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## Psychoanalytic Feminist glance at Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

**Dr. S. Alexander<sup>1</sup>, V.S. Saravanan<sup>2</sup>**

1. Associate Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College, Karur,  
Tamil Nadu, India.
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, Srinivasan Engineering College,  
Perambalur, Tamil Nadu, India.

### Abstract

Feminism's relationship with Psychoanalysis is simple in outline but complex in nuance. The relationship can be said to begin with Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* in 1969, which condemns Freud as a prime source of the patriarchal attitudes against which Feminist's must fight. The influence of this view within feminism is still very strong, but Freud was defended in a series of important books in subsequent years, notably, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974. This paper analyses the female psyche in the play *Hayavadana*.

### Keywords

Phallogocentric; Psychoanalytic Feminism; Girish Karnad; *Hayavadana*.

Feminism's relationship with Psychoanalysis is simple in outline but complex in nuance. The relationship can be said to begin with Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* in 1969, which condemns Freud as a prime source of the patriarchal attitudes against which Feminist's must fight. The influence of this view within feminism is still very strong, but Freud was defended in a series of important books in subsequent years, notably, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974. This book defends Freud against Millet by, in effect, using Millet's own terms and concepts, which are so crucial to Feminism, between sex and gender, the former being a matter of biology, the latter a construct, something learned or acquired or simply put, the psyche. Peter Barry comments in his *Beginning Theory* that,

This distinction is what Simone de Beauvoir invokes in the famous first sentence in part two of *The Second Sex* (1949) when she writes 'One is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman'. The project of Beauvoir's book is one which *Sexual Politics* sees itself as continuing. (130)

Mitchell defends Freud that he does not present the feminine as something simply 'given and natural'. Female sexuality is not just there 'naturally' from the start, but is formed by early experiences and adjustments. Freud shows how female sexuality is being produced and constructed in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Jane Gallop in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982) switches from the Freudian to the Lacanian variety, partly because what is often implicit in Freud is explicit in Lacan's system, namely the phallus is not the physical and biological object, but a symbol of the power, which goes with it.

The absence of phallus in woman gives context to all the institutions, which are the products of their centre. Cultures and individuals stick to different complex rules and behaviour by appealing to different world views, but doing the right thing in the eyes of the society unites them, for which the

phallogocentric institutions such as language, culture, marriage, religion, morality, ethics and so on are authoritarian. When phallus gives the meaning to masculine world, the desire of the object, which is absent, gives meaning to non-masculine world or the female world. The male mind, which creates the phallogocentric world, keeps the female under its control, which are primarily due to their biology and psychology.

When Girish Karnad wrote *Hayavadana*, he was very much aware of Lacanian ideas. “BHAGAVADA: Each one to his own fate. Each one to his own desire. Each one to his own lack” (Act I, 2). These are the key sentences which talk about the characters. Dhanavel’s interpretation is controversial to Lacan’s who does not believe in ego psychologists’ idea that ego which makes subject, selfhood and personality, when the laws, on the other hand, enter in the form of language; the child’s life is divided into two – the pre-natal stage and oedipal stage. There language makes division in the mind; therefore, his desire is repressed into the Id. The desire is the signifier. The desire to reach the pre-oedipal stage is the signified. The signified becomes in-signified or unaccomplished in his lifetime. According to Lacan, “Language delivers us not to life but to death. Drives which elevate this life to language make much of place for that which, in terms of somatic support, signifies death” (Maccannell 52). Death refers to the death of the pre-natal stage. This fragmented nature causes not only gender differences but also social differences.

The pre-natal phase has no order. It is essentially anarchic. It knows no incest or no taboo. Only in the symbolic phase, the female mind is termed by the symbols, which are phallogocentric. From that point onwards, the female mind is continuously conditioned by the male order to the extent that the female mind accepts it as inevitable. It is like caging a wild beast. The female mind constantly looks for a chance to break the male order.

