



# “Hayavadana”: A Study in Virtue and Morality

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## ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* is a two act play. Its plot has been borrowed from *Kathasaritsagar*, a Sanskrit collection of tales. It narrates how the “one mind, one heart” friendship of two persons, one intellectual and the other a man of physical prowess, disintegrates. The present paper will aim to explore the conditions of complication of the relationship of the trio- Devadatta, Kapila and Devadatta's wife Padmini and how they get entangled in the fabric of inadvertent situations which lead to their destruction. My purpose is to uphold here the Indian values of chastity, morality and self control, the beauty of virtuous life and the ugliness of a sensual and immoral life. Leading a virtuous and moral life can bring all disorder and anarchy in order. Vice may generate temporary pleasure but inherent in it is the seed of greater future destruction. Stationed in virtue, one need to practice the quality of renunciation wishing the well-being of others.

## INTRODUCTION

*Hayavadana* is a study on the imperfections of human beings. At the beginning of the play, the divine perfection of Lord Ganesha is invoked to point out the fallibility of human beings. It is never possible for the humans, the finite beings, to define the infinite. We can have a glimpse of the nature of the infinite in the finite. As Ramakrishna often tells the story of a salt doll which goes to measure the depth of sea and is melted. *Hayavadana* is an imperfect being with the head of a horse and the body of a human being. He is utterly unhappy at his present situation. He suffering from an abject feeling of alienation – he belongs to nowhere, neither of animal kingdom nor of human world. *Hayavadana* mother is a chaste woman. At the end of the play *Hayavadana* through his virtuous activities is relieved from his predicament and turns into a complete horse and just like his mother enjoys the bliss of a complete life in animal form. Whereas the lives of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila are destroyed because of their close complicity with immoral life.

According to Ramakrishna the best relation of a man to a woman is that of a son and mother. He sees in every woman, Goddess Kali, the Anandamoyee. To see the mother in every woman even in one's own wife is the stepping stone for attaining spiritual bliss. To desire for other person's wife is a vile thing. Kapila has initially been a pious and virtuous man. His relation to Padmini has been that of a son to a mother-

### **Kapila: Mother can I at least talk to a servant?**

Padmini: I knew it. I knew you would not touch my feet. One can't even trust strangers any more. All right, my dear son! I opened the door.(Act One)

When Kapila regards Padmini as his mother, the trio enjoys the blessings of their lives. To reassure her husband about Kapila's innocence and her deep devotion to him, Padmini asserts

*“You are my saffron, my marriage thread, my deity. Why should you feel disturbed? I like making fun of Kapila-he is such an innocen. Looks a proper evil, but the way he blushes and giggles and turns red , he might have been a bride.”*

Kapila feels a strong pull of emotional attachment to Padmini on the level of satisfying his lust. In his heart he has a deep craving for Padmini. The mother turns out to be object of his passion in his heart. Jesus says *“whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:29).

However Devadatta is not assured at Padmini's hypocritical assessment of Kapila as innocent. He contradicts in his soliloquy and identifies Kapila's true nature-

*“ Kapila was never the sort to blush. But now, he only has to see her and he begins to wag his tail. Sits up on his hind legs as though he were afraid to let her words fall to the ground. And that pleading in his eyes-can't she really see that?”*

Kapila becomes blatantly aware of his desire for Padmini when their trip for the day is cancelled due to Padmini's

**concocted ill health-** *“Why should it feel that the world has been wiped out for a whole week? Why this emptiness? “ He began to realize that he was about to slip from the path of righteousness. He cautioned himself to control himself “You are slipping, boy, and control yourself. Don’t lose that hold”*

Padmini grows also a fascination for Kapila’s well-knit body and strong muscles. She exclaims- *“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.”*

Devadatta watches this. Padmini goes on to watch the sweetness of his physique. *“He is like a celestial being reborn as a hunter. How his body sways, his limbs curve – it is t a dance almost.”* Devdatta notices Padmini’s deep craving for Kapila- *“ Look how she is pouring her soul into his mould.”* So Karnad here portrays the episode of the trio as an opportunity to mirror the real suppresses desire and feelings of all the three characters. Devadatta’s feeling of anxiety and insecurity, Padmini’s feeling of deep and ardent adoration and craving for Kapila and Kapila’s feeling of emptiness without a vision of Padmini.

We are surprised to find that Devadatta, a man of delicate frame and comely in appearance, who cannot even- as Padmini tells- drive his cart well, seeks courage from Goddess Kali to sacrifice his head when he comes to the Kali temple. In his sacrificing speech Devadatta says that he sacrifices his life for the sake of Kapila and Padmini. *“Live happily together. I shall find my eternal happiness in that thought.”*

He has foresworn that he would sacrifice his head and hand. Now he attaches noble purpose to his sacrifice of his head to Goddess Kali. His sacrifice would pave the way for a happy life of Kapila and Padmini. He seeks forgiveness from Goddess Kali because of his being oblivious to his promise and now he sets himself to cut his head.

