

MADHVI: TWICE CURSED

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Madhvi portrays the journey of the daughter of Yayati who was twice cursed, both, by her father, as well as her lover. From a pure, secluded and serene environment of fathers ashram, she is shown as being palmed off for the benefit of Gaalav. The play depicts women as earth, which carries the burden of the whole world and suppresses her inner feelings.

Keywords: Sacrifice, responsibility, reputation, spiritual awakening.

Madhvi was written after a gap of three years from his play Kabira Khara Bazar Mein where we saw that the dramatist's main concern was the exploration of Kabir's human personality with a tender but bold heart, presentation of his spiritual approach to religion and his determination to reform the society. In Madhvi the theme of the exploration of human personality, caught in a partly self imposed conflict between an ideal and egotistical nature, of the individual is presented with all the human tenderness, cynicism, unconventional love and integrity of the protagonist's whole personality. In the present play, Bhishma Sahney uses a variety of ancient Indian dramatic conventions, folk elements and the rural stylized Nautanki devices of drama. He uses the Nautanki technique of introducing an interlocutor in the character of the Kathavachak who mingles in himself also the functional roles of the use of chorus in ancient western drama as well as the exploitation of the interlocutor's artistic position in the great dramatic poem of Vyas, namely, the Bhagavad Gita, where Sanjay acts as a dispassionate and impartial narrator of the events of the battlefield of Mahabharat to Yudhishtir. It is relevant to mention that the bit of the story dramatized in the play is taken from a situation described in the story of Mahabharat. The story has been briefly mentioned by Kathavachak in the opening scene.

There is a context in Mahabharat in which Lord Vishnu is in deep meditation. But his concentration starts flagging. He opens his divine eyes to see that a devotee of his, standing on the bank of the Ganges and with bent head in prayer to God, was remembering him. Lord Vishnu knew that the man was so frustrated that he was going to commit suicide. He sends Garun to find out the cause

and dissuade his devotee from adopting the terrible step of ending his life out

of frustration. Garun assumes the shape of a brahmin and appears before this devotee who confirmed that his life has no meaning now as he has not been able to fulfill the promise of arranging for eight hundred ashwamedhi horses as guru dakshina after the completion of his education in the ashram of Vishwamitra. The brahmin shows this disciple of Vishwamitra the way out of his present dilemma. He guides him to the hermitage of Maharaj Yayati, who is a renowned 'danveer'.

The name of this devotee is Gaalav. The story of Gaalav is well-known to the Indian audience. Yayati has offered materials for a variety of literary compositions including a play by Girish Karnad. But the way the story here moves dramatically almost exclusively on the strength of the cleverly structured verbal medium, the dramatist has scored a point in the direction of experimental drama in Hindi, towards the end of the last century. The background, atmosphere, mood and the main thematic thrusts of the play are evident from the exposition of the initial situation through the use of the interlocutor and the exploitation of the technique of choric commentators. These commentators are not like those of the ancient Greek drama as a detached group of people but a participant as well in the dramatic action. In the manner of Antonio in the opening scene of The Duchess of Malfi by Webster the first and second forest dwellers, significantly not named but only numbered, comment on the main issue not only of the story of Madhvi and Gaalav but also of the inner weaknesses of the personality of Yayati himself. Yayati is a lover of flattery and a great egotist. He can be asked to part with anything belonging to him if he learns that this will bring him praise and social applause for his magnanimity. It is because of this weakness that he agrees to help out Gaalav when the latter informs him of his reputation among people throughout the nation as a great benefactor and helper of the needy people.

