CHAPTER III

"Is Life a Carnival?":
The Carnival
The Carnival belongs to the tradition of 'Drama of Ideas.' It deals with the theme of love and marriage like Bernard Shaw's Candida. While dealing with the theme of love and marriage it seeks to dramatize the incongruity between love and marriage. The ultimate purpose of the play, however, is to present different approaches to life, with a view to upholding the idealistic attitude and deprecating the purely mercenary one. What the play drives home to us is that:

Life understood in the proper prospective is bound to be exciting, interesting and glorious. We can make it or mar it according to our attitudes towards life.¹

As Basavaraj S. Naikar points out,

"the play thus shows the symbolic victory of aesthetic life over the sheer pragmatic, mundane existence."²

The play centers round Suresh, who is the protagonist of the piece. He is presented as an 'idealist' and a 'dreamer' who is "sociable."³ The central conflict in the play on Basavaraj S. Naikar rightly points out is "between the upper middle classes for whom money is everything and the world of love that transcends all such material life."⁴ It also depicts the interaction between the middle-class
people like Suresh and Ramesh and the aristocrats like Shiv Lal and Ravinder. It lays stress on the intellectual aspect of the problem of love and money. The conflict is finally resolved by the triumph of love over money.

The play opens in the Constitution Club, New Delhi, where the first anniversary of the Progressive Youth Association, of which Suresh is the president, is just over. As an opening scene, it serves the purpose of exposition of theme and characters. It presents Suresh and Ramesh who one poles apart. They are different from each other in their attitude. If Suresh is a thoroughing idealist, Ramesh is a gross materialist. The conversation between them reveals the theme of the play – the conflict between lofty idealism and gross materialism:

Suresh always talks of ideals. Cannot have any ideals when you are starving, can you?

Perhaps not. But you cannot talk of bred and butter all the time. (185)

The theme of love and marriage indicated in the opening scene of the play is further developed in the second scene which takes place in the Mogul gardens. Suresh and Prem have been friends for the last six months. They were drawn towards each other at their very first meeting. However, they have taken six months of time to understand each other. Suresh tells Prem:
Prem, we have been friendly for the last six months. (189)

It is Prem who takes the initiative to express her love for Suresh. When Suresh suggests to Prem that they can sit and talk something about their Progressive Youth Association, Prem becomes "a little irritated" and says:

You and your Association all the time. Cannot you feel the warmth of a woman? Donot you understand the language of love? Are you not human? (191)

Suresh understands that Prem is in love with him and comes out with his feelings toward her. He gives the reasons for the delay in making up his mind to marry her. He has definite views about marriage. He says:

I am rather fastidious. I expect everything to be faultless. With me marriage is no gamble. I am glad you say that....

Suresh: When I think of marriage, the picture of partnership inevitably suggests itself to me. Marriage is companionship – I mean it is no tall talk. (192).
He says that he believes in the individuality, and economic independence of husband and wife:

I want my wife to have her own individuality. I hate to see her helpless and dependent on me.
You mean to say she should take up a job.
No, not exactly that.
But, what I mean is that she should be educated, enlightened and sympathetic. (192)

Finally, he says that he loves her and promises to be faithful to her all his life:

Prem, I love you even the first day I saw you. But I wanted to be pretty sure of myself, my own emotions and feelings. (193)

He takes the opportunity to express his view of marriage:

This very moment we are married. Marriage does not necessarily mean ceremony. It is enough if two persons sincerely love and promise to be true to each other. I will always stand by you. (194)

When he looks forwards to a happy marital life with Prem, she warmly responds:
We will indeed be happy.... Sincere love always enables its subjects. It makes them develop within a spirit of sacrifice and mobility.

Prem is particularly happy that the period of suspense is over as Suresh has made his mind very clear. He says:

What a glorious feeling it is ... to know that someone loves you, cares for you and longs for you.

(195)

Suresh is equally happy about his decision to marry a good and beautiful woman like Pre. But, at the sometime, he is aware that marriage is more than a biological necessity. He says:

I suppose the attraction of men and women is not solely based on sex. There is something more in it than his simple, biological factor. (195)

The plot takes a new turn with the most successful conduct of birthday party of Shiv Lal daughter, Sobha. Suresh who arranges the Garden Party in Shiv Lal's house, as his Secretary, impresses everyone who attends the party with his courtesy and politeness. This is revealed in the conversation among Manohar, Ravinder and Shiv Lal.
I have never seen such a party in my life. Such a combination of the pick of society! Grand! Splendid!

Lai: The credit goes to my secretary. He spent nearly a fortnight on these arrangements

Ravinder: He is earnest and sincere in what he does.

