

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

August 2013 Vol. 4 Issue IV

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Re-Interpreting Femininity: Karnad's Padmini in *Hayavadana* and Mohan Rakesh's Savitri in *Halfway House* or *Adhe-Adhure*

Madhvi Lata

Research Scholar,
Department of English,
University of Allahabad,
Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh

Women have always been portrayed marginalized and traditional since past history. The marginal position of women in society has become an integral part of the socio-cultural identity of any country but the present scenario has changed. The image of women in contemporary Indian literature has changed drastically. Modern writers have tried to transform the image of woman as seen in the myths by portraying them in a more modern and realistic manner. Now the roles played by women are different from the characters of traditional literature.

The present abstract deals with re-interpreting the femininity in Karnad's character Padmini and Mohan Rakesh's Savitri. Savitri, the central protagonist of *Adhe-Adhure* is a modern housewife. Not only does this restless and dissatisfied middle-aged mother of three grown up children breaks out of the confines of the family home to enter the public space, but she also becomes the bread winner of the family, reducing her unemployed husband to a redundant cipher. With this play Mohan Rakesh explored the myth of the idealized and hallowed institution of marriage as well as shattered the image of the ideal Indian woman and mother as pure and self-sacrificing perpetuated endlessly in creations, paintings and stage.

In Karnad's play *Hayavadana* Padmini is also portrayed a woman free to choose her life partner. She is not like traditional woman oppressed in male dominated society. She represents a modern woman who wants completeness and perfection, which is probably next to impossible to get in this world. The double parentage that Padmini bestows on her son by wishing him to be brought up by the hunters until age five and then by Brahmin Vidyasagar afterwards, announces the post-patriarchal order that it is the woman who decides the destiny of her child.

The contemporary Indian drama in English is benefitted by four major vibrant theatre personalities namely- Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Mohan Rakesh. These four playwrights heightened the graph of Indian drama through their experimental techniques, themes and plot. They have given a meaningful and lively existence to the Indian English Drama. They have brought a new recognition to Indian English drama through their tradition and contemporaneity.

Despite their closeness to each other their techniques, themes and approaches to play writing is quite different. Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Badal Sircar in Bengali deals with daily problems of middle class society while Karnad and Mohan Rakesh (except *Halfway House*) are keen to adopt historical legends, myths and folklore techniques to discuss the issues of human life. Though these two playwrights are influenced by western theatrical patterns but at the same time they are also well acquainted with their indigenous dramatic modes. Karnad though began with *Yayati* (1961) but he shot fame with his play *Tughlaq* (1964). His play *Hayavadana* marked as a milestone in his career as a playwright. Similarly Mohan Rakesh's popularity befalls on *Half Way House* (1971) rather his other plays namely *One Day in Ashadha*,

Swans of the Waves' etc. Karnad's *Hayavadana* and Mohan Rakesh's *Half Way House* proves a great achievement in the trend setting of Indian drama in English. Both plays were published in the same year.

Girish Karnad has borrowed the plot of *Hayavadana* from a novella of Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads* which actually are drawn from *Kathasaritsagara*. By this way Karnad has used Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads* and ancient collection *Kathasaritsagara* as a raw material for his plot of *Hayavadana*. He at the same time also added Kannada regional form of 'Yakshagana' in his play. Mohan Rakesh's play *Half Way House* represents early seventies life, when family institution has begun to lose its values and importance. He has adopted a contemporary middle class family for the setting of his play. Characters at the outset of the play, have no names, they are only having nouns like- the woman, the boy, the elder girl, the younger girl, the first man and the fourth man. Though as the play moves on we come across with character's real names like- Savitri, Ashok, Binni, Kinni, Mahendranath, Singhanian, Jagmohan, and Juneja respectively. Rakesh, like Karnad, too makes an additional mark by giving the last four roles to a single actor. Karnad in his plays always introduced a Sutradhar apart from the major characters. In *Hayavadana*, he portrayed three leading characters namely- Devdatta, Padmini and Kapila but the sutradhar of the play 'bhagvata' also acts as one of character of the play. Mohan Rakesh too in his play *Half Way House* used 'Man in black suit' as the sutradhar of the play.

Despite these basic resemblance and differences in the matter of plot, setting, characterization etc, these two dramatists shares one very common thing between his plays- *Hayavadana* and *Half Way House*. They have chosen female character as one of the protagonist of their plays, aspiring restlessly for the best of all which is an impossible thing in the present world. Karnad's Padmini and Rakesh's Savitri has re- interpreted femininity. They have changed the portrayal of traditional woman.

Padmini is described as:

"Her forelocks rival the bees; her face is white lotus. Her beauty is as the magic lake. Her arms are the lotus creepers. Her breasts are golden urns."
(119-20)

She is not only beautiful but also is 'fast as lightening and as sharp' (126). She needs a man of steel to control and hunt her. Padmini aspires of the best hence Devdatta and Kapila behead themselves she fears that people will think that Devdatta and Kapila fought for her and killed each other. She too picks up the sword to end her life. But at the same moment goddess Kali and appears and asks her to attach their heads. Padmini quite judiciously and cunningly places Devdatta's head on Kapila's body and Kapila's head on Devdatta's body to get the best of both. Finally she wins having Devdatta's head and Kapila's body as in form of her husband. So much so that she consoles Kapila while leaving him:

"But remember. I'm going with your body. Let that cheer you up" (152)

By this way she has broken the traditional image of a wife who always devotes herself to her husband.

She is herself confused as to whom she really loves and wants. When Devdatta and Kapila challenge and kill each other Padmini too performs sati without knowing whose wife she is and for whom she is performing sati. Throughout the play she aspires of the best of the two men in her life. She has refuted the traditional ideology of a chaste and pious wife devoted only to her husband. She has given concept of 'New Woman' by re- interpreting femininity. The remark of Padmini to goddess Kali seems very joking and against tradition:

“Other woman can die praying that they should get the same husband in all the lives to come. You haven't left me even that little consolation”
(163)

This statement of Padmini makes fun of seven steps of marriage taken around fire and promising for the same husband in all her life.

In Mohan Rakesh's *Half Way House*, like in Karnad's *Hayavadana*, the protagonist is a woman Savitri. She belongs to middle class working woman who is trying her best to get her family on the right track. She also represents modern image of woman. In traditional time women were prohibited to walk out of their room. To work outside was a far thinking dream for them. But portrayal of Savitri gives different image of that stereotyped women. She represents a new Savitri. This Savitri not like that of Hindu mythological Savitri who chased Yamraj to get her husband back. But the character of Savitri depicted by Rakesh has made her husband feel that he is a big failure in his life. She never adores and appreciates him. Right from the beginning she has taken all the responsibilities on her shoulder and forced her husband to accept that he is good for nothing.

Like Padmini, Savitri has also been aspiring for the best in her life. But she fails to realize that what she wants is impossible. Juneja's comment on her aspiration to get the best is like thus:
:

“Because the meaning of life to you is how many different things you can have and enjoy at the same time. One man alone could never have given them to you. So no matter whom you married, you would have always felt as empty and as restlessly as you do today” (74).

Works Cited:

1- Karnad, Girish. *Hayavadana. Three Plays*. New Delhi : OUP, 1994.

2- Rakesh, Mohan. *Halfway House* (Trans. Bindu Batra) Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2001.

3- Dr. Vivek R. Vishwarupe and Kharabe Ram Pundlikrao “ Indian Culture and Modernity In Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House*” ‘Research Analysis and Evaluation’ Vol-2 Issue 23. August 2011.

4-file:///H:/ "Halfway House" by Mohan Rakesh Survivingbaenglish.html.