Gaalav has been enjoined upon the duty of giving eight hundred ashwamedhi horses as gift to his guru Vishwamitra who was annoyed to ask for such a ridiculous gift by the presumptuous insistence of Gaalav. Yayati knows that to arrange for eight hundred

ashvamedhi horses is an impossibility and advises Gaalav to go back to Vishwamitra and apologize to him for his egotistical insistence which drew the anger of his guru, which made him ask for something impossible so that his egotistical self is demolished. But Gaalav is as egotistical as he is obstinate. Yayati knows that there is no way except to help him out in some way which may provide him a ray of hope for the fulfillment of his promise made to his Guru. The only way out which seems feasible to him, is to take his only daughter Madhvi with him who will act as a means of acquiring ashvamedhi horses for him.

Madhvi has the blessing of God to be the mother of emperors and who will have everlasting youth and beauty. Yayati's unstated plan is that Gaalav should palm off Madhvi to some ruler in India who is desirous of begetting a Chakravarty king. Since such stories may sound outrageous to the Indian sensibility of treating a female child of the family as mere commodity, Bhishma Sahney is clever enough to have the sanction of the mythological situational context. The use of a daughter as an object to satisfy her father's ego will be a fit object of feminists' angry retaliation. But Sahney cleverly avoids any debate of feminism and its tenets so hotly debated by critics and treated by creative writers.

Like a sacrificial cow, Madhvi accepts her father's verdict of her following the plans of Gaalav to arrange for the gift for his guru. The decision of Yayati and Gaalav's acceptance of his daughter as a means to arrange for the gift for his guru may appear ridiculous to the modern sensibility. But through this story Bhishma Sahney, is trying to explore the role of fate in man's life and the concept of man's

dutifulness to his commitment and to his ideal howsoever untenable it may appear to the worldly-wise mind. The first scene ends with the choric character's direct discussion with Yayati about Yayati's great step in banishing his daughter to fulfill his desire of being applauded by people for his generosity. The chorus draws a mirror to Yayati's mind and soul where Yayati's philosophizing his step in stultifying his fatherly position is exposed. Yayati's refusal to recant, because a thing once gifted away is never taken back, appears a mere affrontery and an instance of his egotistical obstinacy. The chorus as a representative of humanity tries to convince itself that there is, what Hamlet says, a "providence in the fall of a sparrow".

Scene II opens with the interlocutor's narration of Madhvi's journey from her father's hermitage to the unknown outside world to act as an instrument for the fulfillment of Gaalav's pledge of gift to his guru. The interlocutor introduces an element of suspense on the

uncertainty of the result of the present step taken by Yayati because ashvamedhi horses are rare to find even in the courts of great kings. The required number of such horses marks the success of the whole venture of Gaalav's journey, accompanied by Madhvi towards some king who might need Madhvi's gift of delivering a Chakravarty ruler in lieu of parting with eight hundred horses.

That Madhvi can mother a Chakravarty king brings into the mind of Gaalav a desire to be the father of such a king. This desire of the self for its own satisfaction negates the most vaunted value of fulfilling one's duty as claimed by Gaalav. But soon he overcomes his weakness and hands over Madhvi to the king who would accept her as his queen, destined to give birth to an emperor. There is a temporary dissonance in the mind of Gaalav, who is already attracted by the youth, beauty and divinely gifted destiny of Madhvi. He already feels that Madhvi is his

property. This is clear from his thoughts contained in the debate going on inside his mind about the certainty of losing Madhvi to some ruler who would agree to accept the deal for eight hundred ashvamedhi horses. He shows his mild anger against his guru's attitude towards him who has never made any such demands from any of his disciples in the past. However, his questioning the intention of his guru is a result of his weakness of natural infatuation towards Madhvi. But he expresses his regret and is ready to do penance for his vacillation by strictly following the path of his duty. The dramatist exploits one of the strong tenets of Indian belief in transcendental warning through using a voice from the void cautioning him against nourishing any thought-related step in stultifying his fatherly position. Yayati's refusal to recant, because a thing once gifted away is never taken back, appears a mere affrontery and an instance of his egotistical obstinacy. The chorus as a representative of humanity tries to convince itself that there is, what Hamlet says, a "providence in the fall of a sparrow".