Lal: Yes he is. Look at him, how he conduct himself with all types of people! He is all courtesy and politeness (198-99)

Sobha, the daughter of Shiv Lal, is drawn towards Suresh. She is very found of him and wants to marry him cutting across the barriers of class and caste. But, she is perturbed to see Prem by the side of Suresh. She wonders whether Suresh is in love with Prem. When Ramesh tells Suresh that Sobha is watching him with an idea of loving him and marrying him. Suresh simple brushes him aside saying “don’t be silly.” (203)

A few days after the Garden Party Sobha sends for Suresh to meet her. When Suresh enters her room Sobha is delighted. She says:

I did want you to see me. I thought of thinking you in person for all the trouble you took in arranging my birthday party. I am indeed grateful to Suresh.

(208)
In the course of their long conversation, Sobha comes out with her true feelings for Suresh. He says she is very fond of him and that she strongly wishes to marry him. Furthermore, she says that she is determined to have him as her husband or remain unmarried. She says:

I know you wish to marry Prem. But no one loves the way I love you. You have been with us for two years. All along I had an eye on you. The other day when I saw you with Prem decided to let you know my mind. I know Dad will be engaged if I tell him of my choice. But I am not worried about it. I am determined to have you or remain unmarried (213)

But, Suresh is not willing to marry her though he has great respect for her as an "emancipated woman (211). He is already in love with Prem and so he cannot possibly marry Sobha. He feels terribly sorry for disappointing her, and asks her to forgive him for his inability to fulfill her wish.

I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but if I did it unknowingly. I apologise for it. Please forgive me. I know understand you. I know you are so very different from women of your class. You are independent. You despise traditions and
meaningless customs. I have nothing but admiration for you. But on the question of marriage, I am afraid, I have to disappoint you. I am fond of Prem (214).

But Sobha is undeterred by the sentiments expressed by Suresh. She gets annoyed and asks to forget Prem and marry herself. She says:

Don't talk to me of your fondness for Prem. I know, men are polygamous by nature. I am sure you can change your mind if you wish to. Look at this beautiful mansion, all this wealth. Don't be silly. Of course I don't wish to tempt you with these material comforts. I love you Nothing matters to me expect this ennobling desire of possessing the person to love (214).

After a few days, Sobha reveals her mind to marry Suresh. Much to his chagrin Sobha tells her father how greatly she admires Suresh and how passionately she is in love with him. She says:

Dad, he is wonderful. I have never seen a man like him. Others bore me to distraction but he leaves me spell-bound. (218-19)
But her father retaliates saying:

No doubt, he is clever, but surely he has no business to come and talk to you. He is after all our secretary. I hate to see my secretary making love to my daughter (219).

However, Sobha suitably and intelligently replies to him. She says:

How about your daughter making love to your secretary (219).

Shiv Lal is simply horrified at the idea of her daughter marrying his own Secretary and he thinks that she is mad. When he says that he is very serious about marrying Suresh and that she is very found of him, Shiv Lal is greatly agitated and retorts:

Found of him! You are mad; Sobha you are mad. O what a shame! My dear, be reasonable. What sort of life you expect to have with Suresh? Can he afford you the luxuries you have had all your life? (219)

Sobha who is bent upon marrying Suresh tells her father that she does not mind living with Suresh. Moreover, when she says that what is needed for a successful material life is not riches but "mutual understanding and sympathy" (219), Shiv Lal repudiates her saying:
Don't be silly. My dear, life is a blessed carnival. It is a grand picnic, a glorious holiday. We, the rich, we are destined to enjoy life with its pleasant round of joys. Our riches are our sole comfort. (219)

Shiv Lal tries his best to dissuade Sobha from marrying Suresh. He tells her that by marrying a poor fellow like Suresh she will not be happy. But, Sobha does not agree with her father. She says:

But Suresh is such a good soul that he will surely make me happy (200).

Then, Shiv Lal tries to divert her mind saying that he had decided to offer her in marriage to another rich young man called Ravinder who is a Capitalist. He says:

I know Suresh is good. But it's no use being poor. Everything goes by riches. In the busy, modern world who cares for spiritual values or for lofty ideals? As a matter of fact no one likes to be poor. Even the communists who are supposed to be the champions of the poor do not like a life of poverty. No, certainly not. My dear Sobha, don't be silly. Do not dream of Suresh. Think of Ravinder, a man suited to you in all respects. (200)
But, when Sobha tells him that Ravinder is already in love with Asha, he replies to her that Ravinder would still jump at the idea of getting her as his wife for the simple reason that she is "a millionairess" (220). Sobha suitably answers him saying:

So he will love my riches not me. (220)

