

**EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN IN GIRISH KARNAD'S
HAYAVADANA**

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Abstract

The Indian cultural traditions are male-dominated, hardly giving any scope for women to exercise their freedom for fulfillment of desires and development of identity which they claim as of their own. Karnad was well acquainted with feminist ideologies and the havoc wrought by patriarchal ideologies in Indian society. His plays abound with subalterns especially women and lower caste people subjected since ancient time by patriarchy or upper hierarchy of the society. Karnad's women play lead roles in the discussion of several contemporary issues and problems. It is quite interesting to point out that Karnad gauges both internal and external world of woman's life. The theme of the play Hayavadana if analyzed from the socio-cultural and gender level, we notice that there is a conflict between two polarities namely, Apollonian and Dionysian. Hayavadana depicts the drama of tangled relationships where Devadatta a man of intellect and mind, and Kapila a man of steel like body, are friends and lovers of Padmini, the wife of Devadatta. She loves the fabulous mind in the fabulous body. Padmini's quest for completeness and perfection brings downfall in her personal life and is alienated. Her performance of 'Sati' is a social demand for infidelity in married life. She tries to revolt against socio-cultural forces which engulfed her. These forces alienated her from the worldly life she does not wish to compromise with and finally she finds relief in death.

Key Words: Revolutionary, Apollonian, Dionysian, Bellicose, Patriarchal, Alienated.

Girish Karnad, apart from being an acclaimed actor and director of theatre and films, is a path-breaking playwright of post-independence India. He is an extremely innovative playwright who was born in 1938 in Matheran, Karnataka. For his contribution in the field of direction, acting, script-writing and playwriting, he has earned many fellowships and awards of which Fulbright Fellowship, Sahitya Akademi award and Jnanpeeth award deserves special mention. Karnad delves into Indian myths and legends, using them as vehicles of a new vision. Through these myths he tries to depict the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions, conflicts and man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection. His portrayal of characters in general is revolutionary, and his women characters can be considered the enlightened and emancipated women of modern times. Among the treasure-trove of his plays are included *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Naga-Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Bali: The Sacrifice*, *Broken Images*, *Flowers* and *Wedding Album*.

The Indian cultural traditions are male-dominated, hardly giving any scope for women to exercise their freedom for fulfillment of desires and development of identity which they claim as of their own. They have internally colonized the minds of women, often making them aware of the limitations. Karnad has attempted decolonization of the cultural and society in two ways. Firstly, he shows the weakness and hypocrisy of attitude, social, cultural and moral values and practices, and secondly by making his women sharply react against these values. For this purpose, he borrows the plot from myths, legends and folk-tales and assimilates to the contemporary situations, brings out the differences between mythical, fantasy world of make belief and realistic contemporary world. It is this journey from mythical world to the world of reality, social and psychological, that offers large scope for discussion of new women from different points of view.

Karnad's women play lead roles in the discussion of several contemporary issues and problems: specifically women's individuality, family, marriage, chastity, fidelity, society, culture, politics, religion and rituals, mirroring contemporary life, a post-colonial phenomenon. This can be observed in the women who belong to different strata of society and social hierarchy—intellectual, royal families, religious priests, Dalits and tribal, etc. Each women character is unique in her personality in creating her world in her own ways and

desires to live life as she finds fine and suitable in the present multi-dimensional, socio-cultural milieu. Each woman presents different aspects of the history of the Indian society and its culture and helps to evaluate them in the contemporary contexts.

It is quite interesting to point out that Karnad gauges both internal and external world of woman's life. The inner world of woman involves desire for several subjective needs and their fulfilment. Eros or accomplishment of carnal desire is the core aspect of Karnad's woman's personality in each play in different situations. She loves man of her taste if she is virgin and after marriage another man and does not suppresses the passion under the ritualistic principles of the society and its sanction. He has shown that such suppression of natural instinct would result in turmoil and disorder in the normal life of the woman. Pure love does not recognize chastity, ethical and moral values attached to it. Karnad is revolutionary and anti-moralist in this matter.

The theme of the play *Hayavadana* if analyzed from the socio-cultural and gender level, we notice that there is a conflict between two polarities namely, Apollonian and Dionysian. To explain these terms: Apollonian is the ego state which causes self-alienation and in which the soul leaves the body. All human suffering is due to this culture of self-alienation. *Hayavadana* depicts the drama of tangled relationships where Devadatta a man of intellect and mind, and Kapila a man of steel like body, are friends and lovers of Padmini, the wife of Devadatta. She loves the fabulous mind in the fabulous body. Padmini attempts to obtain the perfect man without self-alienation, through the boon of Goddess Kali but her juxtaposition of brilliant head and a strong body is easily undone by the hegemony of Apollonian culture carried on the head. In the play, Devadatta is the character around whom the Apollonian order is created. He is least subject to passion and therefore, least impulsive of the other characters in the play. Whereas, Dionysian represents the mental state in which the ego wants to be natural or really human wherein the mind and the body work together. There is no split between them. There is a perfect harmony between them. The mind feels the bodily experiences and body rocks with feeling of the mind. This state is called undivided body-soul. Such an ego allows the undifferentiated, unified body-mind is called Dionysian ego, in which the soul returns to and resides in, the body. Kapila in the play is the best example of this. The play hints that Apollonian always asserts itself and suppresses the Dionysian in our

