

A Brief Study of Girish Karnad's Play *Hayavadana*

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Abstract – The action of the play is dominated by the motif of completeness and perfection in life. Padmini wants to unite with a man who is perfect in body and mind and Hayavadana wants fulfilment in body because he has a horse head and human body. P. D. Nimsarkar, points out about Padmini's story in the book titled Women in Girish Karnad's Plays: A Critical Perspective, "Padmini's story is an attempt to break the natural order to seek her idea of perfection" (98). Whether it is Padmini or Hayavadana both of them try to get completeness and perfection.

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The main plot of the play consists of the story of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila and the sub-plot deals with the story of Hayavadana. Hayavadana means 'horse headed', he has human body and horse head. His mother was the Princess of Karnataka. She was very beautiful. She chose a white-stallion for marriage, and lived with him happily. After fifteen years of her love the horse turned into a Celestial Being, a gandharva. He was cursed by the god Kubera to be born as a horse for some act of misbehaviour. He was able to get his original self only because of his wife's human love. But now he wanted to go to heaven with his wife but she said "She would come only if he became a horse again." (H114). But he cursed her to turn into a horse. A woman who served him for fifteen years got such a reward for her love.

Padmini is the daughter of a rich merchant of Dharmapura. She is very beautiful, Kapila praises her, "I hadn't thought anyone could be more beautiful than the wench Ragini who acts Rambha in our village troupe! But this one! You're right-she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati- all rolled into one" (H123). She is not a traditional woman. She wants perfect mind and perfect body in her husband but it can't be possible. She marries to Devadatta, a Brahmin. He is very intelligent but feeble in body. His friend Kapila has a very strong body who usually visits their house. Devadatta remains busy in his reading and writing poetry, that's why Padmini feels attracted towards Kapila. Devadatta is also conscious to her behaviour. No husband can tolerate her wife to be indulged in too much talking with his friend. So he says to her in a complaining tone "So long as you chatter and run around like a child... and droll over Kapila all day" (H127). She can't suppress her attraction towards Kapila's strong body. Her state of mind is very well described by the female chorus in the play, "Why should love stick to the sap of a

single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?" (116-17). Padmini revolts against Manu's law, "A man and woman who have performed the (wedding) ritual should always try not to become separated and unfaithful to one-another" (209). In goddess Kali's temple when both the friends beheaded themselves she mixed up the heads. In this way her problem of social behaviour is solved. She is able to get what she wants. She insists to go with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. A sage also suggests that the man with her husband's head should be her husband. At this Kapila says, "I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapil's strong body..." (H148). At this Devadatta who felt jealous to Kapil's body justifies the attraction of a strong body and says to Kapila, "Suppose she did. There is nothing wrong in it. It's natural for a woman to feel attracted to a fine figure of a man" (H148)

It is the custom of Indian people that they desire for a male child. If a child is awaited, it is the wish of the unborn child's parents that it should be a son and not a daughter. Same is the case of Padmini and Devadatta. Devadatta after getting Kapila's body feels very energetic and suggests Padmini to go for a picnic by the lake and presents his desire to a long swim. He says to her, "Once our son's born, I'll teach you to swim too" (154). Padmini replies, "You go on about it being a son. What if it's a daughter?" (154). Devadatta calls the unborn child a son not a daughter which shows his desire to have a son.

But after some months, Padmini finds it difficult to forget Kapila because Devadatta's muscles become loose due to the lack of proper exercise. Devadatta is also aware about it and goes to the

gymnasium and then swimming. Due to the tiredness, he is moaning in his sleep and when Padmini comes to know about the reason of his moaning, she says, "What are you afraid of, Devadatta? What does it matter that you are going soft again, that you are losing your muscles? I'm not going to be stupid again. Kapila's gone out of my life-forever. I won't let him come back again"(161). But it's not the reality. It becomes difficult for her to get rid of Kapila's thought. When she closes her eyes she starts dreaming about Kapila. These dreams are also seen under her eyelids by the two dolls which Devadatta brought from a fair for their son. Padmini suggests Devadatta to buy new dolls because the older dolls are torn out. At this doll first says, "You wretch-before you throw us out watch out for yourself"(164). The second doll says, "Cover your wife before you start worrying about our rages" (164). Padmini goes to the jungle in search for Kapila with her son when Devadatta has gone to fair to sell new dolls. She meets Kapila and unites with him. Devadatta also reached after her and both of them Kapila and Devdatta killed each other. Now Padmini has left no option but to sacrifice her life. If a woman tries to become untraditional, then she gets suffering and nothing else.

Padmini is a modern woman, freed from the socio-cultural reticence. She executes her desire of a perfect man in her personal life overthrowing the patriarchal propriety and male dominance. P.D. Nimsarkar comments about Padmini, "She is the mother earth in search of perfect companion, mind and body, which she could not trace out and bursting like a volcano, she burnt the whole world around her in the fire of passion"(111). In her desire of a perfect man she destroys the life of Devadatta and Kapila. Both of them have to die for her sake. She is unable to leave either of the two. Shubhangi S. Raykar points out in the article titled, "The Development of Girish Karnad as a Dramatist: *Hayavadana*", "The real crux of the problem is that society in its present form would not accept a woman living with two men"(178).

She can't become a good wife as well as a good mother. She made her husband's life miserable in her desire of perfection. She commits 'sati' at the death of Devadatta and Kapila but ignores her responsibility towards her son. If a woman tries to cross the threshold of the traditional norms, she gets nothing but suffering.

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