She further says that she is hoping to get the heart of Suresh though he flatly refused to marry her, but her father bluntly tells her:

Leave him alone. He will be all right with a woman of his class. And I shall so on get rid of him. (220)

Though Sobha unequivocally made her love for Suresh, Shiv Lal thinks that he can get her married to Ravinder. He says to Manohar:

But as regards Sobha's infatuation for Suresh there is no fear. I think I can manage her. I am very near success in convincing her to my way of thinking. (224)

Since Asha, a close friend of Sobha, is in love with Ravinder, Shiv Lal wants to dispose her of somehow or other so that she can give his daughter in marriage to Ravinder. He asks Manohar:

But tell me one thing – how can I dispose of Asha? She is Sobha's dear friend, you know that, don't you? (224)
Manohar suggests that Shiv Lal himself can marry Asha, since she wants fun in life whether it comes from Ravinder or Shiv Lal. So, he thinks that Shiv Lal can marry Asha and solve the problem. He says to Shiv Lal:

I don't see why you shouldn't. Any woman would run mad for you. Don't you know that Asha's first, perhaps the only consideration for Ravinder's hand, is his wealth? (225)

But Shiv Lal who is not interested in marrying a young girl at his age, suggests to Manohar that he himself can marry her. Manohar is very much pleased at this suggestion but says that Asha will not be interested in marrying him since he is not wealthy. Shiv Lal promises to make sufficient provision for both Manohar and Asha.

When Ravinder enters Shiv Lal tells him that he will not give his daughter in marriage to him though she has "an eye on Suresh" (227). He says:

Ravinder, you need not entertain any doubts about Sobha. She is a dutiful child. She will marry you all right, provided you promise to be faithful. (227)

While agreeing to do so Ravinder suggests to Shiv Lal get rid of Suresh by this dismissing him from service as his secretary. He says:
Your wisdom will be an asset to me. But what do you think of your secretary Suresh? Don't you think, he ought to be dismissed? (228)

And Shiv Lal replies that he has already passed orders dismissing Suresh. At this critical juncture Sobha enters with Asha. Shiv Lal tells her that she will very “soon be married to Ravinder” (229). But Asha immediately intervenes saying:

Ravinder loves me. How can he marry Sobha? (229)

But to her great surprise, Ravinder tells her:

Madam, I am sorry for your unfortunate mistake. What was fun for me was an act of faith with you. I never expected you would take me so seriously.

(229-30)

Shiv Lal also requests Asha to leave Ravinder so that he can get his daughter married to him. He says:

Asha don't disheartened. You love Sobha and you know that she is meant for Ravinder. Be generous to your friend. (230)

He further suggests to her to marry Manohar to solve her problem of marriage. He says:
Asha, you need not doubt my sincere devotion to you. But for my poverty. I would have proposed to you years ago. Now we can lead a comfortable life. (230)

Thus, after making all the necessary adjustments Shiv Lal wants his daughter to marry Ravinder. He says:

Don't be sullen and sulky. Be a dutiful child and marry Ravinder. (231)

But Sobha loses her temper and replies to her father with contempt:

Dad, I have no respect for your strange views on love and marriage. You think you are an all-seeing God. Don't be ridiculous, Dad. How can you ever pair off men and wimen? Don't you think they have their own emotions and feeling? You and your money! ...... fortunately the world is not so poor as you imagine. (231)

Taken aback by his daughter's rude response, Shiv Lal becomes very angry and announces his final decision. He says:

No more of your rudeness. You should marry Ravinder, or else you have to leave my house at once. (232)
With these words Shiv Lal moves towards Sobha and shakes her violently by her shoulder. But Sobha asks him in a dignified manner not to touch her. She says:

You dare not touch me. Take off your hands.

Ravinder is deeply moved and touched by the sentiment expressed by Sobha and apologises to her for his hasty idea of marrying her without her consent. He says:

Sobha, I am awfully sorry for this. I have no intention to marry you by force. I am not brute. Dear Sobha, give me time to woo you. I shall try my best to deserve you. I know how you feel about marriage and my sympathises are for you. Your Dad loves you to madness. So he is over anxious to see his only child happy. In a way I am responsible for this unpleasant strife. I apologise to you. I realise I do not deserve you at present. But I shall patiently wait till I can get you by desert and not by wealth. (232)

When Suresh receives a letter of dismissal from his boss, he is least bothered about it. When Ramesh says that he should not be mild and protest against the injustice done to him, Suresh replies:
No, please don’t say that, there is justice in the world. We cannot ignore it. The balance is always struck between good and evil. (236)

When Rekha, who is worried about Suresh’s future says:

