



CUL DE SAC: A STUDY OF THE QUEST FOR COMPLETENESS IN GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAY- HAYAVADANA

SUSHITHA ANOOP

Guest Lecturer

English Department

Govt. College of Arts & Science, Chelakkara

Thrissur District (KERALA)-INDIA

ABSTRACT

Human beings have to live within the framework of incompleteness. From human being to semi human figures, none is complete. Everyone is in search of perfection in one way or other. They cannot gain perfection till their death. Even though they are tired of pursuit, they never abandon their quest for happiness. The play Hayavadana depicts the complexity of modern man, the shattering of values and the family system. The changing values and breaking of the traditional homes bring about the inner turmoil of the modern discontented mind. The human being is a creature of circumstances. He is not always responsible for what happens in his life. Fate makes him a real puppet in this world. But he is not aware of his meaningless existence.

Key words: *disintegration, alienation, frustration, imperfection, fragmentation*

INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad, a path breaking playwright of post-independence India, has given new dimensions to Indian English Drama. Karnad and other postcolonial playwrights prefer to portray ordinary men, who are engaged in day-to-day struggle for existence. They realized that the age of post independence has brought defamiliarisation in human minds. Even though colonial period is over, man suffers uncertainty throughout his life. Modern man feels himself an 'outsider' in this world. He seeks to establish order and harmony in his life. There is always a tension between what he is and what he wants to become. What's authentic? What's native? He cannot identify then. He is oppressed by mental frustrations. Karnad's

SUSHITHA ANOOP

1P a g e



protagonists fail to win any solace under religion or any other ideology. Through his plays, Karnad draws our attention to this fragmentary and futile quest.

Karnad's third play, *Hayavadana* brings out the theme of human being's desire for perfection. Through his characters, he portrays disillusionment of modern mind. *Hayavadana* is based on a tale from 'Vetala Panchavimshati' (from *Kathasarithsagara*). Karnad has been influenced by Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in *The Transposed Heads*. Girish Karnad's protagonists are representative of common men. In spite of receiving much happiness in life, they remain restless and discontented. This lack of fulfillment seems to have become the fate of modern man. Karnad uses many techniques such as motifs of folktales, uses of masks, dolls, story within a story to describe a bizarre world of incomplete individuals.

In the main plot of *Hayavadana*, there are three main characters, including two close friends-Devadatta, a Brahmin, Kapila, an ironsmith and Padmini, the beautiful young wife of Devadatta. Bhagavata describes the close friends in one sentence as 'Two friends were one mind, one heart' one can see later both of them suffer from self-alienation. Each depends on other for what each lacks. Devadatta and Kapila become incomplete halves. They are in identity crisis. They can't accept the sudden change and are alien in their own lives. Devadatta takes physical exercise and cares for body building at the beginning. But he gradually loses interest in it and continues his customary hobby of reading. Hence, he misses his physical vigour. Padmini also falls into the pit of unhappiness.

In *Hayavadana* each character suffers imperfection in their body and mind. They are aware of their own weakness, so they have to struggle in their lives. Karnad presents Padmini as a modern woman, who does not gain happiness anywhere. She wants both of them. Kapila is physically strong and Devadatta is a great scholar. She realizes the fact that Devadatta is intellectually brilliant but he is physically weak while Kapila has a strong muscular body but a dull mind. Padmini desires for a complete man who should be physically and intellectually superior. After the transposition of heads at the Kali temple, another complicated question emerges-who is the real husband of Padmini? To solve the dispute, they approach a Rishi, who decides that the body with Devadatta's head is her real husband. Padmini's desire for a complete person is fulfilled there. But poor Kapila with Devadatta's body leaves forest disappointedly.

Karnad stresses mental sterility in modern mind through his characters. It is said that Devadatta has fallen in love fifteen times before his marriage with Padmini. It shows that Devadatta could not find any happiness in women. Modern man suffocates within his own



dual personality. Even though Padmini and Devadatta pretend happiness after their marriage, their dreams of happy life would not be fulfilled.