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What temptations are in trying to nourish in your mind young man? Only yesterday you were going to commit suicide and today you have started dreaming of becoming an emperor. Will you deceive two people, your guru and King Yayati? Even the gods above are anxiously watching the direction you would take to fulfill your promise to your guru

or to pursue your newly aroused desire for worldly life.

The intimate talk between Gaalav and Madhvi shows Gaalav's increasing interest in Madhvi and Madhvi's monolithic attitude to life which is only obedience to her father's dictation. The theme of duty is now directed towards treating the theme of human relationship which has developed between Gaalav and Madhvi. This relationship, resulting from mutual attraction, is shown very effectively

through the language of silence adopted by the lovers and their dependence upon conveying their yearning for each other through the medium of the eyes. This is a well-known technique of writers' expressing economically the erotic attraction which renders the lovers speechless. Numerous examples can be given from literature dealing with amorous themes through

silence across the boundaries of international culture. Two glaring examples wellknown to average readers are those of Portia and Bassanio and of Vasavadatta. The classic example is of the meeting of Radha and Krishna where the ecstasy of love has been expressed through their silence during their meeting for several hours.

Madhvi is equally attracted towards Gaalav but she, too, feels bound by her sense of duty towards her father. Gaalav regrets his insistence to his guru for imposing a demand of gift on him. Madhvi suggests to him that he should go and apologize to his guru who will certainly forgive him for his obstinate insistence. But Gaalav's ego will not permit him to do that because he is apprehensive that his guru might think that his disciple has sacrificed his egotistical nature for the sake of siding with worldly life. He feels as if he has been thrown into the midst of a river and is not able to come out of the current which has caught him. The scene ends with Madhvi yielding to Gaalav's proposal for starting his search for a king who would accept Madhvi as a bargain for eight hundred ashwamedhi horses. The scene ends with Madhvi's worldly feeling of amorousness when she requests Gaalav, "Let's go to Uttarak! and by the longest route so that we are together for as long a period as possible. Spending a long time in your company moving by your side through the forests and mountains will bring me immense pleasure".

This scene highlights the human aspect of the drama. The human issues here have an archetypal pattern of confronting demands of idealism which in the manner of Ibsen's *Brand* forebodes only hardship, failure and eventual disasters

which can be rationalized only by a reference to the will of God and the role of destiny. Gaalav declares: "There is certainly the hand of God in our fate". His helplessness before the demand of the ideal, which is synonymous with destiny, reminds one of Bhishma Sahney's indebtedness to the philosophy of life contained in the two great tragedies of the West i.e. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ibsen's *Brand*.

The first "station of the technique of the Brechtian epic drama is presented in Scene III. Gaalav and Madhvi reach the court of King Haryashcha of Ayodhya. The King is impressed by the proposal of accepting the future mother of his Chakravarty son as claimed by Gaalav. He summons his courtly astrologer to verify the claim of Gaalav. The astrologer observes the various physical features of Madhvi and confirms that she has got that divine gift of mothering a Chakravarty king. The astrologer's analysis of the features of Madhvi's body and the King's attitude towards her in describing Madhvi's physical wretchedness and his impolite

address to Madhvi show as if Madhvi is a mere head of cattle to be shown to a not very willing buyer of. This situation may offend the feminists. but from the point. in view of dramatic cohesion, Madhvi's destiny, which has reduced her status to the level of nothingness, is in accordance with the dramatic artistry of the play. I feel that Bhishma Sahney's dramaturgy is not unflawed when he suggests that the detailed examination of Madhvi before she is accepted as a suitable sacrificial goat to be placed on the altar can be shown visually through the manipulation of lighting.