Don’t you think you should hate the millionaire for giving you the sack? (238)

But, Suresh with his quantity of mind replies:

Why should I? I shall soon get some other job. If one has merit one is bound to succeed. (238)

Ramesh thinks that Suresh is foolish in refusing to marry a millionairess like Sobha, Suresh aptly tells him:

But let me tell you that life is not a holiday. It has a purpose, a mission and everyone of us is expected to fulfil that mission. We cannot take life easy. We have to fight and struggle even to the last day of our lives. It’s rather dull to have the same unbroken chain of thrills and joys. We have to accept life with its shortcomings and make the best of it through our individual efforts. (239)
At this critical juncture Asha comes and breaks the news that Suresh has been reappointed by Shiv Lal on Sobha’s insistence and persuasion. She says to Suresh:

Sobha came to know of your dismissal. She became annoyed with her father and she refused to see unless he called you back to his service. He was helpless. So he agreed to take you back. (242)

The play comes to a close when Suresh expresses his gratitude to Sobha for her benign gesture. The ending of The Carnival reminds no of the happy ending of As You Like It even though melancholic persons like Jacques meant for other than dancing measures may find it disturbing and unpleasant to see many lovers on the stage making the best of life.5

The title of the play, The Carnival, is apt. As P.Obula Reddy points out, The Carnival is mostly interrogation. Is life a carnival or a festival? Presumably the answer is that life is for a nobler aspect, not for simple jollity or dalliance. However one cannot ignore the fact that life is for living, and living well.6
The play presents different approaches to life, but the focus is on the idealistic attitude, but not on the mercenary attitude. The title is projected as an interrogation – is life a Carnival? As the playwright points out in his 'Preface':

To some, life is a glorious holiday whereas to some others it is a great fight. Whether it is taken as a holiday or as a fight, one need not be under the illusion that money alone makes life worth living. Most people labour under this misconception and make themselves miserable. If life is to be glorious, one can never satisfy oneself with pleasures and pleasures alone. A life that is worth living is one that has made an unceasing effort to justify its existence. The spark of ambition, the urge to serve mankind, the courage to withstand the ills of life these constitute life in its real sense. Any other way of living is parasitic and a negation of existence. Life is not meant for fun and frolic. It has a mission and it has to be fulfilled.7

As Basavaraj S. Naikar observes:

the writer suggests that life is no mercy-go-round.

One has to work hard and cherish human values.8
The Carnival is a well-knit play with one main plot and three sub-plots. The main plot is concerned with Suresh and his problem of getting married to Prem. The problem gets intensified when Sobha develops love for Suresh and wants to marry him. But her idea of marrying Suresh is thwarted by her father, Shiv Lal, who dismisses Suresh from his service he is interested in getting his daughter married to Ravinder, a capitalist. The problem is solved when Suresh is reappointed as secretary on the intervention of Sobha. Suresh is expected to marry Prem. The first sub-plot deals with Ravinder and his false love for Asha. The second sub-plot deals with Manohar and his flirting with Pratima a rich widow. The third sub-plot is related to Ramesh and his love for Rekha.

The Carnival enjoys structural unity. The incidents in the sub-plots are linked with the incidents in the main plot. Similarly, all the characters in the sub-plots are closely related to the characters in the main plot. The plot structure of The Carnival resembles the plot structure of As You Like It which also has one main plot and three sub-plots which are unified into an organic whole.

The play is important not only for its structural unity, but also for its art of characterization. Suresh is presented as an ideal young man full of life and spirit. He is refined and cultured. He gives impression of the born leader. He is rather shy and reserve, but full of
confidence. In the words of Rekha, Suresh is a great 'dreamer,' and an 'idealistic' who is sociable and charming. In the words of Shiv Lal, Suresh is honest and sincere in what he does. ‘He is all courtesy and politeness’ (199). He has a right concept of marriage. For him marriage is a gamble but a companionship. He carefully chooses Prem as his life partner. His love for Prem is sincere and constant. He is not materialistic in his attitude to life. Though Sobha falls in love with him and wants to marry him, he politely rejects her offer. He is not interested in leading a luxurious life by marrying a millionairess like Sobha. He is content with marrying Prem who is educated, enlightened and sympathetic. Thus, “the ideal love is presented through Suresh and Prem who are like Touchstone and Audrey in As You Like It. Manohar and Asha seem to exist in a world of marriage of convenience. Sobha's acceptance of Ravinder, conditionally, is like an arranged marriage. In a way, “it is an approximation to the conventional arranged marriages still prevalent in our country.”
REFERENCES:


All the references to the text are from this edition, and the page numbers are given parenthetically at the end of each passage.


