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Women's Desire for Perfection and Self-Fulfilment in the Plays of Girish Karnad

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Abstract:
Karnad's women characters have their own potentials. They present as subaltern but, in this situation, also they find their own way to fulfil their desire. In the words of P. D. Nimsarkar, "While performing their social roles in the family and society, Karnad's women take care of their desires and to achieve them find their own way". Padmini in *Hayavadana* has a desire to get a perfect man mentally as well as physically. Padmini's husband, Devadatta has a perfect mind and his friend, Kapila has a perfect body. When she gets the occasion at goddess Kali's temple to place the head of these two people with their bodies, she mixes the head and completes her desire to get a complete man with sharp mind and strong body in the form of Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. Even goddess Kali is aware about her intention and says to her satirically, "My dear daughter, there should be a limit even to honesty".

Key Words: Performing, accomplishes, provisionally

Introduction

Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker comments about the main women characters in Karnad's plays *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mangala* and *Bali: The Sacrifice*, "The women want or get men they cannot legitimately have; each one accomplishes her desire, but only provisionally, and like the queen be destroyed her male partner (lover o husband) in the process". Padmini is a bold and ambitious woman who desires an extraordinary thing and tried to achieve it. On the other side, Rani in another Girish Karnad's character in *Naga-Mandala* has to lead a prisoner life in her husband's house. She is weak and submissive. She is confined to four walls or her home. Naga, in the disguise of her husband visits to her at night and makes her pregnant. She is able to get her husband after the naga-ordeal. She makes the life miserable for both Appanna and Naga. After accepting Rani, Appanna himself admits, "I know! What sense am I to make of my life if that's worth nothing"? Padmini in *Hayavadana* in her desire to get Kapila destroys the life of Devadatta, her husband as well as the life of Kapila, her husband's friend and her lover. Because of her, their friendship turns into enmity. Devadatta says, "No grounds for friendship now. No question of mercy. We must fight like lions and kill like cobras". Both of them killed one another. J. D. Soni points out in his article "Girish Karnad's Female Protagonists: Their Journey from Identity to Recognition", "Both Padmini and Rani undergo the same experience: the first aspires to have perfection through two human beings, Devadatta and Kapila, and Rani feels satisfied through Appanna, her husband and Appanna the Cobra".

Amritamati, the *Queen in Bali: The Sacrifice* is a lover of music that's why she is attracted to the song of the Mahout and commits adultery. This relationship makes the life of her husband miserable. She has no guilt for this adultery. She calls it happened not planned. About her Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker comments, "More than any other female characters in Karnad's drama, she has a transgressive presence, deprived of conventional feminine role by chance and circumstance, but self-possessed and cerebral enough not to surrender to the pressures of conformity". About the character of the King and the Mahout, Dharwadker further says, " The two male characters in the play, in contrast, are arranged in relations of perfect antithesis and hierarchical reversal: the cultivated, sensitive, and valiant but impotent king versus the crude, amoral, and cowardly but potent mahout with his irresistible song". One more thing which is focussed through these women characters is their strong desire to get a perfect man as a husband or a lover. For the Queen or Rani both find love outside marriage and betray the sanctity of marriage. The Queen pay the price of fidelity by sacrificing her life but Rani is saved because of the taboo that is naga-ordeal.

Una Ellis-Fermor points out in the book titled *The Frontiers of Drama*, "But a play which communicates to the audience only those passions or thoughts which the characters can communicate naturally to each other is in danger of becoming either superficial or colourless". Sometimes it is very necessary to present the mental state or inner thought of a character. Without presenting these thoughts, the story in the drama has lost its real meaning or relevance. In Karnad's *Hayavadana*, when Padmini sees Kapila climbing a tree, the dramatist present her inner thoughts, "…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". Her inner thoughts present her attraction to Kapila's strong body.

