

Traditional-Modern Dichotomy: An Analysis of Women in *Hayavadana*

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Girish Karnad is one of the renowned playwrights whose contribution to the Indian drama can't be denied. His dramatic genius is unsurpassable. Karnad has woven modern insight in mythological stories and he has been successful in delving into this realm. The present paper focuses on the play *Hayavadana* (1975). *Hayavadana* is originally written in Kannada and translated into English by Karnad himself. As stated in the Note given by Girish Karnad in the text of *Hayavadana* the central episode Devadatta and Kapila has been taken from *Vetalapanchvimshika*. He also admits that he has drawn heavily from the *Transposed Heads* by Thomas Mann. (Note in the Text *Hayavadana*)

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran Maharashtra in 1938. Since his childhood he has been very enthusiastic in watching Yakshagana and Natak Mandali and this has shaped his writing. Karnad's play touches the core of the human mind with all its modernity. *Hayavadana* is the third play of Karnad published in 1970. The play highlights the supremacy of mind over the body. The play *Hayavadana* is divided into two plots, the one deals with the story of *Hayavadana* and the other deals with the story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. In this paper the focus is on two women, *Hayavadana*'s mother i.e the princess of Karnataka and Padmini. The play *Hayavadana* is a blend of Indian mythology and contemporary thoughts. Karnad has dealt the mythological story with a modern touch.

The play begins with the search for completeness of *Hayavadana* who is half human and half horse. *Hayavadana* is roaming to achieve completeness and on being asked about his incompleteness tells the story of his mother. The character of the princess of Karnataka and the mother of *Hayavadana* is quite complex. This beautiful princess keeps aside all the proposals of her prospective suitors and desires for a stallion. This is uncommon for a human being. Karnad owes many incidents from the mythology and gives it a modern touch. The princess is adamant and her father accepts the stallion as her son in law. The princess and the stallion live together for fifteen years and the touch of human love transforms the stallion into a celestial being *Gandharva* who was cursed by *Kubera* for his misbehaviour. Here comes the twist as the princess denies her association with the *Gandharva* because she likes the stallion only.

Karnad was highly influenced by Bertolt Brecht who has proved that histories, fables and myths can be reinterpreted to highlight a contemporary issue. Karnad has used this myth to prove modernity as the princess doesn't compromise. The *Gandharva* asks the princess to come to "his Heavenly Abode. She said that she would come only if he became a horse again." (*Hayavadana* 9). The princess presents the modern thought that whatever she chose was her will only and she will never adjust with anything else. The *Gandharva* curses the princess to

become a horse herself and leaves for his heavenly abode. The princess transforms into a mare and she becomes happy. Indifference and apathy of the super towards the lesser mortals is a modern trait. On the part of the princess she exhibits her strength and accepts her destiny happily. The story has a mythical base but it has modern implications as princess's desires are beyond the traditional acceptance.

The main plot and the story within the story is a love story of three characters Devadatta, Padmini and Kapila. Devadatta and Kapila are bosom friends and the twist comes with the entry of Padmini in their life. The marriage amongst Devadatta and Padmini is settled by the parents without considering Padmini's decision. Padmini gives importance to her brain and agrees to marry Devadatta but she is attracted towards Kapila. Padmini is the protagonist whose character is divided between the two polarities, a traditional woman who loves her husband and follows the customs of society but she is attracted towards Kapila which is a modern aspect.

Unrivalled in intelligence, Devadatta governs over Padmini and Kapila Padmini being a traditional woman tries to follow all the orders of her husband but at some places she exhibits the modern trait and become conscious of her identity, then she listens to her heart and doesn't allow Devadatta to fail her plans. This is evident when they all plan to visit Ujjain fair. Despite Devadatta's reluctance to visit with Kapila, Padmini amends the plan and they all travel to Ujjain. The entire action of the play revolves around her. Padmini makes Devadatta and Kapila to change them as per her plan. Padmini is a modern confident woman in front of her husband when she deals with her husband's friend Kapila. As Nimsarkar examines the brain research of woman characters in Karnad's plays and states that each woman protagonist is exceptionally strong in her balanced and mental aura. She executes her choices heartlessly once concluded and rebuffs the individual who has misled her or demonstrated unfaithful and traitorous. (qtd in Deena Jana and Dr. Sharon Luther)

After the incidents of Kali temple and the transposition of heads, Padmini lives happily with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. She is satisfied with this change. Karnard uses both modernist ideas of identity where Padmini gets what she wanted and for the time being she forgets Kapila. Padmini is bold in true sense as it is exhibited in the Kali temple through her interaction with Goddess Kali.

Shubhangi S. Raykar comments on Padmini's difficulty of Indian culture. She says that Padmini's scrape is the pickle of present day, liberated lady in our general public who is torn between the two polarities, a woman who cherishes her better half and another person for various parts of their identities. A socialized culture and its ethical code won't acknowledge such a woman. The two men won't acknowledge each other with regards to sharing a woman and the three will annihilate themselves simultaneously (Raykar 177).

As the mind controls over the body Devadatta with Kapila's body becomes tender and delicate as earlier. Padmini plans to send Devadatta to Ujjain fair to purchase new dolls for her

son, and goes to forest to meet Kapila. This doesn't exhibit the part of an ideal wife. The scope and the meaning of pativarta is being questioned here.

Girish Karnad has used a female chorus in the play who is actually the voice of Padmini. In the beginning of the play the chorus chants, “Why should love stick to the sap of a single body?(*Hayavadana* 11) And “A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm. I have neither regret nor shame.”(*Hayavadana* 11) The female chorus expresses the suppressed feeling of a traditional woman and Padmini's love for both Devadatta and Kapila.

Further the chorus gives a message about the abolishment of the institution of marriage also.

Later in the play the female chorus sings:

“The river only feels

the pull of waterfall.

She giggles and tickles and rushes

on the banks, then turns

a top of dry leaves in the navel of the whirlpool, (*Hayavadana* 58)

Here the chorus compares Padmini as a river attracted towards Kapila. The lines “While the scarecrow on the bank has a face fading on its mudpot head and a body tom with memories” (*Hayavadana* 58) gives the impression of the scarecrow of the society. Thus a woman with such modern thoughts receives this reaction from contemporary society. Padmini violates the oath and the principles on which the institution of marriage is laid and finally dares to go to Kapila in the forest. When Devadatta and Kapila die, she asks the Bhagavatha to make a large funeral pyre for them and she jumps into it. Female chorus attributes Padmini as Pativrata and sings “Our sister is leaving in a palanquin of sandalwood. . . . The Lord of Death will be pleased with the offering of three coconuts” (*Hayavadana* 63).

In such a manner Karnad's own announcement gives philosophical and practical reasons when he says, "If womanhood discovers satisfaction in affection that happens to be outside marriage why that should be viewed as wrong? Women are vehicles of these trends; they expend these feelings utilizing their bodies. Family association and marriage have been taken care of cleverly by giving contemporary touch to it however at the centre is woman. (qtd in Deena Jana and Dr. Sharon Luther)

Women in Karnad's plays are the traditional women with modern thinking and perspective. In fact, these women play lead roles in the discussion of several contemporary issues. Extra marital affairs are not considered in Indian tradition. Padmini stands on a different ground and exhibits traditional Modern dichotomy. Karnad is a skilled artist who delineates the

characters in such a way that they fulfill the demand of the plot. In this way women in the play present their real self in the shadow of culture and tradition.

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