Throughout this play, Karnad brings out the problem of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. Padmini is bold and is never willing to play the role of the submissive woman assigned by society. Society never allows her to enjoy her life with two people. When she finds out that Devadatta has lost the strength of body, she misses Kapila's impulsiveness. She wants Kapila's company in the forest. But the meeting does not last long. Devadatta joins them and try to find a solution by fighting a duel to decide who will have claim over Padmini. But no one survives in the fight. Padmini's plight suggests woman's vain attempt to unite man as both intellect and flesh. Her divided self never permits her to live according to the norms of society. So she performs 'sati' when Devadatta and Kapila killed each other for her. Destiny tries to make her happy for some days. So she enjoys completeness for a few days after the transposition of heads.

Hayavadana starts with the description of Lord Ganesha, the 'destroyer of obstacles. Bhagavata prays to Lord Ganesha for the success of performance. He says that Ganesha has an elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly. Even though Ganesha seems the embodiment of imperfection, he is the lord of perfection and success. Actually the lord also suffers an essential problem. He is also with an identity crisis. According to Hindu mythology Ganesha was beheaded by Shiva, Lord Shiva put an elephant's head of Ganesha's original head in order to reduce Parvati's anger.

Padmini's child also suffers identity crisis. The child suffers for what his parents have done. Unlike other children, he does not laugh. According to Padmini, he should grow up as Kapila's child in the forest and at the age of five, he should go to the city to live with his grandparents. Later child gains completeness through an animal, horse. But in other sense, he never becomes complete because he has no mother and father. He cannot say who his real father, Kapila or Devadatta.

In *Hayavadana*, each character is a fragmented creature. They conclude their lives as losers. Devadatta does not win Padmini by killing Kapila and vice versa. Padmini as an incomplete woman can't sustain a man with intellectual power and strength. Even dolls feel identity crisis, when they know the fact that Devadatta goes to Ujjain fair for buying new dolls to the child. It is a belief that if there is a doll with broken limbs in the house, it will make destruction in that house.

Girish Karnad's story of *Hayavadana* is his own invention. *Hayavadana* suffers frustration and disappointment with life. He cannot bring his real identity before the crowd. So he



becomes a major victim of existentialist alienation. In the subplot, one can see Hayavadana as the embodiment of meaninglessness in human life. Hayavadana is a man with horse's face. Actually his parentage symbolically suggests the combination of the divine, the human and the animal elements. . Later it emerges as a full-fledged horse instead of a complete man. Thus dream of Hayavadana remains unfulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Completeness is a humanly impossible target. Through *Hayavadana*, Karnad focuses on the man's desire for physical pleasure and spiritual fulfillment. Here Karnad delves deep into man's anguish and dilemmas. His women characters' major concern is 'how to become whole.' They strive hard and sacrifice everything to solve their problems. This play proves the fact that frustration, alienation, desperation and lack of adjustment preside the disintegration of man. It is a great task to bring happiness to body and mind in human life. Man indulges in earning and spending money or possessions without knowing their real role or karma in life.

Human beings only struggle is the struggle for new pleasures and comforts. He continues his search for comforts and happiness in the life. But he does not feel happiness. Modern man is tortured by his realization that he is unable to do anything significant. He also understands that the circular movement of his life leads him nowhere. Completeness is mere illusion, it never happens in human life. Desire has its own importance in a human being's life. But, when it goes beyond our capacities, they are thwarted. A human being, aiming perfection, finds himself in a cul-de-sac, closed alley.

WORKS CITED

- Gill, L. S. *Girish Karnad's Hayavadana: A Critical Study*. Delhi: ABC, 2005. Print.
Joshi, Pranav. *The plays of Girish Karnad*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1999. Print.
Karnad, Girish. *Hayavadana*. Calcutta: OUP, 1975. Print.
Nair, M. K. *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*. Delhi: Sterling, 1984. Print.