R. N. Rai says, "In every age human characters have been classified according to certain general categories. Since they are mostly drawn from ethics or legendary and historical sources, they must be appropriate to their traditional accounts". The characters of Girish Karnad's plays are taken from mythology- *Yayati* from Adiparva of *the Mahabharata*; *Bali: The Sacrifice* from the thirteenth-century Kannada epic, *Yasodhara Charit*; *Hayavadana* from *Thomas Mann's The Transposed Head* and Naga-Mandala from a tale told by A.K. Ramanujan and the origin of which is *Kathasaritsagar*. In the words of M. Sarart Babu in his article titled "The Concept of Chastity in *Naga-Mandala*", "Karnad uses myths and folk forms in his plays to exorcise socio-cultural evils". Sudhir Dixit points out, "Girish Karnad employs the myth structure to synchronize the past and the present, to blend the appearance and reality, to put contemporary side by side with history". He further says, "…myths of gender brings about the supremacy of males over females, and most of these are focussed on female chastity and sexuality". In Karnad's *Naga- Mandala* Rani has to prove her chastity by cobra-ordeal like Sita in *The Ramayana* who has to enter the fire to prove her chastity. But there is no example of males who have to prove his chastity in history or even in Karnad's plays. Nand Kumar also points out in his book titled *Indian English Drama: A Study in Myth*, "…The characters, incidents and circumstances are related to the ancient times. However the message conveyed through them is relevant to modern times as well". Girish Karnad's all selected plays are based on myths but they deals with the contemporary issues. Devayani in *Yayati* presents the jealousy of a wife whose husband is attracted by another woman like Sharmistha. Rani in *Naga-Mandala* presents the picture of an ideal wife who accepts everything without any retort. Padmini in *Hayavadana* presents the natural attraction of a woman to a man with strong body.

R. N. Rai says about the characters in a play, "They must naturally be linked with their age, sex social class status and nationality" . The characters in Karnad's and Tendulkar's plays have contemporary appeal. Karnad has taken his character from myths but they have contemporary appeal. His women characters like Devayani, Chitralekha, Swarnalata, Sharmistha in *Yayati*; the Queen and the Queen-Mother in *Bali: The Sacrifice*; Padmini in *Hayavadana*; Rani and Kurudavva in *Naga-Mandala* behave like a contemporary women. About the female characters of *Yayati*, J. D. Soni points out, "All the female characters are young married women and are put to test to prove their mettle against the dictates of man's ego".

Vijay Tendulkar's characters are from the middle-class. Shanta Gokhale points out in "Tendulkar on his own Terms", "…his most convincing male characters come from the middle-class to which he and his circle belonged. It is to this class and often to this class that his plays are addressed". All of them are true to life. They have resemblance to real life. About his characters Tendulkar writes in "Preface" to *Collected Plays in Translation*, "My characters have also being related to certain living persons quite a few times because of an obvious similarity of a few details". Tendulkar's play *Kamala* is based on a real life incident. In the words of P. Pramila Devi in her article, "Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*: The Theatre of Cruelty", "Kamala was inspired by a real life incident- the Indian Express exposed by Ashwin Sarin who actually bought a girl from the rural flesh market and presented at a press conference". Jaisingh Jadhav, Tendulkar's central character in *Kamala* is based on Aswin Sarin, a real life character. He is a journalist and bought Kamala to present that such auctions are exists even today. About his character of Sakharam in *Shakharam Binder*, Tendulkar says in Preface, "I never met a man like him. But I was once told about a man who worked as a Binder in a printing press in a small town and lived a strange kind of life. He did not marry but was on the look out for a woman who was thrown out by her husband whom he brought home and stayed with her till one of the two got fed up of the other". In this way, the character of Sakharam is based on a verbal description of a real life character that the dramatist with the power of his pen makes him alive again. Tendulkar's women characters like Miss Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*; Kamala and Sarita in *Kamala*; Jyoti and Seva in *Kanyadaan*; Laxmi and Champa in *Sakharam Binder* are presented as contemporary characters in the patriarchal society and they represent the problems of complex society. In the words of Maya Pandit, "None of these women except Benare and to some extent Sarita show any defiance of the male standards and patriarchal domination in the family system".

