



LIMITED EMANCIPATION: THE CASE OF PADMINI IN KARNAD'S HAYAVADANA

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ABSTRACT



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In the context of Indian patriarchal system, it seems a little hyperbolic to dream for a man or a woman as an ideal or model for others. Girish Karnad made Padmini, the heroine of the play *Hayavadana* victim of her tragic visions of perfection. In fact it is an unwise thought of her for a man who is perfect in both mind and body. This was her tragic desire. However, throughout the play, Padmini raises questions against patriarchy but could not rise above the whims of it. She languishes behind the bars of patriarchy. Patriarchy victimizes men and women both by different strategies. Outwardly she is an emancipated woman but inwardly she could not dare ditch patriarchy. Her problem is the dream of completeness. For her dream she transgressed social norms. It was perhaps due to her shallow knowledge of the true nature of existence. The present study is a moderate attempt to examine the place of Padmini in the patriarchy.

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In 'postcolonial feminist' studies it is argued that colonial oppression undoubtedly hurt sentiments of both men and women but nature was quite different. Women suffered what Spivak, Mohanty and others prefer to call double or triple bind colonization; first as a colonized subject and second as simply being a woman by patriarchy. During colonial hegemony, women were worst sufferers. The concept of 'double colonisation' became a catchphrase in feminist and postcolonial discourses during 1980's. It is the notion that women are colonized twice; first, by the imperial colonizers and second, by the patriarchal ideologies within their own country. Robert J.C. Young enumerates key issues of 'postcolonial feminist' endeavor:

Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and ecofeminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse. Feminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary woman in a particular place, while also thinking her situation through in relation to broader issues to give her the

more powerful basis of collectivity. It will highlight the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal - institutional, economic, political, and ideological. (Young 116)

Ketu H. Katrak saw all this business a little differently:

The notion of female suffering in the Hindu tradition is dangerously glorified through such use of mythological models. The subconscious hold of socialization patterns inculcated in girls through the popular mythological stories of the ever-suffering *Sita* as virtuous wife or the all-sacrificing *Savitri* who rescues her husband from death are all part of the preparation for suffering in the roles of wives and mothers. (Katrak 398)

Hayavadana is not an ordinary play. It leaves reader with many questions to his/her own wit. At general level, the play is a probing into the 'incompleteness' of everything under the sky. The attainment of completeness is impossible out of temporary world. 'Incompleteness' is an in-born virtue of everything. By such hypothesis, it is no way being suggested that it is futile altogether to look for perfection. Instead, one should work for harmony. Harmony may lead to completion. Perfection in the imperfect world is mere an illusion. In the human world, everything is tentative.

Hayavadana in the play is a man with the head of horse. He desperately wants to shake it off. He recounts the entire story about this abnormality to Bhagavata, the Sutradhar (anchor):

My mother was the Princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. When she came of age, her father decided that she should choose her own husband. So princes of every kingdom in the world were invited- and they all came. From China, from Persia, from Africa. But she didn't like any of them. The last one to come was the Prince of Araby. My mother took one look at that handsome prince sitting on his great white stallion- and she fainted. (TP 79-80)

Ultimately she was married off to the white stallion. Both lived married life for fifteen years. One day, in place of the horse a heavenly being turned up and carried my mother off to his heavenly home leaving *Hayavadana* on the earth. *Hayavadana* wants

to be a complete man. His routine life is akin to average human beings. His lone problem is his head. Bhagavata suggests him to go on few sacred pilgrimages like Banaras, Chitrakoot, Rameshwaram etc. Bhagavata says:

Banaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar, Gaya, Kedarnath- not only those but the Dargah of Khwaja Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of Our Virgin Mary- I've tried them all. Magicians, mendicants, maharshis, fakirs, saints and sadhus- sadhus with short hair, sadhus with beards- sadhus in saffron, sadhus in the altogether- hanging, singing, rotating, gyrating- on the spikes, in the air, under water, under the ground... I've covered them all....Everywhere I went I had to cover my head with a veil.... I hate this head....(TP 81)

Hayavadana visited the temple of Kali goddess of Mount Chitrakoot as per suggestion of Bhagavata with the hope to be rescued here. The goddess Kali appeared before *Hayavadana* but she looked to him slight rough. Anyhow he galvanized her. He asked her simply to be complete in helter-skelter. She turned me into a complete horse retaining human voice. Right now, his problem is human voice. Just before the closure of the play, *Hayavadana* becomes a complete horse by the grace of elephant-headed Ganesh most probably in the appearance of Padmini's son.