The verbal medium is adequate enough to convey the idea. Haryashcha's detailed questioning of Gaalav about the whole story of ashwamedhi horse requirement, too, is not required and contributes only to the sluggish movement of the dramatic action. The king does not have the required number of ashwamedhi horses in his possession and hence he settles his bargain and accepts Madhvi for two hundred horses plus his promise to make her free after she will have given birth to a son. Gaalav is reluctant to accept the bargain not so much because it is contractually bad as his amorous jealousy at parting with Madhvi to be the wife of someone else for a year or so. It is Madhvi's persuasion to Gaalav that since she has the blessing of everlasting youth, her being the wife of Haryashcha and mother of his son will not affect her youth and beauty which she can regain. Act lends with the completion of the first 'station' in the 'epic' dramatic structure of Madhvi and Gaalav's journey towards their effort to fulfill their mutual promises. Though the characters feel inner disturbances and temporary vacillation under the pressure of mutually exclusive demands of external reality and inner yearning in the manner of Ibsen's *Brand*, the first Act establishes the thematic burden of the play unambiguously.

What has been dramatized in Act II in its first two scenes is narrated by the interlocutor in the following words:

In the religious scriptures woman has been likened to the earth. As the earth carries the burden of the whole world, women bear the responsibility of all around her. Her strength is service to others. Man is ambitious but the chief attribute of woman is sacrifice and service".

The interlocutor goes on to pile up examples from mythology. His mythological allusions include such personalities as Sita, Savitri etc. who are the emblems of sacrifice and power. The interlocutor stops at a point where he hands over the dramatic action to Yayati's friend Marich who has just returned from his journey to Uttarakhand. He describes to Yayati the excitement of people in the Kingdom of Haryashcha on Madhvi giving

birth to a baby boy. Yayati is not so much concerned with his daughter's success as bothered by his egotistical satisfaction and love of flattery as to how highly he is applauded by people for his generosity in parting with his only daughter as a gift to Gaalav. The conversation between Yayati and Marich veers around how Gaalav is going to arrange for the remaining six hundred horses. Marich suggests that Yayati should go to Vishwamitra to get the non-availability of the remaining six hundred horses waived off so that Gaalav is exonerated from the responsibility of further struggling to fully meet the demand of guru dakshina. But Yayati would not do it because of his egotistical character like that of Gaalav. He can sacrifice any possible happiness for his daughter on the altar of retaining his image of a supremely generous person. Yayati wants to lighten the burden of self responsibility and of suppressed feeling of guilt by bringing the concept of the "Fate is all powerful. We can do nothing against it. Every person is born with his individual destiny. One person cannot take a decision on the fate of another person. He can only do his duty". Marich's mild reprimanding Yayati only draws the suppressed anger of the latter, which may also be called his affrontery. Marich throws in the face of Yayati the words which draw the picture of his inner reality and his utter selfishness which he has tried to hide under the cloak of his generosity. He says, "pardon me, king, even after seeing the condition of your daughter, your concern for your reputation" is more important even though this may require the sacrifice of Madhvi. To this Yayati declares that if Madhvi returns to his ashram being abandoned by the king who husbanded her for about a year he will arrange for a Swayamvar for her. Even though he has renounced the world, his ashram is still like the capital of his kingdom, where he can invite mighty rulers of India for Swayamvar. There is a slight touch of Lear's incipient madness in Yayati's imagining of his still being an emperor after abdication. transformation. She throws a big question to be answered by Gaalav. It is whether a woman is entitled to be called a mother because of her feelings or because of the physical act of delivering a baby. She faces a dilemma while departing from her baby son before resuming her journey to fulfill the duties of Gaalav towards his guru. Gaalav's hurry in taking Madhvi quickly away to her further journey, ignoring completely her inner suffering as a mother, truly smacks of his selfishness. So far as her selfishness is concerned Gaalav and Yayati are both comparable figures.

