POSSIBILITIES TO FRUITION: SEARCH FOR THE IDEAL IN KARNAD'S HAYAVADANA

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad is well known for his intricate exploration of Indian mythology in handling his plot. The different characters from mythology, religious texts, folklores, come in their age-old form but daubed in a colour all new. In Hayavadana the characters Devdatta and Kapila are the two facets of the same identity and while one stands as the intellectual spearhead, the other Kapila is the owner of physical prowess. Both in their own way, own life and control the force of life which is Padmini. Padmini the life spirit is as if the water nymph who wants to conquer life through energies, whether of the body or of the intellect. Nature instead reigns supreme as Padmini never stoops before any God (male) but surrenders before Kali and names her mother Nature. Nature, of which Padmini seems to be an inevitable part, proves more powerful than life or death. As the males get their identities shuffled, the female principle gets merged in life. What is it that excels, the Godhead or the humans, the Providence or Will Power, remains unravelled.

KEYWORDS: Existence, Identity, Nature, Primordial, Self

Received: Jun 08, 2020; **Accepted:** Jun 28, 2020; **Published:** Sep 14, 2020; **Paper Id.:** IJMPERDJUN20201210

1. INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad (1938-2019), the veteran Kannada playwright, actor, director and the recipient of Gyanpith Award, the highest literary award in India, constantly kneaded the different nebulous images arising from the pages of mythology, and folklores, religious texts and histories and crafted them into strong images of humans and magical creatures who would create an indelible mark on the minds of readers and audience and on the pages of literary history. Hayavadana, a similar powerful creation, in the same vein as The Fire and the Rain and Nagmandala weaves a magical spool of numerous threads to create a fascinating story of swapping heads. The paper reveals how two best of friends Devadatta and Kapila have their heads transposed, in the temple of Goddess Kali, and so too Hayavadana, born of a princess and having a horse's head. Developed upon the story recreated from Sanskrit text Kathasaritasagara(11 c.), by Thomas Mann in his novella The Transposed Heads (1940), Karnad wonderfully crafts the problematic of identity. The paper sees how as heads are altered, aspirations change and humans lose their selves.

The head of the two birds at the gate of Padmini brings to the fore the implication of the presence of two different instincts, two diverse aspects of the same personality in a single being. The two friends Devdatta and Kapila not only suggest two beings but the different qualities which signify the division in men. Padmini is driven by two instincts her urge for loyalty towards the husband and a love and desire for the lover Kapila on the other. She wants to possess both. The two Gods and the two dolls too reiterate the same notion of duality. The presence of both the gods and goddesses Rudra and Kali signify the presence of the male and female principles who try to rule over each other and sacrifice the other for its prominence. Life or love, habitualization or urgency of desire, the power of the moment, what will actually rule and what relinquish man remains the main motif of the text. In

this play over heads, animals and gods, humans, and demonic selves get mixed up. As Karnad quotes M. M. Ghosh's translation of the *Natyashastra*, in the notes to his play *The Fire and the Rain*, as Bharata Muni calls upon the gods and demons alike to fortify the theatre building, assuring the demons: "In it (natya) there is no exclusive representation of you or the gods," he said, 'for drama is a re-enactment of the Three Worlds'" (qtd. Karnad 1998: 71)

2. DISCUSSIONS

While Devdatta pledges his head to Rudra he gives his arms to Goddess Kali. While the head is one; action, signified by the arms drives one to diverse directions. In the song sung by the Chorus, the petals which attract are many but controlled by a single stem:

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, 1975: 11).

Love, desire and consummation play their role and marriage acts as the pivot on which the entire play turns. Attraction and habitualization as the two facets of marriage come up clearly in Karnad's *Hayavadana*. Padmini gets wedded to Devadatta but her fascination for Kapila remains live and both Padmini and Kapila feel an indomitable urge to be with each other. Their love finds expression in their prattle and their urge to look out for each other. Padmini's urgency for Kapila catches Devadatta's sight and he repents for having intruded into the life of his friend and his wife. Devadatta decides to surrender his life. He gives up his life when he finds out his wife's eyes feasting over the sight of Kapila's bare body. Kapila in his turn kills himself when he finds the truncated head of his friend Devdatta grovelling in the dirt of the desolate temple of Kali. Padmini traces their steps and in sometime gets at the reality and the crisis of the situation. In the tense situation that she is in she resorts to Goddess Kali, the mother of Nature to come to her aid. She calls upon the Goddess Kali to resolve her of the crisis of her situation, to which the Goddess responds immediately. Goddess Kali asks her to put the truncated heads on the respective bodies so that she might infuse life in them. But Padmini unconsciously mistakes in the dark of the cave and transports the head of the one on the other. Through this transposing of heads the characters change and the two men become the master of unknown bodies. Devadatta's head gets Kapila's body and Kapila's head, the soft and tender body of Devadatta, knowing no use of wrestling or swimming, hard labour or rigorous work in the smithy. This would immediately make one think of Freudian slip. Though Padmini finds it a wish-fulfilment as she attains the body of Kapila that she had ever desired and Devadatta's head, the body gradually changes and so too her attraction. Instead she turns to erstwhile Devadatta's body then adorned with Kapila's head.