II

Bhagavata continues his story about two friends who were two parts of same root. One is mind another heart. In the city of Dharmapura, ruled by King Dharmasheela there were two youths namely Devadatta and Kapila. For Kapila, Devadatta is above his parents. Devadatta divulges everything to Kapila first. "The world wonders at their friendship." They are Rama and Lakshmana, Lava and Kush, Krishna and Balarama. Bhagavata individualizes them:

Comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence, Devadatta is the only son of the Reverend Brahmin, Vidyasagara. Having felled the mightiest pundits of the kingdom in debates on logic and love, having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit, Devadatta is as it were the apple of every eye in Dharmapura.

The other youth is Kapila. He is the only son of the iron-smith, Lohita, who is to the King's

armoury as an axle to the chariotwheel. He is dark and plain to look at, yet in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing, in strength and in physical skills, he has equal. (TP 73-74)

Devadatta's missing at the gymnasium prompted Kapila to guess that he again fell in love with some lady. Fifteen times he already underwent love pangs. This was sixteenth time. Kapila as usual talks to Devadatta slightly in jovial mood. To sense the situation Kapila also gets serious. To Devadatta, she "is a white lotus. Her beauty is as the magic lake. Her arms the lotus creepers. Her breasts are golden urns and her waist...." (TP 84-85); so are the images of a lady in patriarchal eyes. Devadatta desperately wishes to have this lady this time. If he had, he could outshine Kalidasa like great love poets. "I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra...." (TP 85) He is constantly haunted by her bewitching beauty. He thinks that his poetry cannot live without her. "What's the use of these hands and this head if I'm not to have her?" (TP 86) He craves for a cloud-like messenger. Devadatta even pursued her in Pavana Veethi (the street of merchants) and stayed before a house for whole evening but she didn't turn up again. Devadatta mentions her mansion:

The door-frame of the house had an engraving of a two-headed bird at the top. I only saw that. She lifted her hand to knock and it touched the bird. For a minute, the bird came alive. (TP 86)

Ultimately, Kapila set out for the lady's mansion. He reached the site and saw the beauty of the lady (later on they come to know that her name is Padmini). He impulsively remarked in aside:

I surrender to your judgment. 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. (TP 87)

These are in fact patriarchal symbols generally used for ladies. On the other hand this is one of the patriarchal strategies that inspire men to subjugate and won women. And moreover these images of women slowly but gradually make women in general to aspire for. Patriarchy follows the path of lady-glorification so that they can be hooked into its

machinery comfortably. By these ideological apparatuses, women are prepared to accept slavery at their own hands. In this regard women find little time to live their own lives. Unless men and women set out living with due balance in between, the dream of women emancipation cannot be realized fully.

Kapila told Padmini about Devadatta's personality and his family status. She immediately understood the import and blushed at. Padmini retreats calling out her mother glancing back to Kapila. Kapila for a minute broods:

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 lightening- and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel.... (TP 90)

Kapila consulted with Padmini's parents and anyhow agreed them to offer Padmini's hand to Devadatta. Bhagavata sheds light on the status of both families briefly:

Padmini is the daughter of the leading merchant in Dharmapura. In her house, the very floor is swept by the Goddess of Wealth. In Devadatta's house, they have the Goddess of Learning for a maid.... Padmini became the better of half of Devadatta and settled in his house. (TP 90)

Padmini accepted her parents' choice peacefully though she was very much drawn to the physic of Kapila. With Devadatta, Padmini soon conceived. Devadatta does not like her idea of trip to Ujjain in the condition of pregnancy. Padmini sharply disapproves him. In fact Padmini loves Kapila's astounding physic ardently. It is quite uncertain whether Padmini loves Devadatta's intellectuality or not. She often talks of Kapila which irritates Devadatta badly. Devadatta out of bad temper asks her to "drool over Kapila all day", "You had to hop around him twittering 'Kapila! Kapila! Kapila!' every minute." (TP 91) Padmini even taunts, "If I fall into a well tomorrow, you won't even miss me until my bloated corpse floats up...." (TP 92) In fact she sees him no better than an effeminate. Padmini is bold enough. She declares, "No one taught this bride to blush." (TP 92) For the time being she appears emancipated and cancels the trip and says, "I had a womb of steel, but I won't- in the present condition."

