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## **A Friendship Destined to be Doomed: A Critical Study of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana***

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The notable Indian critic M.K.Naik deplores the pathetic situation of Indian English drama in a very sensitive way in his *A History of Indian English Literature*:

Unlike poetry and fiction, drama has not registered very notable gains during the post-Independence period....This was mainly because the encouragement which drama received from several quarters immediately after Independence was monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages, while Indian English drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousins' tables. (255)

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*, originally written in Kannada and later translated into English, is surely a notable addition to the lean body of Indian English Drama. This drama has successfully derived acclaims from critics. Influenced by Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* and Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, Girish Karnad wrote the drama *Hayavadana*. Critics like M. K. Naik, Kirtinath Kurtkoti, and P. Dhanavel, on the one hand, have discerned the presence of identity crisis in this drama. On the other hand, critics like K. Rajendran, Veena Noble Dass, and Mohit Ray have focussed on the mythical presentation of the play. It is quite interesting that the relationship between Devadatta and Kapila has not been elaborately analyzed by notable critics. This paper will, in its small way, seek to question the very authenticity of their friendship.

Bhagavata introduces Devadatta and Kapila as bosom friends. When people of Dharmapura watch them "hand in hand" (*Hayavadana*, 74), they remember the legendary brotherhood of "Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krisna and Balarama" (74). They are complementary to each-other: "one mind, one heart" (74). According to Bhagavata, "the world wonders at their friendship" (74). This presentation of Bhagavata is highly ironical as the textual evidences contradict his view. The textual evidences will gradually lead us to believe that the world 'wonders' at their friendship not because of the intensity of their friendship but because of the impossibility of their friendship. Devadatta and Kapila are presented as binary opposites in the text. They differ from each other in every aspect. Socially, psychologically, culturally, economically, and educationally Devadatta and Kapila are poles apart. While the Brahmin Devadatta is "comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence" (74), the Ironsmith Kapila is "dark and plain to look at" (74) and unrivalled in physical skills. Devadatta is poetic by nature and loves to spend time in house. Kapila revels in adventures. Despite such differences, two persons can become friends if they forget or at least endeavour to overcome the differences. We hardly confront any moment or any particular situation when Devadatta and Kapila are not aware of their social status. While Devadatta suffers from superiority complex, Kapila from the inferiority one. What remains within them is not friendship, rather a master-servant relationship.

At their first meeting, we find that Devadatta and Kapila are not at par with each other. While Devadatta reads a poem, Kapila returns from a gymkhana. Devadatta's poetic sensitivity is contrasted with Kapila's robust physicality. When Kapila gloats over his success and eagerly informs Devadatta about his wrestling match with Nanda, Devadatta is preoccupied with his own thoughts. Kapila understands Devadatta's unmindfulness and cajoles him to reveal his thoughts. The very unmindful Devadatta becomes highly alert and energetic to flaunt his love for a new lady. This conversation explicitly denotes Devadatta's megalomaniac nature. He wants only to talk about himself and pays a deaf ear to Kapila's achievements. Devadatta requires Kapila to gratify his ego. He expects Kapila to play the only role of a silent listener. On the other hand, Devadatta is the be all and end all of Kapila's life. Kapila is even ready to risk his own life for the sake of Devadatta:

DEVADATTA. You call yourself my friend. But you haven't understand me  
at all.

KAPILA. And have you understood me? No, you haven't. . . . Don't you  
know I would do anything for you? Jump into a well--or walk into  
fire? Even my parents aren't as close to me as you are. I would  
leave them this minute if you asked me to.

DEVADATTA. (*Irritated.*) Don't start on that now. You've said it fifty times  
already. (84)

The reaction of Devadatta is noteworthy. He is neither glad nor very sympathetic to Kapila. Rather, he becomes 'irritated'. But Kapila's indomitable spirit can hardly be daunted by Devadatta's irritation:

KAPILA. . . . And I'll say it again. If it wasn't for you I would have been no  
better than the ox in our yard. You showed me that there were such  
things as poetry and literature. (84)

What is discernible in this comment is that Kapila accepts Devadatta's superiority over himself. To Kapila, Devadatta is like a teacher, a person belonging to a higher pedestal and a man of finer sensibilities. What Kapila feels for Devadatta is not friendship. Kapila has out and out reverence and servile loyalty to Devadatta. Devadatta, too, takes Kapila to be an inferior personality:

DEVADATTA. What do you know of poetry and literature? Go back to your  
smithy--that's where you belong. (84)

When Kapila starts to go, interestingly Devadatta stops him. Devadatta's intervention does not come from his compassion for Kapila's hurt feelings. Rather, Devadatta needs a listener for his bragging of love. When Devadatta resumes his story of love for Padmini, Kapila makes him sit on chair and he "sits down on the ground happily" (84). Kapila does not have any illusion regarding his social status. He always takes Devadatta as a benevolent master who behaves leniently towards him.

