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## **Eloquence of Rudrambe and silence of Padmini: A study in contrast**

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### **Abstract**

Women are engaged since time immemorial in searching for a language which can give expression to their selves. Writers have perused the traditional conforming roles as well as the rules essaying assimilation into the mainstream. This paper explores two eminent Kannada playwrights who have tried to highlight women characters in their plays. The similarities between the two writers are that both of them seek sources for their subject in history and mythology. The plays chosen are Raktakshi by Kuvempu and Hayavadana by Girish Karnad.

**Keywords:** Strong-will, women, identity

### **Introduction**

As feminist discourses have gained momentum and the various women's movements all over the country take on a cohesive force it is high time a researcher perused the literary tradition and the representation of women characters by eminent writers who are supposed to be sensitive to the social changes. Right from the epics and mythologies to the modern day literary works the journey of the women protagonists has glided through the traditionally established roles, and meandered against the historical and cultural forces, and is still passing through the upheavals to mark or reach its destiny of equality or assimilation into the mainstream. When one examines a stream of writers both men and women a majority of them are engaged in recognizing the individuality of a woman and giving her a separate identity. Each writer expresses oneself within the boundaries of one's exposure to life in general. Then who is the woman? Do the writers come closer to the real women? Does her language get its due in the literary works? Well, they are some of the questions which remain unanswered. Yet in literary works we are exposed to a galore of women characters expressing themselves in myriad ways and in different languages.

For my paper I have chosen two eminent Kannada playwrights who have attempted to highlight women characters in their plays. Kuvempu who wrote in the 30s to 70s and Girish Karnad who began to write in 60s and is still writing. Both these writers seek sources for their subject in history, folk traditions, mythology or epics and try to transform the incidents and the characters to suit the messages that they intend to convey. This is indeed a remarkable attempt as they are trying to view the present in the light of myths and history. Both of them seem to be conscious of the breaking gender barriers and have given enough space for their women characters in their plays. The plays chosen for this analysis are Raktakshi by Kuvempu and Hayavadana by Girish Karnad. Context and content are different but my intention is to study or to draw one's attention to the obvious difference in the language used by these two male authors to portray the so called strong-willed woman.

Here, I would like to quote Anne Barrowdale who says "the challenge of feminism is the insistence that women have as much right to act in and influence the world as do men and must be treated equally in relationships. This has to be taken on board particularly by men, and the process will be painful. It means acknowledging that the sex to which they belong has done wrong in oppressing women, and that even men who support feminism have benefited from this."

Therefore, in this difficult process of advocating righteous treatment to women how much pain the two male writers Kuvempu and Girish Karnad have been able to sustain. Do they succumb to the contradictory patriarchal voices or do they overcome the warring

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chauvinistic? Do they write as mere writers or as male writers?

### **Padmini of Hayavadana and Rudrambe in Raktakshi**

Padmini of Hayavadana as the name itself suggests sensuality has been confined to sexually defined roles - a wife, a seductress, a betrayer and an inspiration for male authors. Whereas the name Rudrambe in Raktakshi is a combination of two words Rudra and Ambe. Rudra indicates rage while ambe implies mother. It can also be a combination of male and female elements.

Raktakshi was influenced by Shakerspeare's Hamlet and Rudrambe is the counterpart of Ophelia. Kuvempu tackles the issue of deceit and greed for throne. Hayavadana as we all know draws inspiration from one of the Betala Vikramaditya stories which was also responsible for Thomas Mann's 'Transposed Heads'. Karnad takes up the complex issue of the eternal question of mind and dynamics. While Kuvempu tries to replace the passive character of Ophelia by creating a strong eloquent character Rudrambe, Karnad tire to project the issue of choice through highlighting the character of Padmini the women in the play. Both the writers give enough space for women's voice.

Whatever may be the influences, and inspirations of two authors the main concern is the way they transform the original characters and wither they really succeed in capturing the essence of a woman and in projecting them as empowered.

Padmini, a woman of instincts all through the play is portrayed as a coquettish playful young woman whose pursuit stop at gaining the love and attention of the 'perfect man' or the complete man. Even the concept of a complete man lacks clarity in her mind and she remains confused till the end. Whereas, for Rudrambe love becomes a pretext to exhibit her inner strength. Rudrambe's quest begins where Padmini's ends. One wonders whether Hayavadana stage in the 70's marks a regression in the creative process of Girish Karnad who was distanced from Kuvempu by over forty years.