(TP 93) A little while later, Padmini bluffs Kapila and Devadatta by telling a lie. She says, "I'm perfect. I had a headache this morning. But a layer of ginger-paste took care of that. Why should we cancel our trip for a little thing like that?" (TP 94) Finally Kapila as cart driver, Devadatta and Padmini set for Ujjain. On the way to Ujjain, she frankly admires Kapila:

How beautifully you drive the cart, Kapila! Your hands don't even move, but the oxen seem to know exactly where to go... What a terrible road. Nothing but stones and rocks- but one didn't feel a thing in the cart! You drove it so gently- almost made it float. I remember when Devadatta took me in a cart- that was soon after our marriage- I insisted on being shown the lake outside the city. So we started- only the two of us and Devadatta driving- against my advice, I must say. And we didn't even cross the city-gates. The oxen took everything except the road. He only had to pull to the right, and off they would rush to the left! I've never laughed so much in my life. But of course he got very angry, so we had to go back home straight! (TP 95-96)

How he climbs-like an ape. Before I could even say 'yes', he had taken off his shirt, pulled his *dhoti* up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back-like an ocean with muscles rippling across it- and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless. (TP 96)

She continues in the aside:

He is like a Celestial Being reborn as a hunter.... How his body sways, his limbs curve- it's a dance almost.... No woman could resist him. (TP 96) Such open patriarchal moral transgression burnt Devadatta's heart. He in the aside gives vent to his Hamlet-like inner agony:

No woman could resist him- and what does it matter that she's married? What a fool I've been. All these days I only saw that pleading in his eyes stretching out its arms, begging for a favour. But never looked in her eyes. And when I did- took the whites of her eyes for their real depth. Only now- I see the depths- now I see these flames leaping up from those depths. (TP 96)

From now on Devadatta confirmed that he was not fit for Padmini. Padmini adores Kapila. Both are ideologically diametrical. This is the root cause of her unhappiness. On the road to Ujjain Padmini sees

a tree of flowers called the Fortunate Lady's flower. Kapila explains why it is called so. His explanation led Padmini to remark that shows her intellectual level: What imagination! (To Devadatta.) You should put it in your poetry. It's good for a simile. (TP 97)

Out of deeper agony, jealousy, conflict to find Padmini more interested in Kapila, Devadatta reminded his promise and decided to keep his word. And hence he bade good bye to Padmini (angel of Kapila) and Kapila who were going to see Rudra temple:

Good-bye, Kapila. Good-bye, Padmini. May the Lord Rudra bless you. You are two pieces of my heart-live happily together. I shall find my happiness in that. (TP 98)

Padmini and Kapila set for Rudra temple and Devadatta for Kali temple to keep his word bearing a sword missed by some hunter on the road side. Soon they return and find Devadatta missing. Padmini says:

He's probably somewhere around. Where will he go? He has the tenderest feet on earth. They manage to get blisters, corns, cuts, boils and wounds without any effort.... (TP 99)

So delicate Devadatta is which Padmini does not like. She wishes a man of iron and steel. Kapila suits for her. Soon Kapila went in search of Devadatta towards the Kali temple leaving Padmini behind. Kapila here in the temple finds Devadatta's head truncated. Kapila mourns to hold cut-off head and finally cuts off his own head too. After sometime, she also went towards the Kali temple. There, she found Kapila and Devadatta dead. She shudders at the sight and broods over her future hereafter. She realizes that people will take her responsible for the loss of both lives: "And who'll believe me? They'll all say the two fought and died for this whore. They are bound to say it. Then what'll happen to me?" (TP 101) She also decided to chop off her head. As she was about to chop, the goddess Kali turned up. She told Padmini everything. Padmini implored Kali to save her from social slanders. "I can't show my my face to anyone in the world. I can't...." (TP 102) It shows that Padmini could not rise above patriarchal politics of sexism inwardly. Even the goddess Kali bawls out Padmini's selfish nature. The goddess asked her to fix both heads and press the sword to bring them back into

life. Padmini in helter-skelter hotchpotches heads. Consequent upon, Devadatta's head got Kapila's body and Kapila's head got Devadatta's body. Thus Padmini's dream of an able-bodied man with sharp head fulfilled for the time being. Now a feud rises over in regard to the real husband of Padmini between Kapila and Devadatta. Patriarchy holds head above the body. By this logic Devadatta having the body of Kapila got Padmini. Bhagavata remarks:

So the roads diverged. Kapila went into the forest and disappeared. He never saw Dharmapura again. In fact he never felt the wind of any city again. As for Devadatta and Padmini, they returned to Dharmapura and plunged into the joys of married life." (TP 111)

Padmini was ecstatic to have "Fabulous body- fabulous brain-fabulous Devadatta." (TP 113) She has yet to bore the baby. Devadatta often talks of a son to be. She opposes him why not daughter. In fact, patriarchal weightage to male baby largely prepared women to disregard female babies. They also wish to have male baby first. Here Padmini jolts patriarchy but slowly.