Padmini after she is once again desirous of a different body than that which she possesses, she tracks Kapila. This remains the most puzzling enigma as to why Padmini looks out for Kapila— for his head or for Devdatta's body. What does she at all come to? Is it as she mentions, the body of her husband, and the body whose seed had given to her, her child or is it for her attraction for Kapila's body which she had acquired by clipping it to Devadatta's head, but had waned out, for Devdatta had never known its use. Or could it be that she must have had it in her mind that Kapila's body which had initially been Devdatta's must have changed to become Kapila's muscular and strong metalled body once again. Though Padmini repeatedly mentions she had come to meet her husband's body, the father to her child, there remains enough doubt as to the veracity of the comment. Initially when she had been permitted to take Devadatta's head on Kapila's body as her husband, both Devadatta and Padmini had gone out, "laughing," (Karnad, 1975: 40). As the rishi had proclaimed: "As the heavenly KalpaVriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore the man with Devadatta's head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini" (Karnad, 1975: 40).

Devadatta and Padmini are seen to spring to life and move to the corner of the stage delighted, “laughing and dancing” (Karnad, 1975: 40). As the three leave Devadatta and Padmini are euphoric exalting and jeering at having possessed Kapila's body. There was hardly any sign of grief at having deprived Kapila of his grace or and longing for Devadatta's soft body of a scholar or even the body that had fathered her child. This immediately makes us question Padmini's real intention behind returning to Kapila, once again returned to his original stature. Her prerogative behind seeking Kapila might have been her urge to connect with Kapila's self which she could have been unconscious of. Her “rubbing” herself against the body which had earlier belonged to Kapila, shows her dire urgency. However there is always the scope for gradual change in mind as she even gets habituated with Kapila's body or may be she loses attraction for Devadatta once again as Kapila's body changes to become Devadatta's once again.

The transposed heads suggest the reversal of identity and as identification comes from the head, the seat of the intellect, which contains that force which controls man's impulses. The body remains a mere object responding to the whims of the mind. The sentiment runs high and what emerges is that the body becomes a mere tool in the hand of the mind. With the reversal of the heads and the transportation of the one over the other, their identities do not change rather with the alteration of the heads their bodies transform gradually to their initial stature. It is not the body, but the mind which proves powerful. Both the men aspire for the woman but what becomes clear is that their desire and love fails to win her over. The men crave for her love but she remains divided in her love from the very beginning till the end.

The urge to combine both the powers,— the power of the mind and the prowess of the body connects Padmini's urge to the age- old search for the ideal; as the Bhagavata wishes, “May you become successful in your search for completeness” (Karnad, 1975: 40). The completeness and fruition that every individual desires of love drags Padmini to direct possibilities and ultimately to the death of the three characters who form the nodal points of the story.

Fulfilment and completion remain the leit-motif of the play *Hayavadana*, the most important craving of the three hearts, — while the men derive completion in their union with the woman, the woman finds both the men lacking— one the strong body, other the strong mind, the intellect. In search of the perfect state of fulfilment of desire the characters attain a state where each remains dissatisfied with the other, yet each character's absence creates a state of lack.

In *Hayavadana* the characters look out for completeness as the ultimate goal of life. However in the course of action they realize that perfection or the ideal eludes/ deceives human existence. With the gradual growth and development of the human mind the characters feel more and more aware of their lacunae and grow jealous of the other's competence. In the course of time the characters form their own life away from the benevolence of the company of the other. In the course of action the men resort to their God— Rudra, the male God of perfection who is responsible for the perfect state of existence even while being the Destroyer. He stands as the cult of the ideal state amidst flux and destruction. However the woman instead of appealing to the male God comes to Kali, addressing her as mother Nature. The dichotomy between Kali and Rudra is masterfully crafted in the discrimination between the two set of devotees ascribed to both.

