this lack and meets the terrible end in death. Against the backdrop of this major concern in the play the personality of Padmini is cast.

Padmini, in 'Hayavadana,' is a beautiful female character, appreciated highly by academic critics and readers. This character has come from a lot of philosophical pondering on the part of the playwright. She is innocent, beautiful, perceptive and cruel, all these qualities rolled in her make her a unique and distinct personality. The name

'Padmini' is 'generic' representing a type, "the name of one class of women in Vatsayana's Kamasutra."

Referring to a social dimension in her personality, Karnad clarifies,

...a women who had fallen in love with a man but who was not exactly out of love with husband. She was under tremendous stress and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She broke down. She used to confuse and mix up the names of her husband and her friend. But there are social dimensions to this problem.

The portrayal of Padmini is

'sexually explicit and invokes a representational mode of projecting female body as a sexualized object;'

The actual love triangle that Karnad had in his mind prompted him to find similar love stories in myths and mythologies. It would be proper to keep in mind the mythical sources exploited by Karnad for the development of the plot. These mythical stories provide background, on which the dramatic action of the play depends, though Karnad has borrowed the plot from Thomas Mann's 'Transposed Heads' and the character of Padmini is developed on similar line. Every human being is circumscribed with

"psychological limits imposed by nature"

She cannot violate the design and structure of the laws of nature and all the attempts against it turns into a hazard, a complex design, not be solved. Padmini's story is an attempt to break the natural order to seek her idea of perfection.

The centralized figure of Padmini is wonderfully dramatized in the play. She is the sixteenth woman who has come in Devadatta's life. She is a beautiful woman unsurpassed, gifted with the charming body and countenance, her

“fore locks rival the bees, her face is...”

says Devadatta who has seen her on the way. Kapila, who is an illiterate, imagines the beauty of the girl his friend describes and joins him. Both praise, she “ ... is a white lotus. Her beauty is as the magic lake. Her arms the lotus creepers. Her breasts are golden urns and her waist....”. Devadatta, the poet and man of high intellectual power, unrivalled in logic and love, is engrossed in appreciation of the alluring elegance that exudes from her fascinating appearance. In the poetic idiom they call her “... shikharidashana pakvabimbadharoshthi-Madhye Kshama Chakitaharineeprekshana nimnanabhih”.

If Padmini is compared to Veda Vyasas Shakuntala who is a product of the matriarchal society and Kalidasa's Shakuntala, who is a product of patriarchal society, she is a combination of both.

In beauty and charm Padmini is a superb blend of these two women. She is the “Shyama Nayika - born of Kalidasa' magic description-as Vatsayana had dreamt her”. She is not only beautiful but has got magical power in her body: “She lifted her hand to knock and it touched the bird. For a minute, the bird came alive”. Kapila points out. The personality of Padmini, thus, emerges from the comments so expressed by the different characters and the comparisons.

Kapila finds out the house “Pavana Veethi” with a door having ‘two-healed bird,’ so much ‘tiny’ curved on it. When she stands at the door, Kapila loses his senses and gets back to his feet with the open eyes, so amazed by the serpentine beauty of the girl he has set out to locate. Almost in a great bewilderment, he talks to his own self: “I hadn't thought anyone could be more beautiful than the wench Ragini who acts Rambha “She is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati all rolled into one”. In the very first meeting she displays a sharp mind which grasps the situation, her great capability in logic and insight to read the inner-working mind of a person who is present in front of her. She is not a girl who can be easily deceived by using words or displaying innocence. She is bold, audacious and aggressive girl in her straightforward interaction with a person, whether known or unknown.

Padmini is the daughter of the leading merchant in Dharampura, a wealthy and prosperous person. In her house, “the very floor is swept by the Goddess of wealth. In Devadatta's house, they've the goddess of learning for a maid”. On Kapila's cold response to her imposing question she comments, “I know it. I knew you wouldn't touch my feet. One can't even trust strangers any more. All right, my dear son! I opened the door. So consider me the door-keeper. What do you want?” In spite of her assertive nature and bellicose attitude, she is quite considerate and rational, and being born and brought up in a rich family, she seems to have been loved to her utter satisfaction, her every desire fulfilled by her parents. She does not surrender to mere emotion and she has no value for sentiments. When Kapila proposes to her for his friend, Devadatta, she accepts it immediately, even before the parental deliberation. The marriage proposed from such a well-known family, the revered family, makes her delighted and proud. ‘Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. He is delicate and comely in appearance but endowed with profound intelligence; in height he is five feet seven inches tall, he has long hair and fair face. He is a poet, pundit and knows Vedas, he writes fine poetry and has tremendous excellence in logic’. He is “the apple of every eye in Dharampura”. Devadatta has got these fine quality in his personality, but he is fragile in body, is emotional and sentimental,

an Apollonian in all aspects. He loves her, her beauty and her body but has not applied his mind and reasoning power to decipher her mind, nature and personality. Kapila realizes that she is an unfit match for Devadatta, in the very first encounter: Devadatta, my friend. I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightning- and as sharp. She is not for the like of you. What she needs is a man of steel. But what can one do? You'll never listen to me. And I can't withdraw now....

Conclusion

The play thus deals with mythical reference through the story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini and Hayavadana. The way the heads of Devadatta and Kapila are transposed, transforming the bodies in the process goes on to suggest that perfection is not given to man, for it is a trait of the divine. What cannot be attained in real life is achieved in our dreams, in our mythology and Hayavadana is an example of something of this kind happening in the form of a dream sequence, though it turns out to be a nightmare for Padmini.

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