After listening to Devadatta's story, Kapila takes the initiative to carry the message of love to Padmini. He himself demands the role of a messenger:

KAPILA. My dear Devadatta, your cloud-messenger, your bee, your pigeon  
is sitting right in front of you and you don't even know it? I'll go,  
find out her house, her name. . . .(86)

Like Shakespeare's servants, Kapila carries the message, on behalf of his master, to the lady. Devadatta is quite anxious after sending Kapila. Devadatta thinks Kapila to be a rough and crude sort of person as he belongs to an Ironsmith family:

DEVADATTA. He means well--and he is a wizard in his smithy, in his farm,  
in his field. But here? No. He is too rough, too indelicate.  
He was the wrong man to send. He's bound to ruin the  
whole thing. (87)

Kapila seems to be stereotyped as dull and crude by Devadatta. According to Devadatta, Kapila is a 'wizard' in his smithy, but in a sensitive matter like marriage is an inept. However, the textual analysis reveals Kapila in a diametrically opposite way. Kapila is, in no way, a rough man. He evinces romantic sensibility when he describes Padmini, in an aside, as "Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati---all rolled into one" (87). We also find glimpses of his imaginative nature in his very poetic description of a particular flower as 'Fortunate Lady's Flower':

KAPILA. Here you are. The Fortunate Lady's flowers.

PADMINI. And why a 'Fortunate Lady', pray?

KAPILA. Because it has all the marks of marriage a woman puts on. The  
yellow on the petals--then that red round patch at the bottom  
of the petals--like on your foreheads--then--here--that thin  
saffron line--like in the parting of your hair--Then--uhm. . .  
Oh yes--here near the stem a row of black dots--like a necklace  
of black heads--

PADMINI. What imagination! (*To Devadatta.*) You should put it in your  
poetry. It's good for a simile. (97)

Kapila evinces his witty side in his conversation with Padmini. He also works as a catalyst in Devadatta's marriage with Padmini. Again, it is Kapila who instantly realizes that Padmini is a mismatch for Devadatta. Kapila shows a rare insight and foresight:

KAPILA. 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

his one is fast as lightning--and as sharp. She is not for the likes  
of you. What she needs is a man of steel. But what can one do?  
You'll never listen to me. (90)

These textual evidences clearly contradict Devadatta's projection of Kapila. In fact, Devadatta tags Kapila as inferior human in order to dominate him. Kapila, on the other hand, accepts his inferiority as he belongs to a lower class of the society.

After Devadatta's marriage with Padmini a new development takes place in the relationship of Devadatta and Kapila. Devadatta gradually becomes aware of the growing mutual fondness between Kapila and Padmini. As Devadatta takes Kapila to be his inferior, he wants Padmini to behave in the same manner. Hence, Padmini's little concern for Kapila enrages Devadatta. When Padmini teases Devadatta for his friendship with Kapila, Devadatta exaggerates his friendship in hyperbolic terms:

DEVADATTA. . . . Kapila isn't merely a friend--he's like my brother. One  
has to collect merit in seven lives to get a friend like him.  
(91)

Being a witty woman, Padmini clearly understands the tension between Devadatta and Kapila. She initiates to realize Devadatta's true attitudes towards Kapila:

PADMINI. You aren't jealous of him, are you?

DEVADATTA. Me? Jealous of Kapila? Why do you have to paint everything  
I say. . . .(92)

PADMINI. (*Laughs. Affectionately.*) Don't sulk now. I was just trying to be  
funny. Really you have no sense of humour.

DEVADATTA. It's humour for you. But it burns my insides. . . .(92)

The comparison with Kapila 'burns' his 'insides' as he is stunned by his wife's audacity and insight. Devadatta is jealous of Kapila's masculinity as he himself confesses later: "I wanted your power but not your wildness" (129). Padmini is the first one who can see the true face of Devadatta behind the facade. After this discovery, Padmini seeks to placate Devadatta by condemning and ridiculing Kapila. This attitude of Padmini unravels the hollowness of Devadatta's friendship with Kapila. In an aside to the audience, Devadatta compares Kapila to a dog who "sits up on his hind legs" (92). This aside is a marker of Devadatta's abhorrence for Kapila. He always had a feeling of superiority over Kapila. He cannot digest Padmini's friendship with Kapila because he does not think Kapila to be worthy of his wife's friendship. The notable critic P. Dhanavel has succinctly captured the agony of Devadatta: "While Devadatta looks at him as a 'slave', Padmini considers him as her 'master'" (93).