While the men prove less effective in the understanding of their inner nature and what is being ascertained to them, Padmini in her oneness with Goddess Kali becomes more understanding of the inner processes of her self and of Nature itself. Human nature and Nature become one in their interaction with each other. The action of the inactive dolls reveals the coming together of the inanimate body and the animated mind. The corporeal transcends its limitedness and enters into a progressive zone where the body surpasses its restrictions and enters into a more interactive process.

The characters throughout the play struggle for their sanctity, a perfect order and fulfilment but none attains till the end. Trapped between the quest for fulfilment in life and satisfaction of the senses the characters seek but fail to find. Kapila on the other hand can be said to be born of the earth, the earthen one, who is nonetheless marginalized. He fails to attain but tries to get over his attraction for his love. He discards even his body and never attains satisfaction. Padmini and Devadatta gain their satisfaction and fruition in love, they possess their child though begotten of the erstwhile body of Devadatta, later acquired by Kapila.

The name Kapila which itself means brown or the dark one also means innocent, uncared for the complications of the world. Devadatta on the contrary is the high prized one, the Brahmin, begotten of God and hence superior, bearing the imprint of God himself. God is in his ways and moves and his actions are sophisticated reaching out to the world. He is God himself and like the gods in Hindu mythology who had drunk the demon's share of elixir, the Amrit that which could have made them immortal, depriving the black demons, here too the dark Kapila is deprived of attaining Padmini or the bliss of life and love, or even fatherhood. He remains marginalized, and when Devadatta's body fails to arouse the passion incited by Kapila's presence, he by the grace of prejudiced heaven or the artful wiliness of his wife, he gets to enjoy the tough sinews of Kapila.

The passion which Kapila sprouted in the female spirit embodied in Padmini is absolutely nature in its primordial existence. The significance of the same comes live as, when Padmini and Devadatta become one in their love and languor, overjoyed with each other, enjoying the presence of the body of Kapila, while cherishing the status of being Devadatta's wife; Kapila recedes to the jungle. The ambience of darkness which surrounds Kapila perfectly matches his complexion and the spirit of his poise, his composure. The perfection of Kapila that had enticed Padmini gets perfected as the blacksmith gets secured in his selflessness and his grief.

Kapila's marginalization comes out clear in the deprivation of the upper caste, whether friend or beloved, as they side with his body, the most prized identity marker of his self, crafted with a lot of skill and workmanship. In the course of time as Kapila is left in the premises of the jungle to fend for himself without love, care, concern or the security of home and hearth, he once again darkens his body and his muscular body gains back its metallic colour and texture through his tough labour that had made his chiselled body possible earlier. He proudly discards the white plump body of his friend Devadatta and regains the lustre of his fabric in no time.

The characters looking for completeness amidst these clusters ultimately choose death as the only way out of the serious effects of life. The male and the female principles come and live in the dolls and the inanimate too talk and respond and gain animation as the characters slyly respond to their inner passions while still sticking to the norms of society and the religious structure of sin and sinning. The urgency of the characters who want to possess and know themselves and their hearts get fainted as they realize that under no circumstance can they derive fulfilment or the satiety which they are hankering after. Happiness, real satisfaction eludes making the characters hollow, devoid of real spirit, while the dolls gain life and spirit in their expression, their attempt at getting hold of the urge that gets unconsciously realized within.

The characters search for satisfaction and fulfilment but none attains the same and ultimately their unquenchable thirst for fruition abandons their life. In their urge to vent their desires the characters take the wrong road. As Padmini claims, as she finds her way to the desolate Kapila who had taken recluse in the jungle: "The wrong road stuck to my feet; wouldn't let go" (Karnad, 1975: 54). The "mad dance of incompleteness" (Karnad, 1975:57) deceives every completion and what comes out is a cacophony where no character is his own and none can pursue his identity as individual. If the men

lack the congruence between their body and mind, Padmini lacks the conformity between her self and desire. As the men get back to their original forms after their neck or nothing struggle with the alien bodies glued to their heads, Padmini still suffers in her craving to reach out to the perfection that her heart desires:

Padmini: you won, Kapila. Devadatta won too. But I— the better half of two bodies— I neither win nor lose...It's my fault. I mixed the heads up. I must suffer the consequences." (Karnad, 1975: 57)

What comes out is an inescapable tragedy—

Padmini: They burned, lived, fought, embraced and died. I stood silent...Because you knew death you died in each other's arms. You could only have lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you to death. You forgave each other, but again, left me out (Karnad, 1975: 62).

