

## **Contrast between Rani and Padmini in Girish Karnad's Female Characters**

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**DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.5.5.06**

### **Abstract**

Girish Karnad has the persona of giving his characters an air of freedom. The characters of his plays are mostly liberated from the pro-social norms or at-least tried their best to get that air. In every play we can find that kind of character very easily, especially in the female characters. This is the most distinct feature of Karnad, of giving the female characters, the lead in his plots. But still there is an exceptional case in this scenario too. The main focus of this paper is to picture the two contrasting female characters of Karnad i.e. Rani's character from *Naga-Mandala* and Padmini's characters from *Hayavadana*. It also interrogates the actions of both character in the similar situation and its outcome.

**Keywords-** Marriage Compatibility, Domestic Violence, Societal Pressure, Role of Elders, Feministic Approach, Marriage Institution

Girish Karnad has created a landmark in Indian English Drama, with his explicit writing, employing both the folk art as well as of Indian Mythology. His plots are always enriched with Indian cultures, human flaws, and real life situation and are very much realistic in nature. Every character has their specific identity and role but if we will zoom out and then see we can find that Karnad's every female character has the aspiration of freedom. They are not at all submissive in nature and not afraid of the taking risk. They are usually dominating, have a dream and are very courageous. If we consider all these qualities, we can also find an exceptional case which is of 'Rani' in the play *Naga-Manadala*. She is the only female character which lacks all the above qualities. The level of suffering is still the same as all the other characters. Rani was timid, shy, uncertain, incapable, and coward. Comparing this character with the exact opposite one will clear things more and can show the vast realm of Girish Karnad's writing skill, in Indian English Literature. Taking two poles apart character, the character of

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Padmini from *Hayavadana* and Rani from *Naga-Manadala* has been taken to compare their aspirations to live life.

Padmini is the protagonist in the play *Hayavadana*, written in 1972. The plot mostly deals with the human aspiration of completeness where all the characters suffered from their outmost desire of acquiring the concept of totality of beauty specifically of physical beauty of man. Padmini has the greatest desire of attaining the oneness of physical and intellectual beauty of human. For attaining her desire she can be bold and courageous. In the whole play her character dominates over the other two. Her character is very open minded, bold and very outspoken. She never accepts injustice and always speaks through some logic. So in some way her desire was not illogical and immoral as it seems so. She never hesitates to speak the truth. Her marriage was also set with her status. Her illuminati personality deserves the intellectual mind of Devadatta but her versatility needs the force of Kapila to stop her. She was outspoken regarding her preferences. At the time of their marriage (Padmini and Devdatta) Kapila himself commented, “She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel.”(19) She never lies in the league of traditional Indian women. She never feels shy of anything and is always put herself on the top. She is confident and focused. She loves to travel and explore the world herself. When the trio was going for the trip, Padmini was super happy and excited even though she was pregnant. “My condition! What’s happened to me? To listen to you, one would think I was the first woman in this world to become pregnant.” Her more than casual reaction doesn’t shows that she is careless or reckless or irresponsible but shows that how alive that girl is from her heart. She never hesitate a bit to ask her husband of being jealous of Kapila. She was the kind of girl which never hides her feelings from anyone, not even from her husband and was concerned for her husband as well. When she felt that Devadatta is somehow annoyed with her behavior she apologizes. She even confesses to Devadatta, “The trouble is I grew up saying these awful things and it’s become a habit now. But you are so fragile! I don’t know how you’re going to go through life wrapped in silk like this! You are still a baby...” (21). The character of Padmini has been made so strong by Karnad that her mere presence makes the others down. Devadatta’s intellectual mind was nothing in front her logic and Kapila’s physical strength turns into shaky before her free soul. She is not all shy in nature. Never hesitate to demand. She has the free soul which is impossible to caged. But the society is accustomed to the ‘traditional woman’ of without voice, submissive by nature, timid, fearful of man and can easily confined. So as expected, such character is not allowed to survive in our society. So Padmini also chose death over life for her son to get everything she desired for him. At the end, she chose self-emulation which made her death even more glorious. She was the type of woman who always took her own decisions, even if it was of her death.

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Girish Karnad has set the perfect example of 'traditional women' by portraying the character of Rani in his play *Naga-Mandala*. Rani is the perfect contrast of Padmini. She has no dream of herself. Her treatment was so pathetic that can melt anyone's heart while reading. She has no voice. No desire. No dreams. She was not just house locked but was mentally locked as well. She has no opinion. She was scared of her husband. All she did was just breathing. She just wanted to survive. There were minimal conversation between the husband Appanna and wife Rani. She was basically a slave for Appanna. A slave, which society has appointed to him legally with the tag of 'marriage'. Appanna gives her the least time of his day and visits only once in a day, after locking her up in the house. The very first day of her marriage, her dreams have been shattered when she has been locked by her husband in the house all alone. She was confused, scared, terrified by the kind of life she has been stuck to. 'Rani looks at him nonplussed. He pays no attention to her, goes out, shuts the door, and locks it from outside and goes away. She runs to the door, pushes it, finds it locked, peers out of the barred window. He is gone. She doesn't know what is happening, stands perplexed. She cannot even weep. She goes and sits in a corner of her room.'(6) She has been beaten brutally, dragged on the rough road and was falsely accused and has to face capital punishment as well. No one come forward to help her. Still in the end she chose life over death unlike Padmini. She chose to live for her son, forgiving everyone.

The treatment of Rani was way far of Padmini. The creator has shown the diversity of his writings by these two sketches. These two characters are like the two farthest points of human practices. In between, lies everything and nothing can go beyond these. The character of Padmini is a glimpse of future of human mutation, after learning the mistakes of human roles from the character of Rani. Both the characters have their distinguish qualities of surviving. One reflects the patience the other shows the courage of man. One shows the power of voice, the other, the power of silence. Karnad's treatment of both the characters is marvelous. The two opposite characters basically gives the same lesson, of being courageous to survive. At the climax of the story both turns out to be the same, no matter how much they are different. Padmini took the risk of meeting Kapila after two years to show him his child which leads to the final turning point of her life. Rani took the risk of holding the cobra in her hand to show the world that they all were wrong and eventually leads to the final turning point of her life. Padmini and Rani both stand alone at the time of crisis. Both of them have to take stand alone for the best of their son. In the end Padmini and Rani both turned out to be the mother, with same traits as well.

Rani and Padmini's individual personality defines their attitude towards life. One's personality was to govern the world according to her will, the other had to bear the world rule for her

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sake. But they both possess one quality i.e. of motherhood. As a mother they both act the same. Their actions always lead to the best for their children. Rani turns out to be like scared cat which can bite the predator in a life threatening situation. So both have the same motherhood traits but as an individual they both were pole apart.

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