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## FLAW – FRAILITY OR FORTITUDE?

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**Abstract:** Perfection – is a matter of perception. Every individual aspires to be perfect in the sense they perceive themselves or their surroundings. The simple fact that pursuing the elusive perfection results in illusion; can never be comprehended by any individual. Be it either man or beast; or for the matter, even God; is not beyond imperfections – for perfection can be achieved only through an amalgamation of positive and negative traits (on a different plane of thought; if there is anything that could be called positive or negative ???). So, perfection is possible only when in possession of certain imperfections too!

**Keywords:** Elusive, Illusive, Imperfection, Misconception, Perfection.

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**Introduction:** Is the extensive and expansive creation of God flawless? Perfect? Complete? Leave aside His creation, what about Him? Is He perfect, flawless or complete? Is He, who destroys all obstacles and hurdles; and crowns the efforts and endeavours of humans with success, flawless? Is a deity who has an elephant's head on human body an embodiment of perfection? Does half a broken tusk and a cracked belly untangle the mystery of completeness? Can a mortal fathom the significance of this appearance?

These are the questions that the Bhagavata of Girish Karnad's "Hayavadana" poses at the outset of the play; and very valid questions at that!!!

The term 'completeness' is quite funny. No mortal is perfect and yet craves for this elusive perfection. People remain blind to their own frailties and search for them in others. Actually, when perceived from a different angle, creation is incomplete without a flaw. Only when the positive and negative forces complement each other does a thing become complete. Possessing all positive traits makes a person as imbalanced as possessing all negative traits. Karnad in his 'Hayavadana' deals in depth with this perfection. The two protagonists of his play have their own positive traits in addition to the negative ones too. Devadatta is fair, delicate, knowledgeable and belongs to the upper class. Kapila is dark, rough, strong and belongs to the working class. Despite their differences, they are good friends of one thought and one word. Each complements the other. Into this unprejudiced life; Padmini, as wife of Devadatta, makes an entry. Devadatta loves her and she, him. That is considered natural. The absurdity is that Kapila too loves her and she is unwittingly drawn towards him! This imbalances the situation; but

leaving that aside, what is it that draws Padmini towards Kapila?

Karnad makes the answer intelligible through the course of the play. As the play progresses the readers can swear that the swapping of heads by Padmini may not be as innocent as it appears. Padmini wants the best of the two men in a way that she wants the knowledgeable head of Devadatta on the strong muscular body of Kapila. Despite claiming to have been 'confused in the darkness'; her act of swapping one's head for another's body, is seen through by the goddess Kali who says "My dear daughter, there should be a limit even to honesty. Anyway – so be it." After overcoming the initial excitement and amusement, reality dawns on three of them. Both, the head as well as the body of Devadatta, claim Padmini to be their wife. The head, which is incomplete without Devadatta's body; and Kapila's head which is attached to Devadatta's body – who between them is Padmini's husband? The age-old story from which Karnad had taken his plot, no doubt, elucidates the importance of the head as being the "uttamanga". But Karnad continues with his tale and theory of completeness. The two friends of one thought and one word fight over the issue and then approach a rishi; who gives his answer in favour of the head.

Does the matter end there? No. It is carried further. Padmini happily leaves with Devadatta (who now has Kapila's body) to her house in Dharmapura. Kapila in frustration decides to dwell in the forest itself. Time passes by. Primary novelty gives way to practicality. Devadatta is unable to maintain the physical resilience of Kapila's body, which he now possesses. As the truth is unravelled from the conversation between the two dolls, Devadatta has slowly over time changed his body back to the delicate nature; it

originally was. His body, which had the urge to exhibit physical strength; is slowly chiselled back to the way his head preferred it to be. Padmini is the silent spectator of this transformation. She is now inquisitive to know the change that might have occurred in Kapila too! This is made visible to the who had also succeeded in changing his delicate body into the rough and tough build that his head wished for. Padmini's sudden appearance in the forest rudely brings back memories Kapila wished to forget. Her touch ignites the familiar tingling, which it once felt; and responds to it. Padmini's quest for perfection or rather the best of the two; is rewarded with Devadatta and Kapila killing one another. Padmini becomes a Sati.

The parallel sub-plot of the story of Hayavadana, where the horse-headed man wishes to gain completeness is ironically solved when he becomes a full horse. Hayavadana is in search of a solution for his incompleteness or imperfection. He, on the advice of the Bhagavata, goes to the Kali temple and tries to sacrifice himself seeking the goddess's benediction. When the goddess appears before him, he asks Her to make him complete; and before he could complete the sentence with the word 'man', the goddess blesses him "So be it!" and departs. The result is that he turns into a complete horse.

Hayavadana is happy to have turned into a complete horse; but laments the human voice he still speaks in.

audience through the conversation of the two dolls who happen to witness her dreams and the other man she dreams about.

Padmini sends Devadatta to Ujjain on the pretext of purchasing new dolls for their son and embarks upon the trail that leads into the forest. She meets Kapila When he starts laughing with Padmini's child and takes him for a ride singing a song; he suddenly starts neighing. This concludes the process of his change into a complete horse.

Girish Karnad's approach wherein he espouses the cause of completeness being achieved by any means; through the character of Padmini; is evidence of Man's irrepressible greed. Ascertaining the satiation of their desires at the cost of anything; reflects an individual's self-centredness. But more important than this, is the idea that all the qualities considered to be appealing, if combined, contribute to perfection. Whether qualities and traits appeal or not; whether they are positive or negative; they contribute to the wholeness. Anything may be termed to be complete with differing forces acting towards its stability. Life is change; and change is perfection. The reason why most people suffer is because they try to find stability and hence, perfection, in a world whose very essence is change. Therefore realisation that change and stability are just two sides of the same coin will result in peace, contentment and happiness.

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