Kuvempu way back in 1932 could create a character like Rudrambe who belies the generalized famous line in 'Hamlet' "frailty thy name is women". He succeeds in reversing the role of Ophelia and thus highlighting the significant role of a women other than those assigned by the society.

Erikson one of the critic a cited by Kate Millet in sexual politics began his famous essay "womanhood and the inner space" by deprecation that part of male achievement which has brought the race to the brink of destruction and appeals to women to save it.

"May be if women could only gain the determination to represent publicly What they have always stood for privately in evolution and in history (realism of upbringing, resourcefulness in peace - Keeping and devotion to heeling), they might well add an ethically restraining supranational power to politics in the widest sense." (219 Kate Millet, Sexual Politics).

### **Language of Rudrambe Compared With Padmini**

Accordingly, the personal language of Rudrambe is so strong and explosive that it causes a political change. She gets transformed into Raktakshi (women in bloody eyes) in order to avenge the death of her beloved Basavaiah and in the process destroys the evil elements that ruined the

province. Raktakshi arrives at the time when men became Powerless. Kuvempu has replaced the helplessness of men by the determined, courageous, focused character of Raktakshi. The docile beautiful Rudrambe is elevated to all powerful action - oriented Raktakshi.

Whereas Padmini's language is stagnant - it does not transcend the personal. When she is not empowered enough to solve her own problem how can gain public representation. The problem of choice remains unsolved and Padmini succumbs to the conflict. While Rudrambe gains impetus from the death of Basaviah. Padmini ends herself death the death of her two men. She is bold only in her thought but not in her action. In order to satiate her desire for Kapila she transposes the heads as she is not capable of openly defying the norms of the society. She chooses to live with Kapila's body and Devadatta's head under the well protects shelter of societal acceptance. She openly encourages Kapila and hurts Devadatta in her words but is proved weak when it comes to action as she only chooses to conform to the society. She maneuvers things to suit her convenience.

As a contrast, Rudrambe growth up with all the royal privileges is not inhibited to put on the act of a mad woman in order to discover the truth. She does not fear the society. She is determined to avenge the death of her beloved Basaviah. She pushes aside her modesty and courageously chooses to travel on the path of vengeance for justice. There is a sea of difference in the way both the women characters react to the death of their men. One can mark the different in their language.

Soon after discovering that Devadatta and Kapila have killed each other in the Kali temple Padmini's reaction is that of a women who is left utterly helpless and unable to face the world.

"Oh God! What's this? Both! And didn't even think of me before they went? What shall I do? What shall I do? Oh, Devadatta, What did I do that you left me alone in this state? Was that how much you loved me? And you, Kapila, who looked at me with dog's eyes - you too? How selfish you are - how unkind! What shall I do now - where shall I go? How can I go home? (Pause)

Home? And what shall I say When I get there? What shall I say happened? And who'll believe me? They're bound to say it. Then what'll happen to me? No, Mother Kali, no, -it's too horrible to think of. No! Kapila's gone - Devadatta's gone. Let me go with them. (Picks up the sword.)

I don't have the strength to hack off my head. But what does it matter how I die, Mother? You don't care. It's the same to you - another offering! all right. Have it then - here's another offering for you.

But when Rudrambe encounters Honnaih with the body of Basaviah her vociferous language shakes up the silence of women accumulated over the years.

"You sinner, devilish traitor Honnaiah

how could you stab my beloved

(Drawing a sword from her waist band)

(Suddenly, with all the tension drained from her body, she collapses and cries in a heart - rending tone.)

O my beloved, my king, O Basavaiah.

Is this what you got in return for loving me!

(Again getting up with firm determination).

Death! O death! Can't you fill this void.

In my chest?

Come here fill it up.  
 (Acting as if stabbing someone).  
 O father, you too ran away.  
 Leaving behind my beloved? (Cries)  
 O Shivaiah, wretched coward and traitor,  
 Instead of killing Honnaiah did you  
 run away to save your skin?  
 Let it be! I will complete this task today.  
 I! I am not Rudrambe, I am Raktakshi.  
 Honnaiah, are you pretending to cremate  
 The body after killing him?  
 You are not retraining from that cemetery.  
 If I am truly Raktakshi you will never return.  
 I will bathe the soul of my beloved with your blood.  
 O dark night! Come with me  
 To witness the traitor Honnaiah's sacrifice  
 Human sacrifice! Sacrifice in the cemetery  
 (Shaking with emotions, with her stare fixed on the  
 sword, she slowly departs)."

