

A Confluence: Synge's *Deirdre of Sorrows* and Karnard's *Hayavadhana*

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John Millington Synge's *Deirdre of Sorrows*, is his last and incomplete play. This was published posthumously. Synge borrowed the plot from an Irish legend, *The Fate of the Children of Uisneach*. Synge has given a new face to the legend. His characters do not speak an old and archaic language but wear a contemporary outlook. "Synge wishes to break through the insulation, the stereo-types, surrounding contemporary discussions of the myths, to see the characters not as mystical or heroic, but as men and women motivated by the same needs and fears, piety and great that we are..." Observer Weldon Thornton (146). As per Michael H. Bengel: "...he (Synge) transformed his royal characters into beings who speak and who are motivated in ways that would be familiar to a contemporary audience" (Kopper 88). Girish Karnard has taken his plot for *Hayavadhana* from Mann's translation of *Kathasaritsagara*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. Karnard also presents a contemporary look to the ancient story. S. Karisha Bhatta says, "...Karnard attempts to interpret... myth from an angle of the contemporary society"(186). The story is also relevant to the modern world. M.K. Naik says that Karnard's story "has an urgent relevance to present day thinking about man and his world"(191). So, both plays are from ancient mythic origins but wear a contemporary out-look and are relevant to the modern world.

In *Deirdre of Sorrows*, Deirdre is loved by Naisi, a hunter and Conchubor, the High King of Ulster. Naisi and Conchubor are relatives, Anne Saddlemyer calls Naisi a "Warrior as well as a hunter"(Ayling 204). Conchubor himself declares, "The like of me has a store of knowledge..."(Synge 283). Naisi is physically strong, whereas Conchubor is old but, intelligent. Conchubor, being the king is highest in the hierarchy and Naisi being a hunter, low. In *Hayavadhana*, Padmini is loved by Devadatta, a man of intellect and Kapila, a blacksmith. Devadatta and Kapila are friends. "Devadatta, a man of intellect and Kapila, a man all body are close friends..."(Bhatta 189). Devadatta is an educated man and a scholar. He is "...comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence"(Karnard 2). Kapila is uneducated but has a strong physique. "He is dark and plain to look at ... in strength and physical skills, he has no equal" (Karnard 2). In the social hierarchy "Devadatta's name stresses his primacy in social hierarchy" (Naik 195). Kapila is placed low, ".....as far as the social hirerachy is concerned, he is certainly the bottom dog" (Naik 196). Thus both Naisi and Kapila are strong men, and Conchubor and Devadatta are intelligent persons. Both the playwrights have connected their male characters, Naisi and Conchubor, and Devadatta and Kapila, with relationships. In the social hierarchy, Conchubor and Devadatta are placed in a higher strata and Naisi and Kapila in a lower plane.

“Strong” Naisi knows that if he loves Deirdre, there would be lot of bloodshed. Still, he boldly loves her. He is ready to marry her. Naisi says “Yet it’s a poor thing it’s should bring you to a tale of blood and broken bodies, and the filth of the grave...” (Synge 298), Anne Saddlemyer says, “Perhaps he has more to lose... he knows long before the untidiness of death...” (Ayling 204). Knowing fully about the might of Conchubor, Naisi has no hesitation in saying “yes” to Deirdre’s proposal. “Intelligent” Devadatta also loves Padmini very much, he substantiates this by saying, “I swear, Kapila, with you as my witness I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I’ll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I’ll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra” (Karnard 14). Thus swearing, Devadatta makes the situation difficult for himself. He goes on to marry Padmini. Being fully aware of the consequences, both Naisi and Devadatta choose their spouses. Naisi is ready to face death and Devadatta is ready to give himself up as a sacrifice. So, both Naisi and Devadatta are ready to face death boldly. The choice, in both cases, is clearly fatal.

When Deirdre wants to go to Emain, Naisi hesitates to take a positive decision. He is reluctant to go back to Emain because Conchubor is there. He answers Fergus, “...we’re better this place...” (Synge 310) and he also says, “We’ll stay this place till our lives and time are worn out” (Synge 312). But when Deirdre insists on going to Emain, Naisi says, “Come away Deirdre, and it’s little we’ll think of safety or the grave beyond it...” (Synge 315). Naisi also says, “If a near death is coming what will be my trouble losing the earth and stars over it, and you, Deirdre are their flame and bright crown?” (Synge 315-6). Even though Naisi feels that it is unsafe there, he feels that Deirdre is more important than his safety. Eugene Benson says, “...Naisi seeks to persuade Deirdre not to return to Emain Macha even though it is clear she will do so” (43). Deirdre persuades him to go to Emain, so he goes there. In *Hayavadhana*, Padmini wants to go to Ujjain, but Devadatta is not interested in that trip. He says, “Padmini, I’ve told you ten times—not to face such hazards (of traveling)... But you won’t listen...” (Karnad 20). One of the reasons for Devadatta opposing this trip is Kapila accompanying them. Padmini also agrees not to go to Ujjain, but suddenly when Kapila comes with a cart, she decides to go to Ujjain. Devadatta is disappointed but he does not reveal that. He goes with her. So, both Naisi and Devadatta are not interested in their trips but make them only because of their wives and to please them.

In *Deirdre of Sorrows*, Naisi and Deirdre reach Emain Macha where Naisi is killed by Conchubor’s men. Deirdre commits suicide and falls into the grave where the bodies of her husband Naisi and other lay. In *Hayavadhana*, on the way itself Devadatta remembers his prose to Kali and the story takes a different turn, but at the end, both Devadatta and Kapila die in a duel. Padmini decides to commit suicide by falling into “sathi fire”. So, at the end, both Deirdre and Padmini die at the feet of their dead husbands.

In both plays, two men love a lady; the love triangle is there. Naisi and Devadatta are ready to face death without any hesitation to attain their loved ones. Initially both of them are against their trips but both of them go on with their trips because of their wives. At the end Naisi dies in the fight with Conchubor’s men and Deirdre commits suicide and

Devadatta dies in the fight with Kapila and Padmini ends her life by performing Sathi. Thus there are analogous elements in these two plays.

The societies presented in these plays are different. J.M. Synge's play is based on an Irish legend and Girish Karnard's play on an Indian myth. The plot and technique used by the playwrights are different. But one can see many similar elements in these plays. Gilbert Murray on comparing *Hamlet* and *Orestes* says, "... I suspect, strange, unanalyzed vibration below the surface, an undercurrent of desires and fears and parsims, long slumbering yet eternally familiar, which have for thousands of years lain near the root of our intimate emotions and have been wrought into the fabric of our most magical dreams" (Scott 281). These have also brought *Deirdre* and *Hayavadhana* together.

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