Anthropologist Levi-Strauss in his essay “Incest and Myth” says that the earliest society is matriarchal. Moreover, in the matriarchal society there is

nothing called incest. Marriages were free and had no restrictions. Only in the Patriarchal society the phenomenon called incest came into existence only to protect the male order. In the patriarchal society, incest became a taboo. Matriarchal societies were polyandry in nature. And, patriarchal society made polyandry a taboo. Patriarchy insisted women to be monoandry but gave free license to men to practice polygamy. Hence the desire in female mind to be incestuous and polyandry, surprises men. And the suppression and repression in women result in hysteria. But the libido in female mind to be incestuous and polyandry is still there in the unconscious mind, which is pushed off from the conscious mind. It cannot be removed from the unconscious mind. The suppressed ideas, thoughts, emotions, and feelings use defense mechanisms to take other forms, which are accepted by the patriarchal society.

The ideas, emotions, and feelings take the forms such as sublimation, association, condensation, displacement, substitute gratification, scapegoat mechanism, symbolism, and parapraxis, because the repressed material has to find its outlet. Sublimation is a process in which the repressed material is promoted into something grander or is disguised as something 'noble'. In addition, the sublimated material is no more a taboo in the society, but is put on the pedestal. Association is a mechanism in which the idea that is associated with the repressed material, which is not a taboo, is projected to the foreground. Condensation is a process, whereby a number of people, events, meanings and ideas are combined or compressed into a single symbol or image, which is socially acceptable. In the process of displacement, a person, idea or event is represented by another, which is in some way linked or associated with it. Substitute gratification is a process in which the forbidden, mainly libidinal wishes are permitted by the superego to achieve a fantasized satisfaction in, disguised forms. This fantasized wish fulfillment gives solace and consolation. In scapegoat mechanism, the feelings and emotions towards a particular entity, which is forbidden by the society, are expressed and the

repressed feeling and emotions are projected on another entity, which has no connection to the former entity. Symbolism is the representation of repressed mainly sexual objects of desire by nonsexual objects which resemble them or are associated with them in prior experience. Parapraxis is a mechanism in which the repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through the slip of the tongue, slip of the pen and unintended actions. Parapraxis is otherwise called as Freudian slip.

Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana deals with the problem of incompleteness. Even in the very beginning of the play Karnad through the character, Bhagavata states the problem. Bhagavata says that Lord Ganesh, who has elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly, is the embodiment of imperfection and incompleteness. Yet the Lord and Master of success and perfection is the embodiment of imperfection. Bhagavata in the play Hayavadana acts as that of narrator and director of the play. He describes the relationship between Devadatta and Kapila, who excel in their respective fields with no one as their equal as that of brothers. Bhagavata compared their relationship to that of Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balarama, the mythical brothers of Hindu Mythology.

BHAGAVATA. ...One is Devadatta. Comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence, Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. 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 chariot wheel. 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 no equal.

The world wonders at their friendship. The world sees these two young men wandering down the streets of Dharmapura, hand in hand, and remembers Lava and

Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balarama. (Act I, 2)

Devadatta sees a girl in Pavana Veethi and her beauty captivates him. He thinks that without her, his life has no meaning and he swears in the presence of Kapila that he would sacrifice both his arms to Goddess Kali and his head to Lord Rudra. He says that his poetry would not live without her. Devadatta becomes obsessed with Padmini and her beauty. His obsession has no boundary because he goes to the extent of thinking her to be more superior to his profession. He says that his profession of writing poetry would not live without her. He becomes hysterical because he could not find the means to communicate with her. He poetically says that he has no cloud for a messenger or a bee to lead him. He is totally mesmerized by her beauty therefore he never watched the colour of her house or the number of stories it had. Kapila acts in a lightning speed to relieve his lovesick friend of his pain. Even after Kapila's departure, Devadatta swears to the Gods.

Kapila goes to the house of Padmini to accomplish his mission. His mission is to convey Devadatta's love to Padmini and get her as the bride to Devadatta. Kapila on seeing her is dumb-folded by her beauty. He gapes in awe finding her to be the embodiment of celestial beauty.