Gaalav talks of freedom after Madhvi has been released from her bond as mother without realizing that her

motherly bond is more important for her than anything else. Her show of feeling for her son is described by Gaalav as weakness but Madhvi tries to expose Gaalav's selfish self by scanning his inner self and showing him that he is a selfish person. This has been done by a deftly handled dialogue between Madhvi and Gaalav where we see an admirable restraint on the part of Madhvi who does not want to make Gaalav aware of the guilt he should not be hiding. Madhvi confesses that now she is different from what she was after the birth of her son. Madhvi suffers a great inner agitation at leaving her son behind and getting ready for the second "station" in her journey which, Gaalav describes to her, will bring her freedom and happiness. Madhvi never developed any attachment for Haryashcha whom she considers as a lecherous King and rejects Gaalav's assertion that he was interested in her happiness even though it is claimed that everybody around her is interested in her welfare. This interest in her welfare either by her father, or Gaalav or anybody else is only their interest in Madhvi as an instrument for their own welfare. Madhvi narrates to Gaalav another dream that she has recently dreamt, where she saw that against the background of running horses, her son was snatched away from her. The surrealistic presentation of her inner apprehension is actually the real happening in her life. Her son has actually been taken away. The dream of galloping white horses with varied symbolic significance reminds one of the white horses in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*.

Act II Scene I is an extension of the first "station" in the drama of Madhvi's journey. Scene II is full of sentimental situations. Madhvi debates the definition of motherhood when she is granted freedom to leave the kingdom of Haryashcha. After the birth of her son Madhvi's earlier commodity-like image undergoes a human.

Gaalav argues with Madhvi that she cares more for losing her child than for his suffering and predicament. The scene ends with Madhvi reassuring Gaalav about her resolve to continue her journey with Gaalav for the fulfillment of his promise to his guru. Finally, Madhvi feels that her further journey is a test of her love for Gaalav. The scene ends with her confession of her love for Gaalav and her resolve is to be united with him eventually. The journey's end may be the lovers' meeting.

Scene III is in the nature of the tradition of a caricatured comedy. The setting is the court of the ridiculously comical King of Kashi, named Deevodas who, too, is without a son to perpetuate his dynasty in spite of his several matrimonial ventures. His love of himself, in spite of his ugly personality and comical face is an

object of Vidhushak's sycophantic praise of Deevodas's handsomeness. This scene is dramatically relevant only to the extent that Madhvi can be given away in marriage even to the most undeserving hand for the fulfillment of Gaalav's commitment. Otherwise it doesn't have much relevance to the deeper meaning of the play. The last scene of Act II is very short and presents an answer to the unresolved question of why Vishwamitra put his pupil to such a severe test. Gaalav's classmate, Taamas picks up the courage to question Vishwamitra's motive in making such a demand on one particular disciple. Vishwamitra makes his position clear. He tells Taamas "you do not know Gaalav. He is a very self respecting youth and will not accept Vishwamitra's pardon which will mean to him

humiliation. Gaalav is ambitious. This is why I have put him to such a severe test."? Taamas is bold enough to ask Vishwamitra whether in this act of his, his own ambition is not hidden?

question and clarifies his position further by saying that he wanted to punish Gaalav for his arrogance because arrogance in ambitious people can be truly disastrous. Vishwamitra is confident that one day Gaalav's arrogance and extreme emotion will come to an end. This scene is relevant to resolve one doubt in the minds of all the characters of the play as to why Vishawamitra is interested in acquiring so many horses through an apparently-looking coercive his, a propagandist tone cannot be denied though it has been kept up within an acceptable restraint. Yayati discloses now that his giving away Madhvi to Gaalav as a gift to help him out was a part of his plan which had taken its shape because of his intuition. When he saw Gaalav for the first time in his hermitage he knew that he was destined to be the husband of Madhvi. But Madhvi will have to undergo the torture of sacrifice to get a husband like Gaalav.

There is a sudden reversal of situation towards the end of the play when Gaalav is disappointed by the decayed beauty and youth of Madhvi because of her prolonged suffering owing to her being wifed by three kings and losing her three sons to them. Gaalav wonders why Madhvi has not regained her earlier beauty and youth with the blessing of which she was endowed by God. Madhvi had done so deliberately to test whether Gaalav was interested in her physical charms or in her as a person who lost her beauty and sons to help him out in his mission of fulfilling his deals. Gaalav finally wriggles out of his amorous commitment to Madhvi on the lame excuse that she who has lived in the ashram of his guru cannot be his wife.