The male character of Tendulkar like Jaisingh Jadhav in *Kamala* is an ambitious person who represents those journalists who are very eager to get name and fame by doing something special or sensational. He bought Kamala to expose the women auction in Luharadaga in Bihar. But his main purpose behind this exposure was not to reform the society but to get instant fame. In the words of Jaisingh, "The art lies in presenting the case – not in the case itself". The other male character is Arun Athavale in *Kanyadaan*. He is a very cruel dait young man. He is a drunkard, wife-beater, manipulator and blackmailer. Cruelty is the instinct part in the life of these men. By torturing Jyoti, his wife, he represents the inner hatred towards the Brahmins. In the words of P. Pramila Devi, "There is a cruelty in the heart of man. Even though man is a civilized being now, there is still the savageness of primitive man in him". Pramila Devi's above words are relevant to all the male characters in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. The characters like Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, Mr. Kasikar in *Silence! The Court is in Session* represents

those persons in the society who are ready to make fun of love eve-teasing of a woman who wants to live according to her own way. Whether it is rough Sakharam or well-educated Jaisingh Jadhav, both treated women as useful commodity. In the words of Shanta Gokhale, "…all men are exploiters of women, even those who wear the garb of education or liberalism". About the male characters in *Silence! The Court is in Session* Arundhati Banerjee writes, "In delineating these characters, Tendulkar has explored their psyche to the extent of revealing the hidden sense of failure pervading their lives- the inefficiency of Sukhatme as a lawyer, the childlessness of Mr. Kashikar, the non-fulfilment of Ponkshe's dream to become a scientist, the vain attempt of Karnik to be a successful actor and the inability of Rokad to attain independent adult existence". In this way all the characters of Vijay Tendulkar represent their age and behave according to their gender. No woman behaves like a man and no man behaves like a woman. They have set roles and they are performing that.

In Karnad's *Bali: The Sacrifice*, the character of the King is very complex. He always finds himself in a situation to choose one out of two. He always finds himself entangled between his mother and wife. In giving happiness to his wife, he always gives pain to his mother. When his mother wants to celebrate the news of the Queen's pregnancy according to her religion, the King denies her to do such things because being a Jain his son must be a Jain. At this The Queen-Mother says, "My feelings don't matter to you. It's mother, ranting and raving as usual". The king is weak in taking any decision. He is unable to decide what should be done after the discloser of the Queen's adultery. When his mother suggests him to make a sacrifice for this sin, at this he says, "Mother, whatever's happened, concerns me, my wife and I need her…I can't let her go". The king represents a character who is entangled between his wife and mother, where the happiness of one is the sorrow of other. He accepts the Jainism for the sake of his wife which is a great blow to his mother. He even denies his mother to celebrate the news of a grandchild, at this his mother says, "My God's have already been expelled from this house and live, shunned and starved, like outcastes. I should have followed them out. But I was blinded by my love for you". In this way, one can say that the king is a weak male character who is dominated by elderly mother and his passion for his wife. The Queen-Mother is such a person that for her, her religion has great importance. Her son, the King accepts Jainism. For this she declares, "I shall live away from the palace, in a corner of my own. And there, I shall live as I please. With my gods. My sacrificial animals. No further interference for you two".

The names of the characters in Karnad's plays are symbolic. Rani in *Naga-Mandala* means very beautiful woman like a queen. She is no less than a queen which achieves the status of the goddess with the help of Naga. Appanna, Rani's husband means 'any man'; Kurudavva means 'a blind lady' who is also blind and Kappana means 'darkness' but he is not dark, her mother gives her such name because being blind everything is blind for her. About the names of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila in *Hayavadana* Karnad himself says in an interview with Tutun Mukherjee, "Padmini, one of the six types of women from *Kamasutra*; her husband is Devadatta, a formal name for any stranger; his friend Kapila or the dark one".

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