Undoubtedly, Kapila develops within him feelings of love for Padmini. When Devadatta announces the cancellation of their trip to Ujjain, Kapila immediately becomes disappointed. In an aside he pathetically describes his state of mind:

KAPILA. (*Aside.*) So it's off. What am I to do for the rest of the day? What

am I to do for the rest of the week? Why should it feel as though the whole world has been wiped out for a whole week? Why this this emptiness. . .Kapila, Kapila, get a tight hold on yourself. You are slipping, boy, control yourself. Don't lose that hold. Go now-- don't come here again for a week--Devadatta is bound to get angry with you for not coming. Sister-in-law will be annoyed. But don't come back. Go, go! (94)

Here one should notice that Kapila is not aware of Devadatta's suspicion. He thinks that Devadatta is going to take offence for his absence. Kapila lives in a fool's paradise. However, they get ready for the trip. While they are *en route*, Padmini exuberantly appreciates Kapila's skill of cart-driving. Devadatta endeavours hard to keep his mental equilibrium. After few hours, they reach near the river Bhargavi. Then Kapila and Padmini go to visit the temple of Rudra. Devadatta goes to the temple of Goddess Kali. There he commits suicide by beheading himself with a sword. The reason of this sudden suicide, according to Devadatta, is "to carry out my promise" (99). He had promised once to offer his hands to Goddess Kali and his head to Lord Rudra if he got Padmini as his wife. He has got Padmini as his wife. His suicide, therefore, is in accordance with his promise. But Mother Kali realizes his hypocrisy. She tells Padmini:

That fellow Devadatta—he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it—head to him and arms to me! Then because you insisted on going to the Rudra temple, he comes here and offers his head. Nobly too— wants to keep his word, he says—no other reason! (103)

Devadatta feels defeated by a social inferior. He cannot accept his defeat. Hence, he decides to take his own life. Kapila, too, turns out to be a hypocrite. After Devadatta's death, Kapila also commits suicide. He posits Devadatta's absence to be the reason for his suicide: "No, Devadatta, I can't live without you. I can't breathe without you" (100). This utter hypocrisy of Kapila is revealed by Goddess Kali:

Then this Kapila, died in front of me—but 'for his friend'. Mind you! Didn't even have the courtesy to refer to me. And what lies! Says he is dying for friendship. He must have known perfectly well he would be accused of killing Devadatta for you. Do you think he wouldn't have grabbed you if it hadn't been for that fear? But till his last breath—'Oh my friend! My dear brother!' (103)

Both Devadatta and Kapila were leading hypocritical lives. Devadatta needed Kapila to gratify his ego and pride. Kapila needed Devadatta to feel himself human and accepted by the society. They were never true friends. They neither enjoyed nor at least felt the brotherhood



like Rama and Lakshmana. The seeds of the destruction of friendship were sown inside them from the very beginning. An egotist like Devadatta and a servile man like Kapila can never be at equal par. Nevertheless, it is true that they successfully maintain the facade. But that veneer drops down with the arrival of Padmini.

When Padmini mixes up the heads of Devadatta and Kapila, another very shocking revelation takes place. At the beginning of the play we found Kapila's reverence for Devadatta. Now, with the possession of Devadatta's body Kapila seeks to subvert Devadatta's domination. He claims Padmini as his wife. It explicitly indicates that Kapila's reverence for Devadatta had been merely phoney. His fake respect for Devadatta was the outcome of his inferior social status. At present he thinks himself to be socially upgraded and equal with Devadatta. Kapila confesses to Devadatta that he had desired to have sterling qualities like Devadatta: "Do you remember how I once used to envy you, your poetry, your ability to imagine things?" (128). However, Padmini takes a U-turn. She ditches Kapila because she has got what she persistently and passionately desired to have: "Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong body. . ." (108). Padmini goes with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. Kapila with his own head and Devadatta's body goes to a jungle. After a few months, Padmini finds out Kapila. A duel ensues between Devadatta and Kapila. They both die in that mortal combat.

After this analysis, it is evident that the so called 'friendship' of Devadatta and Kapila was destined to be doomed someday. Padmini's arrival has merely fomented the process. It would be wrong to pronounce the verdict that Padmini is solely responsible for the broken friendship. There did never exist 'true' friendship between Devadatta and Kapila. Moreover, their relationship was hanging precariously over the edge. Padmini serves just the purpose of a catalyst to lead the relationship to its burial ground.

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