The image of the spiritual leaders preaching people of dutifulness has been ironically exposed in the

selfishness of all the great leaders of idealism. Even Vishwamitra is not above the temptation of begetting a Chakraverty king. Everybody is selfish. Yayati for his love of flattery and applause as the most generous king can sacrifice his daughter. Gaalav can mercilessly exploit Madhvi, sustaining her strength by a show of interest in her. He is incapable of loving anybody except himself. Madhvi had a premonition of this feature of Gaalav but could not know the full truth about Gaalav's inner self. In her moment of disillusionment she taunts the entire group of the enlightened leaders of the society and in her moment of disillusion bitterly addresses Gaalav. "You, too, are like your community of gurus and you will make as equally a good spiritual leader." She liberates Gaalav from his commitment of love to her made earlier and with a broad smile blesses him to be happy in life. The play ends at a note of despair for the audience because of the failure of union between Gaalav and Madhvi. : The play thus presents the hollowness of spiritual claims and disapproves of the followers of ideals, who wanted espousal of sagehood, renunciation, detachment from worldly pleasures and effacement of the self from all the worldly involvements to nourish a healthy cultural tradition for the nation. All talks in this direction are mere deception. The supreme ideal is self aggrandizement and selfish gains at the cost of other's happiness. The relevance of the present play can be seen in the present day politics and political slogans. Madhvi who is the icon of a true follower of ideals has to be rewarded only with empty-handedness.

We would do well by not questioning the ethical aspect of using Madhvi as a mere seed-bed for producing continuators for royal families. The modern rational mind will certainly revolt against such an idea in a civilized society. The guru disciple relationship, though not very relevant to the modern world of materialism, opportunism and self-aggrandising ingratitude, the values which unfortunately rule the polity of our nation, more aggressively than ever before is of no relevance. Bhishmaa Sahney exposes in a subtle and artistically concealed manner the hypocrisy of the great spiritual leaders of our society. However, the mythical objective correlative mitigates considerably the causticity of the satirical and ironic edge of the entire play. The conclusion of the play should not appear unexpected because Gaalav's amorous idealism, too, must be exposed and he needs to be classed with the flock of the hypocritical leaders. The play on the whole is a picture of modern Indian society.

A few words about Bhishmaa Sahney's dramatic craftsman will be a fitting finale of our analysis of Madhvi. Sahney's skill in plot construction clearly demonstrates the blending of the elements of a good

plot described by Aristotle in his Poetics as well of a good cinema in Hindi. The characters are rounded, human with weaknesses, topical and temporal, yet archetypal and verifying mythological. The presentation of the play's themes-place of woman in family, our society, futility of her sacrifices (e.f. Ramayan's Sita and Ibsen's Nora) human vanity and selfishness under the garb of pseudo-idealism, and the self-aggrandising note of the rulers and spiritual leaders who treat women as mere commodity in the name of high idealism is deft and cunningly organized. The tool used by Sahney to present his vision of the life of women in our society is irony. Gaalav would not honor his amorous commitment because Madhvi has offered to be wifed by his own guru. But he had taken all the trouble to encourage Madhvi to be wives of the three kings who needed her divinely gifted womb to beget male inheritors of their kingdoms. Madhvi's verbal whipping of Gaalav, equating him with the rest of his clan, towards the end of the play, shows her victory over the hypocritical males. But Sahney does not mince words in explicitly asserting that Madhvi-like sacrifices are not going to have much effect on the insensitive hearts of the modern folk in our society. By using, like Eliot, the mythical method, Sahney is only highlighting the timelessness of the problem of women all over the world. A note of pessimism even at the victory of Madhvi cannot, however, be ruled out.

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