Unlike Kapila who had taken recluse in the jungle, Padminirealizes her peace in the depths. Of darkness. As she enters the forest her admiration reveals the affinity of her character with the chiaroscuro of the shades of darkness in the forest. With her child clinging to her bosom she gets deeper into the density of the jungle fearless as if retracing back to her mother's womb, the innards of life, the darkness where every confusion began the darkness that had let loose the primitive desire in her and her unconscious. She enters fearless, calm, uncared for the "[w]ild beasts— robbers— pathless paths— all sorts of dangers" (Karnad, 1975: 54). Devadatta wonders in sarcasm: "Amazing! Even a man like me found the road hard. But how quickly she covered it— and with a child in her arms (Karnad, 1975: 59).

Kapila goes deep into the forest as a recluse but as he is into it, he is not without the bitterness and with a sense of deprivation. He keeps away from his parents and Padmini and Devadatta. Neither news of his father's demise had reached him nor does he return at his mother's death. Both die in oblivion without any concern of their son. What emerges is a love-lorn Kapila torn between his urge to get back to his "own" body and his love for Padmini.

However his yearning for Padmini still keeps him tied to the society, to his home and hearth and above all Padmini. He detests Padmini as she returns to unearth the memories he had taken such pains to bury, still at the slightest hint of adoration from Padmini he melts and rejoices in the caresses of his beloved. His serenity and tranquillity gets disturbed by his awareness of the nearing presence of Devadatta in search of his wife and son. Devadatta too seeks and finds Kapila and Padmini in the interiors of the forest. What ensues is no turmoil or confusion, no vengeance, nor any revenge on anybody's part but a procession towards the obvious— the unrequited, the at once unification and release from the nexus, the social impingement, the bias of the body and mind.

Instead the three gain life in death— an end to their pain and an escape route from the deadlock comes only in death. The characters perish and cease in their day to day existence but they continue as embedded in nature. Padmini is hailed as a Sati being a Pativrata. None questions her chastity for she had been pious towards her love, or was it because she had mated with her husband's bodies— both Devadatta's as he had owned the one later possessed by Kapila, and lately had owned Kapila's body.

The two characters Devadatta and Kapila remain friends for ever and till the end they do not despise, nor wish to take revenge of one another. As in the beginning of the play they leave out Padmini and it is Padmini to decide for herself the course of her life. Here too Padmini decides to take resort to religion. Religion has a way out for her and gives her release in her becoming a Sati—she recovers her life and the crisis, the dichotomy as she ascends the funeral pyre, but she wonders as to what is it that she could have asked of the Goddess Kali as a boon, could it be the boon to possess the same

husband in the lives to come? But the purity of her urge for both, makes her chaste and life claims, why does desire need to be tied to a single stem, the ramification of desire finds its fruition in the love of both the men, "[a] head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm." (Karnad, 1975: 64).

The tribes find the presence of Padmini still sprouting the forests on new moon and full moon nights. Before her death she instructs the Bhagvata of the play to take her child to the tribes who would willingly take charge of him being Kapila's son. But after five years of age Padmini instructs him to take to the Brahmin in the village wherefrom he would acquire knowledge as a Brahmin for she was Devadatta's son. He would acquire the skills of tribes and huntsmen and a fit body as that of Kapila, but would be regarded by one and all as Devadatta's son, the astute Brahmin, would make the child the true progeny of the union of the three.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The characters die and fire engulfs them all, but it is only Padmini's fragrance that persists and sprawls throughout the forest. Her desire, the *maya* clings to the earth though the other spirits get their release. Most importantly she remains in the forest and gets blended with the lilting melody of the forest and its fragrance. The fragrance emits, filling the air, curing fatigue. The primitive in Padmini continues to exist amidst the Nature. She had ever prayed to Mother Nature and had ultimately been ingrained in her domain. Padmini has attained immortality without ever having asked for it. What remains of her existence is not the body, the seat of desire in animals, but the essence, the aroma that attracts and connects, unifies and perturbs, disturbs and unsettles, yet mesmerizes and taints one and all.

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