Rudrambe intensely experiences and expresses her sorrow over her beloved losing his life. She is concerned about Basavaiah's life and her loss. But Padmini is worried about Kapil and Devadatta leaving her alone. She is more concerned about her loss and not their lives. Rudrambe dons the role of Raktakshi and is all set to move ahead with her new goal. She screams at sky and appeals to the nature to give her the required strength to overcome the grief of separation from her beloved and to avenge his death. She is grieved, no doubt about it but she is strong enough to think and plan her future steps. When she is grieved one can feel depth of her sorrow, when she rages with anger one can almost experience the fury underlying her words.

Whereas Padmini's utterances suggest selfishness and indifference. She does not seem to be involved in the problem and hence fails to carry the audience along with the grievous situation. The playwright also fails to differentiate the language of joy from sorrow. Even the crisis seems to be casual. Padmini indulges in silly talk but fails to speak and act at the required moment. Even during the climax when she makes her second and final choice and walks into the forest seeking Kapila her indecisiveness, her confusion and dearth of reason is very much evident in her evasive short replies and also irritating silence. She fails to justify her behaviour. She is eloquent during insignificant moments and silent where speed is necessary.

"Kapil: (Suddenly.)"Why have you come away from him?

Padmini: What do you want me to say?  
 (They freeze.)

Bhagavata: How could I make you understand? If Devadatta had changed overnight and had gone back to his original form, I would have forgotten you completely. But that's not how it happened. He changed day by day. Inch by inch, Hair by hair. Like the trickling sand. Like the water filling the pot. And as I saw him change - I couldn't get rid of you. That's what Padmini must tell Kapila. She should say more, without concealing anything, 'Kapila, if that rishi had given me to you, would I have gone back to Devadatta someday exactly like this?' But she doesn't say anything. She remains quiet,

Kapila; (To Padmini.) Why have you come here?

Padmini: I had to see you

Kapila: why? (No replay.) Why? Why did you have to come just when I thought I'd won this long and weary battle? why did you have to pursue me just when I had succeeded in uprooting these memories? I am Kapila now. The rough and violent Kapila. Kapila without a crack between his head and his shoulder. What do you want now? Another head? Another suicide? - Listen to me. Do me a favor. Go back to Devadatta. He is your husband - the father of this child. Devadatta and Padmini! Devadatta and Padmini! A pair coupled with the holy fire as the witness. I have no place there, no peace, no salvation - so go I beg of you. Go."  
 (A Long silence)

As a contrast to this when Rudrambe realizes that she has mistakenly killed honnaih thinking that he is the murderer of Basavaiah she is shattered. But immediately after that she invokes gods to instill courage in her and replace the tenderness with immense power to strike against the actual evil doers. it seems as though her voice and words are her strength.

"O Shiva who drank the deadly poison,  
 Come, remove the poison burning in my heart.  
 O three eyed god who had burned Manmatha,  
 Scorch the tenderness in my heart.  
 O Bhairava, Who marks the end of time with deluge,  
 take root in my heart.  
 In this tender heart instill thider and lighyening.  
 Give me strength to fulfill the last wish of my beloved.  
 Bless me with basavaiah's companionship in all my  
 future births.  
 Let Honnaiah be my brother.  
 Thought my body burns and I am doomed, let your  
 blessing be with me."

Padmini's silence is bleak and ends in a catastrophe where as in the flooding words of Rudrambe combined with action one can look forward to an exchange of power and to a reversal of roles.

Towards the end of the play Hayavadana, after the duel ends in the death of Kapila and Devadatta, Padmini jumps into the funeral pyre. She fails to establish her individuality nor does she prove that she has a separate identity. When her men die she also ceases to exist. Her character fails to make an impact on the audience. Her life revolves around the love of men and loses its axis when they die. Whereas Rudrambe gains new strength, new identity and individuality after the death of her beloved. She, unlike Padmini does not jump into the funeral pyre but tries to dig up the grave of Basavaiah to bring him back alive probably in the form of her newly gained strength. That way, she lives to avenge the death and does not evade the purpose or her pursuit.

### Conclusion

Therefore, it is evident that Rudrambe speaks the language of emancipation and not Padmini. I would like to conclude with a quote by Helene Cixous who believed that women's difference from man is both sexual and linguistic. She writes in the Laugh of Medusa

"It is by writing from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speed which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other

than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is in a place other than silence. Women should break out the snare of silence. They should not be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem”.

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