socio—cultural life. Therefore the coexistence of both physically and morally is not possible. In this regard Shubhangi S. Raykar writes:

Human Society is made possible only through submission to Apollonian principle. The collective wisdom of society flouts passion (represented in the play by the judgment of *Rishi* and Padmini's passion for Kapila respectively). It will bring about the destruction of the individual who defy order in society.¹

Padmini is the daughter of the leading merchant in Dharampura, a wealthy and prosperous person. In her house, "the very floor is swept by the Goddess of wealth. In Devdatta's house, they have the goddess of learning for a maid." (*Three Plays*, 90)² On Kapila's cold response to her imposing question she comments, "I know it. I knew you wouldn't touch my feet. One can't even trust strangers any more. All right, my dear son! I opened the door. So consider me the door-keeper. What do you want?" (*Three Plays*, 89). In spite of her assertive nature and bellicose attitude, she is quite considerate and rational, and being born and brought up in a rich family, she seems to have been loved to her utter satisfaction, her every desire fulfilled by her parents. She does not surrender to mere emotion and she has no values for sentiments. When Kapila proposes to her for his friend, Devadatta, she accepts it immediately, even before parental deliberation. The marriage proposed from such a well-known family, the revered family, makes her delighted and proud. "Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. He is delicate and comely in appearance but endowed with profound intelligence; in height he is five feet seven inches tall, he has long hair and fair face. He is a poet, pundit and knows Vedas, he writes fine poetry and has tremendous excellence in logic" (*Three Plays*, 74, 90). He is "the apple of every eye in Dharampura" (*Three Plays*, 74). Devadatta has got these fine qualities in his personality but is fragile in body, is emotional and sentimental, an Apollonian in all aspects. He loves her, her beauty and her body but has not applied his mind and reasoning power to decipher her mind, nature and personality. Kapila realizes that she is unfit match for Devadatta, in the very first encounter:

Devdatta, my friend. I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightening – and as sharp. She is not for the like of you. What she needs is a man of steel. But what can one do? You'll never listen to me. And I can't withdraw now..." (*Three Plays*, 90)

Raykar further remarks on Padmini's predicament of Indian society thus:

Padmini's predicament is the predicament of modern, emancipated woman in our society who is torn between the two polarities a woman who loves her husband as well as someone else for different aspects of their personalities. A civilized Apollonian society and its moral code will not accept such a woman. The two men will not accept each other when it comes to sharing a woman and the three will destroy themselves in the process.³

The root of Padmini's agony is the impact of patriarchal society that opposes legal system or class conflict. It is due to this basic system of power of patriarchy Padmini undergoes suffering and mental torture in her life. In this regard K. K. Sharma supports radical feminist's view who advocates that "the root cause of women's oppression lies in patriarchal gender relation, as opposed to legal system or class conflict".⁴ Men are socialized to have their desire fulfilled and women are socialized to meet those desires. Devadatta fulfills his desire after getting Padmini but Padmini does not feel complete satisfaction with her husband. The young and beautiful Padmini wants her husband hovering around her but Devadatta spends much of his time in reading poetry or plays or writing, paying less attention to his wife and her sensual desire. Padmini needs a man in her company who can fulfil her womanly desire with his strong body and remain absorbed into her passion for a longer time. But after the transformation of heads she feels happy but only for a couple of days, i.e. one year. Even Goddess Kali could not satisfy Padmini permanently. Shubhangi S. Raykar remarks, "Padmini knows that her illicit, extra marital relationship with Kapila will not be acceptable to the society as it threatens the 'order' in this patriarchal society."⁵ As Jaganamohana Chari says, she is "repressed by the power of patriarchal values of the ruling class ideology. But she appears to be relatively freer and more capable of distancing herself from the hegemonic contexts. She may rest content in her consent to the hegemonic contexts, yet she adopts the more indirect mode of facing up to reality."⁶

The relationship between the three major characters conforms to the present day gender theories. Devadatta, because of his cultivated mind rules over both Padmini and Kapila.

Padmini is the major protagonist, always at the centre of action, and the whole action of the play revolves around her. She is a dominating central force in that both Devadatta and Kapila try to adjust them according to her plan. She keeps them under the magnetic force by

controlling their minds and body movements. She traps them into the knot of amorous splendid which they are unable to escape unhurt.