KAPILA. (Gapes at her. Aside.) I give up, Devadatta. I surrender to your judgement. 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.

PADMINI. You knocked, didn't you?

KAPILA. Er-yes...

PADMINI. Then why are you gaping at me? What do you want? (Act I, 16)

Padmini is not only beautiful but also extremely intelligent. Kapila finds her to be a hard nut to be cracked. She baffles him with a string of questions. She without any preamble questions him directly the reason for gaping at her. In patriarchy society women are not supposed to speak with strangers. It is considered improper behaviour to speak with a man and question him in the manner in which Padmini questioned Kapila. She breaks the patriarchal law of questioning a man and that too a stranger. She revolts against it willingly.

Padmini asks a string of questions and baffles him. She does it in order to derive substitute gratification out of his bafflement. It is evident when Kapila says that he would touch her feet in order to meet the master and parents of Padmini, she asks him to touch her feet. When he hesitates, she says that she had touched the feet of all the members of her house due to one reason or other, but no one has touched her feet yet.

KAPILA. (looking around; aside). No one here. Still I have to find out her name. Devadatta must be in pain and...He will never forgive me if I go back now. (Aloud.) Madam, please. I have some very important work. I'll touch your feet...

PADMINI. You will? Really? Do you know, I've touched everyone's feet in this house sometime or the other, but no one's ever touched mine? You will?

KAPILA. (slapping his forehead as he sinks to the ground). I'm finished-decimated-powered to dust-powered into tiny specks of flour. (To Padmini.) My mother, can I at least talk to a servant?

PADMINI. I knew it. I knew you wouldn't touch my feet. (Act I, 18)

It is convention in a patriarchal society like India that a woman should touch the feet of men and elders but not men. Men consider it as the most dishonourable act for a man to touch the feet of a woman who is other than his mother. Padmini finds herself to be the victim of male order. She seeks revenge

on men and to accomplish that she asks Kapila to touch her feet without any fore thought. She has made up her mind to bring down the male order.

Devadatta and Padmini get married by the help of Kapila. Devadatta loves Padmini to the core. But Padmini dotes on Kapila. Devadatta is a Brahmin. He is fair and supple. He spends his time reading Vedas, writing books and poems. But Kapila is the son of a blacksmith. He is brawny, dark and well-built. As time passes, Padmini is bored with Devadatta's knowledge and his work. Moreover Devadatta develops potbelly, which Padmini hates. She longs for variety and spice in life. The beauty of Padmini also bewitches Kapila. He too dotes on her. They feel at home at each other's company. Padmini longs for extra-marital relationship with Kapila, who is brawny and well built. She has no sense of shame because she feels that she is the rebel. But Kapila is afraid of Devadatta. He is afraid because he does not want to endanger their friendship. Hence, he tries to flirt with Padmini without the knowledge of Devadatta. But Padmini does not have any fear about her husband. She flirts with Kapila in front of Devadatta. Since Devadatta and Kapila are portrayed as brothers, Padmini's lust for Kapila becomes incest. Since incest is a taboo in accordance with patriarchal society, Padmini's lust and her flirting behaviour too becomes a taboo. Women have a tendency to violate the patriarchal laws. Padmini willingly breaks the laws of men by flirting with Kapila. Devadatta is put in a tight corner. He hesitates to take up the issue with Padmini or else with Kapila. He does not want to hurt the feelings of Padmini.

Girish Karnad in his play, Hayavadana has depicted Padmini as a strong and revolutionary female character. Karnad has portrayed Padmini as a revolutionary character from the very beginning of the play Hayavadana. She faces the cunningness of her husband and she schemes to attain fulfillment in her life. Padmini defiles patriarchy and mock at it by practicing polyandry. Padmini asserts herself as a new woman. She thinks in different plane. She



breaks the patriarchal rules with her full knowledge. Padmini is psychologically strong and she hates to be a puppet in the hands of patriarchy.

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