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## A Quest for Self: Re-interpreting Padmini in Karnad's *Hayavadana*

**Avijit Pramanik**

Junior Research Fellow

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

NIT Durgapur, West Bengal

Influenced by Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* and Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* examines the "human identity in a world of tangled relationship" (Kurtkoti, 69). The female protagonist of the play, Padmini, suffers from identity crisis. Her character has been portrayed by Karnad in an intriguing manner. Her mercurial behaviour lies beyond the understanding of the two male protagonists of the play, namely Devadatta and Kapila:

BHAGAVATA: (*Sings.*) Two friends there were—one mind, one heart. They  
saw a girl and forgot themselves. But they could not  
understand the song she sang. (*Hayavadana*, 82)

Padmini's character has stemmed forth diverse criticisms. She has traditionally been analysed as a woman craving for completeness: "Padmini's unquenchable desire for completeness is too powerful to allow her to accept her fate" (Dhanavel, 115). Though she is married to Devadatta, she desires to have Devadatta's bosom friend Kapila in her life. She, as if, demands an ideal "man of sound brain and sound body" (Dhanavel, 112). The eminent theatre director B. V. Karanth, in an interview, comments in the same breath:

She wants a man physically strong, stout and handsome at the same time he  
should be wise, intelligent and learned. (Qtd. in Pandey, 56)

However, a thorough reading of the text contradicts this general contention. This paper seeks to delineate Padmini as an incomplete woman herself. She does not intend to have a combination of Devadatta's intellectual qualities and Kapila's masculine vigour. Rather, she needs only Kapila for her completeness. Devadatta with his superior qualities suppresses Padmini's emotions. Padmini's pent-up feelings find a release in the company of Kapila only.

Padmini wants to enjoy love outside marital bond. We never find her to adore Devadatta's intellectual qualities. She does not even find interest in Devadatta's reading of poetry. As she belongs to a merchant family, her upbringing is quite different from the Brahmin Devadatta. She confesses her bad upbringing to Devadatta:

PADMINI: . . . The trouble is I grew up saying these awful things and it's  
become a habit now. But you are so fragile! (92)

Padmini is crude and philistine to aesthetic world. Hence, sophisticated and poetic Devadatta fails to charm her. Kapila is her prince-charming as he can purvey her physical pleasure. Padmini blindly hankers after physical gratification. She cannot fulfil her desire because of the societal prohibitions and Indian social norms. Padmini marries Devadatta as he belongs to a superior class. Kapila can hardly be a social match for her. Karnad presents the problem of Indian women who are denuded of choices in their marriages:

Karnad's women are full of desires and dreams but they cannot live happily because they are denied their right to live with the man of their choice.  
(Dhanavel, 118).

Unlike Appanna of *Naga-Mandala*, Devadatta is caring and sensitive to Padmini. He is besotted with Padmini's beauty. However, Padmini cheats him. Perhaps gentle Devadatta fails to dominate Padmini. Kapila, like a seer, successfully reads her mind after his first meeting with Padmini:

KAPILA: Devadatta, 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 lightning—and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel. . . . (90)

Padmini wants a husband to dominate her. Devadatta miserably fails to attain that position. To Padmini, Devadatta is "still a baby" (92). Her true nature comes out during the trip to Ujjain. When Kapila climbs up the tree to pluck the Fortunate Lady's flower for Padmini, she gets bewitched by Kapila's "ethereal shape!" (96). In an aside, she confesses: "No woman could resist him" (96). Padmini quite blatantly gives vent to her desire to enjoy Kapila's body. The eminent critic P. Dhanavel beautifully sums up Padmini's situation through a contrastive study of locales:

There is an unobtrusive thematic contrast between the urban and rural locales. In the city Padmini's passion is kept under control. When she goes to the forest on the Ujjain trip, her true feelings are expressed without reserve. (105)

After the transposition of heads, Padmini is extremely happy not because she gets the best qualities of two men in Devadatta but because she gets the opportunity and sanctity of enjoying Kapila's masculine body under the head of Devadatta. When Kapila looks disappointed, Padmini lovingly consoles him:

PADMINI: . . . (*She runs to Kapila*) Don't be sad, Kapila. We shall meet again, shan't we? (*In a low voice, so Devadatta can't hear.*) It's my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I'm going with your body. Let that cheer you up. . . . (111)

When Devadatta gradually loses the strength of Kapila, Padmini becomes quite anxious. She cannot accept this metamorphosis because it would melt Kapila away from her life. She is angry because Devadatta takes no measure to keep alive Kapila through his body:

PADMINI: . . . What's happened to you these days? You sit at home all day. Never go out. You've forgotten all your swimming and sports. . . . (116)

Being disenchanted with Devadatta's body, Padmini craves for Kapila again. She goes out of Devadatta's house and arrives at Kapila's door. She has been appositely compared to a river which "only feels the pull of the waterfall" (127). Padmini is spontaneously drawn towards Kapila. She can hardly control herself. When Padmini quite emotionally confesses her reason to meet Kapila, we realize that Padmini needs only Kapila not a combination of Devadatta and Kapila:

KAPILA: (*To Padmini*) Why have you come here?

PADMINI: I had to see you.

Devadatta had always been deprived of Padmini's true love. Kapila matters the most to her. She neither adores nor shows any reverence to Devadatta's creative potential. She merely teases, mocks, and makes fun of Devadatta's poetic qualities. The general contention that Padmini hankers after a combination of Devadatta's intellect and Kapila's masculine body should be taken with doubt. She marries Devadatta for his social position. He is not at all her soul-mate. Kapila is her dream-man. But social norms cannot allow her to have Kapila as her husband. Kapila belongs to an inferior social class. Nevertheless, she succumbs to Kapila's charms. She is happy when Devadatta's head possesses Kapila's body. She gets Kapila as her legal husband. It is Kapila who makes her complete. She depends upon Kapila for her existence. It is evident that Padmini searches for completeness. But this quest is not for an ideal man rather for her complete self. Devadatta suppressed her emotions as well as her true self. According to Padmini, Kapila can purvey her completeness through physical union. Hence, she ultimately goes to Kapila breaking perhaps the marital knot. Pandey has rightly pointed out:

. . . whereas in *Yayati* and *Hittina-Hunja* Karnad seems to be inconclusive, in *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* he seems sharper; Padmini and Rani don't reconcile but recognize and feel the truth. . . . (62)

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