So lost is she in her personal desire that she ignores her motherly responsibility towards her own son, the piece of heart and hands him over to a third person for his nourishment. She gives the child to the hunters who live in this forest, beseeching them that the child is Kapila's son, with a thought that as they loved Kapila, they would bring him up in his interest; "Let the child grow up in the forest with the rivers and the trees. When he's five take him to the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharampura. Tell him it's Devadatta son" (*Three Plays*, 131). Here she adopts dualistic plan for the safety of the child and his future.

Padmini is a victim of the patriarchal order where woman are subjected to the patriarchal culture. The marriage between Devadatta and Padmini is settled by the parents without considering Padmini's liking and disliking. Born in an affluent and rich family she has developed her personality, which searches for perfection. It is after finding unsuitability and malelessness in Devadatta that Padmini turns to Kapila, to satisfy the demand of her body and her idea of man. But she could not go against the concepts of fidelity and sacred concept of marriage so much respected in the culture. Aparana Dharwadker says, the play "...gives primacy to women in the psychosexual relations of marriage, and creates a space for the expression of, even the fulfillment of amoral female desire within the constraints of patriarchy."⁷

Padmini is a generic representative. M. K. Naik observes, "Her name indicates 'lotus' which is the abode of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity as well as the paradigm of feminine beauty made well known by Vatsayana's Kamasutra."⁸ Padmini is a modern woman, freed from the socio-cultural inhibition, who executes her desire of perfection, a perfect man in her personal life by overthrowing the patriarchal propriety and male dominance. But according to Naik, it is "ironical that Padmini brings no prosperity to the two friends with whom her lot is cast."⁹ By making her representative, Karnad has advocated the cause of women for freedom, for execution of desire as well choice they find reasonably proper.

Karnad has used Dolls as a unique device to inform the audience what is happening in the mind of Padmini. The Dolls inform us that the person she is thinking of is not Devadatta. Though Padmini asserts that she has forgotten Kapila, yet in her heart of hearts, she cannot forget him. Rather, he is the prince of her dreams. The Dolls watch the dramatic action

enacted between Devadatta and Padmini and the role Padmini is performing in her quest for Kapila. Padmini's assumption that she is alone, unwatched in her search of a perfect man is wrecked through the voices of the Dolls. The Dolls, in their animated form, are individual members of the society as well as the part of the social conscience who interpret Padmini's psyche and according to Erin B. Mee they narrates her "dreams about Kapila as she sleeps, reveal the illicit desire she feels but cannot, as a married women in Indian society articulate."¹⁰ Padmini desires to send Devadatta to Ujjain after finding excuse in the torn out Dolls, as a part of her plan so that she can find safe route to approach Kapila.

Doll I: (to Doll II): Did you hear that? She wants to throw us out....

Doll II: She wants new dolls

Doll I: The whore

Doll II: The bitch

Doll I: May her house burn down

Doll I: May her teeth fall out (*Three Plays*, 121)

"the joys of married life"(*Three Plays*, 111).

Devadutta (embracing Padmini) My Padmini....

My lovely Padmini....

Padmini: My King - My Master....

Devadatta: My little lightening

Padmini: The light of my joy

Devadatta: The flower of my palm....

Padmini: My celestial-bodied Gandharva....

My sun-faced Indra....

Devadutta: My Queen of Indra's Court

Padmini: (Caressing his shoulders). Come let's go quickly. Where the earth is soft and the green grass plays the swing. (*Three Plays*, 111).

Padmini has now a strong hold on Kapila's body in Devadatta and is quite radiant with self-fulfillment and has escaped from the institutional curbs.

Padmini's quest for completeness and perfection brings downfall in her personal life and is alienated. Her performance of 'Sati' is a social demand for infidelity in married life. She tries to revolt against socio-cultural forces which engulfed her. These forces alienated her from the

worldly life she does not wish to compromise with and finally she finds relief in death. The passionate Padmini cherishes the Dionysian aspect of life by challenging the moral codes of the society, but the socio-cultural aspects are the apollonian which assert themselves and subdue the Dionysian in our socio-cultural life. Raykar views, “Padmini’s predicament is the predicament of a modern, emancipated woman in our society who is torn between two polarities.”¹¹

All women characters in Karnad’s plays have immortalized their places in the literary world and the students of literature, particularly of drama and the theatre goers, would not certainly forget them. These women have set a new standard of their class who aspire for new society, new culture and new world where sex discrimination is underplayed and equality dwells among the members of the society, in true sense of the term. Karnad has established an example in the development of his female protagonist through gender discourse and many new and young dramatists would find a fountain of inspiration in his dramatic creation.

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