The seeds of this sacrifice of Devadatta’s head have been sown long before in Devadatta’s quests for one perfect beauty, one who can be Muse for his poetry. First he accepts Padmini as Goddess who could infuse him with divine inspiration to write best verses which can even surpass those of Kalidasa in beauty and excellence. When he sees Padmini he quickly falls in love with her as the girl catches his fancy. Ironically at the root of his sacrifice we may account his search for perfection; the price of which later turns out to be in the self-annihilation. He is ready to pay the best price to obtain Padmini to materialize his dream and ambition. In one of his sacrificing speeches before Goddess Kali he says: *“You fulfilled the deepest cravings of my life. You gave me Padmini”*

We cannot call Devadatta disloyal. Both Padmini and Kapila have broken his trust. Devadatta is wronged and he suffers for no fault of his own. The situation gets complicated when Padmini exchanges the heads of Devadatta and Kapila when Goddess Kali asks her to attach the heads to the bodies to bring them back to their life.

#### **Goddess Kali and Her Comment on Human Virtue:**

In *Hayavadana* Goddess Kali is attributed with human behavioral traits and speaks from practical sense. Her parting sermon to Padmini is: *“There should be a limit even to honesty.”* Because limit always saves one’s honor and makes one true. No human being is infinitely honest. When one becomes perfectly honest, in finely honest one becomes a God for only God is perfect. Devadatta’s sacrifice is not a selfless sacrifice though there is nobility in it. He is sacrificing to keep his word, to pay homage for fulfilling his dream of having a perfect beauty. Goddess Kali says to Padmini, *“You spoke the truth because you’re selfish.”*

Here in *Hayavadana* Goddess Kali gives importance on the necessity of being truthful. One should not be a hypocrite at least one should know what one is even if it is knowing one’s selfishness. There is no wrong to be selfish when one’s selfishness saves lives of others as is the case with Padmini. Without Devadatta and Kapila alive, she cannot show her face to people. So it is clear from her speech that she saves them out of her selfish impulses. Kapila has not disclosed his selfishness in his sacrificing speech to the goddess as he would be accused of the heinous crime of murder of his dear friend only to enjoy his beautiful wife. He lies that he is following Devadatta in killing himself out of immortal friendship. So what Goddess Kali gives importance on here is truthfulness and honesty even if it involves selfishness.

In Act II Padmini cries to Goddess- *“Kali, Mother of all Nature, you must have your joke even now. Other woman can die praying that they should get the same husband in all lives to come. You haven’t let me even that little consolation.”* The famous lines of Shakesperae are worth quoting here: *“As flies to wanton boys/ Are we to the Gods? / They kill us for their sport”* Padmini’s grief here projects that she is doubly ruined both in this world and the next with a life of uncertainty and confusion.

#### **Morality and Generation of Complex Identity:**

Again we see the conflict of ego in *Hayavadana*. After their heads are exchanged there arises a confusion regarding their actual identity. Both the men claim themselves to be Devadatta since Devadatta is more privileged than Kapila.



Once one of them can prove that he is Devadatta, he is fortune to get Padmini as his wife. So both of them becomes desperate to prove that. Ultimately they consult a hermit who regards the person with Devadatta's head as the real Devadatta. This I-consciousness is related to gratification of their sensual desires. The ego consciousness does not arise from devotion to God or self- renunciation. So this frantic attempt to establish identity as the privileged Devadatta draws them to miserable situation, Padmini at first becomes ecstatic but after momentary pleasure she is disillusioned. Both Devadatta and Kapila regain their former self and now Padmini grows a likeness of Kapila's body. So he drifts towards him and these in turn lead the trio to a brawl. Devadatta and Kapila fight to the extent of killing each other. The fire of sensual desire as Gotama Buddha observes can never be satiated. It is Padmini's quenchless thirst for sensual pleasure which leads to their tragic death.

### **CONCLUSION**

For Padmini's predicament she herself is to blame. She has turned out be a hypocrite and disloyal to her husband. . She defines the personality of kapila and Devadatta as per her needs and does not stick to one. She dilates her passion to Kapila. She alters their heads when she is asked to attach the heads to the respective bodies of Devadatta and Kapila and shares In the process she shares the best of both men with ardent enthusiasm. She has never been in a mood do justice to Kapila's head but always intent on sensual pleasure from Kapila's body and intellectual fervor of Devadatta's head. Disregarding the rights of others is immoral. An immoral person is bent on selfish pursuits disregarding and belittling other's rights and necessities. She is disillusioned when Devadatta loses physical charm which actually Kapila's body has. This in fact ultimately leads to her having lost both Devadatta and Kapila in their killing each other in the duel. Padmini who desires to enjoy life on a bed of roses is ultimately disappointed. . Both of them sacrifice their lives for Padmini and Padmini kills herself helpless.

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