Devadatta for few times showed off feats with Kapila's body but could not retain for longer. Soon his body began growing weaker. Padmini noticed the change in the body of Kapila (with Devadatta). She felt disillusioned, dreams shattered. She bore a male baby in due course. Padmini one day asks him to take the baby to the lake amid frost and mist. Devadatta tries to persuade her but she keeps insisting. She even argues:

What if it's cold? He's older now. There's no need to mollycoddle him. I grew up running around in heat and cold and rain- and nothing happened to me. I'm all right....(TP 115-116)

One day Devadatta set out for bringing new dolls from Ujjain fair. Padmini cheats Devadatta by assuring him that Kapila she would not let him in her life again. You need not feel afraid of. Padmini being alone in the house thought to drop in Kapila. She went to Kapila's hut asking several passers-by under the pretext of a short outing to see her son the world around. Finally came down to Kapila's hut. She asks him that she wants to sleep her son rested on her arms as she is feeling sheer tiredness. Kapila prima

facie denies her to stay any longer yet she implores him:

My son's tired. He's asleep. He has been in my arms for several days now. Let him rest a while. As soon as he gets up I'll go. (Laughs.) Yes, you won, Kapila. Devadatta won too. But I- the better half of two bodies- I neither win nor lose. (TP 126)

After some formalities she made the baby asleep in the hut. Both exchanged their joys and sorrows. Padmini found that Kapila again got his health. To see his fine physic she spontaneously got drawn to him. She even transgressed the moral (it may be patriarchal) codes of a married woman. She did there adultery with Kapila to complete him. She stayed in his hut for four five days as Bhagavata informed to Devadatta on being asked. Devadatta returned from Ujjain; finding Padmini missing went straight to Kapila's hut. He found Padmini. Kapila and Devadatta discuss to arrive at a safe conclusion. Both love Padmini equally yet they avoid living together:

Devadatta : Tell me one thing. Do you really love Padmini?

Kapila: Yes.

Devadatta: So do I.

Kapila: I know (Silence) Devadatta, could not we all three live together – like Pandavas and Draupadi?

Devadatta : What do you think? (Silence. Padmini looks at them but does not say anything)

Kapila: (laughs) No, it cannot be done.

Devadatta: That is why I brought this. (Shows the sword) (TP 129)

In neck to neck fight, Kapila and Devadatta lost their lives. Padmini who was the apple of both eyes (Kapila and Devadatta) decided to become Sati. She asked Bhagavata to give her son to some tribal men because they love Kapila and after her son tuned five hand him to Vidyasagar telling him he was Devadatta's son. To this end so many questions struck into mind why she preferred sati, why she asked to give the baby to some forest men and then to Vidyasagar. If she was a modern emancipated woman, she could bear the responsibility of bringing up by herself instead of becoming sati. Let me try to answer these riddles. She preferred sati to face countless patriarchal slanders. In fact she poses a challenge to patriarchy if a man can keep two or more wives inside and outside household why not a

woman. Since it was unbearable to patriarchal eyes, she preferred sati. The answer to the second question, she wished to make her baby unlike Devadatta, a man of iron-will, hale and hearty at both levels-mental and physical. She wants to make her son more sensitive and pro-feminine. In fact she deconstructs the supremacy of mind. Dionysian aspect of life cannot be obliterated altogether for the sake of Apollonian impulses. Both are equally important. There was imbalance in her relation with Devadatta. Devadatta stresses intellectual commitments whereas Padmini earthly. Throughout the play, Padmini raises questions against patriarchy but could not rise above the whims of it. She languishes behind the bars of patriarchy. Patriarchy victimizes men and women both by different strategies. Outwardly she is an emancipated woman but inwardly she could not dare ditch patriarchy. Padmini acknowledges:

They burned, lived, fought, embraced and died. I stood silent. If I'd said, 'Yes, I'll live with you both', perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I couldn't say it....I know it in my blood you couldn't have lived together. (TP 130)

Padmini finally did sati ritual and died. Her getting sati in fact is a sort of challenge to the existing conception of *sati* and *pativrata*. She died for two men one stood for mind and other for physic. It seems quite risky to remark that Padmini was a seductress, a seducer, a summary of terrible physical appetite and beauty, and the manipulator of two men. Her problem is the dream of completeness. For her dream she transgressed social norms. It was perhaps due to her shallow knowledge of the true nature of existence. Finally, her tragic ideals of completeness fulfilled in *sati* out of incomplete existence. Suppose, if she had chosen to live with both Kapila and Devadatta, she might have been let loose between them to suffer only due to patriarchal restrictions. If she had not chosen sati and preferred to bring up her son by herself; she would have been no more than a sex-beast in patriarchal glasses. It was her search for completeness that proved to her tragic. She could not season her Apollonian and Dionysian instincts. Thus Padmini is emancipated but limited.

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