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## Theme of Female Sexuality: A Study of *Hayavadana*

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The Hayavadana folktale has already been existing before Karnad took up and used it as an “objective correlative” to express what he wanted to express through a unique drama of human emotions and feelings. So from a folklorist perspective he approaches his subject which defines form and theme of his play - *Hayavadana*. The world of play is rooted in the remote past but has strong bearings in the present. In the tone of unraveling murky mysteries, the play presents a world of mysterious passions, of dark and forbidden emotional energy inherent in woman’s sexuality. The central issue of the play, one may not subscribe the oft repeated perfection- imperfection identity-crisis syndrome, is woman’s sexuality. The play sets out to persuade the reader of the magnificence of such immoral passion. The reader is at first expected to take the gigantic institutional drives of extraordinary creatures at their own valuation. Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila, as special creatures, are set apart from the mundane world about them by their heightened capacity of human passion, in their emotional tangled relationships. They identify themselves with an uncompromising primordial force. But this is absurd as much as the detail that surrounds them. Karnad has to discover these absurdities, and evaluate them by his technique to persuade us that they are mistaken in their estimate of themselves. The theme of exuberant, wild, and demonic sexual energies slipping into bottomless void in human realm is difficult to sustain. The characters’ passionate longings and daydreaming end in the smoke. We can see that folklore has been a device, a mechanical device which objectifies the material, examines it and evaluates.

Girish Karnad has presented Padmini driven with natural urges and struggling to keep them in checks and bounds. Her raw, animal like basic passions have similarity to that of Mary Turner’s longing for her native servant Moses in Doris Lessing’s novel *The Grass is Singing*. In both these works the biological needs of female protagonists are getting heavy over the societal norms and conventions. Lessing depicts that the black natives of Rhodesia were desired by the white women because of their superior sexual potency, for example, Lessing says:

Yet he [Tony Marston] had met a doctor on the boat coming out, with years of experience in a country district, who had told him that he would be surprised to know the number of white women who had relations with black men. Tony felt at the time that he would be surprised; he felt it would be rather like having a relation with an animal, inspite of his “progressiveness”.(Lessing 186)

To lay before us the full character of this passion, to show how it first comes into being and comes to dominate the world about it and the life that follows upon it, Karnad gives his material a broad scope in time, and finds a means of narration, and point of view in the figure of Bhagvata who conducts the proceedings in the play, and encompasses the material in his concept of motive and justifies his telling.

The whole action of *Hayavadana* is presented against the background of cloddish world of conventions about it, and which surges forward and backward with its fist, and which wonders at their violations. Before Devadatta’s marriage with Padmini, Devadatta’s

great learning, Padmni's blazing beauty and Kapila's stout physique along with practical world of conventional morality, are established. Bhagavata, the narrator, tells us like a "once upon a time" beginning of a folktale:

This is the city of Dharmapura, ruled by King Dharamsheela and whose empire is already reached the ends of eight directions. Two youths who dwells in this city are our heroes. One is Devadatta. Comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence. Devadatta is the only son of revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. Having felled the mightiest pundits of the Kingdom in debates on logic and love, having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit, Devadatta is as if the apple of every eye in Dharmapura. The other youth is Kapila. He is the only son of the ironsmith Lohita, who is to the King's armoury as an axle to the chariot wheel. He is dark and plain to look at, yet in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing, in strength and in physical skills he has no equal. (Girish Karnad I: 107)

Both Devadatta and Kapila are best friends. Bhagavata continues:

The world wonders at their friendship. The world sees two young men wandering down the streets of Dharmapura, hand in hand, and remembers Lava and Kussha, Rama and Lakshman, Krishna and Balarama. (Girish Karnad I: 107)

Religious connotations are read in their friendship. Devadatta is struck, as if by lightning, by extraordinary beauty of Padmini, so is Kapila who visits her house with a marriage proposal:

I had not thought anyone could be more beautiful than the wench Ragini who acts Rambha in our village troupe. But this one! You're right- she is Yashini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati- all rolled into one. (Girish Karnad I: 123)

At the same time he predicts that Devadatta's fragile body is not meant for her, she needs a man of steel. Reflection of his observation overshadows Padmini's struggle for fulfilment. But the focus for the time being is on Padmini's physical charms. Padmini is not only blazing beauty, she is also the loveliest creature on earth, when Kapila sees her, after her marriage to Devadatta,

... he begins to wag his tail. Sits upon his hind legs as though he were afraid to let her words fall to the ground. And pleading in his eyes .... (Girish Karnad I: 129)

Padmini's marriage to Devadatta is arranged and solemnized. Details are not given except the announcement of Bagavata:

Padmini is the daughter of the leading merchant in Dharmapura. In her house, the very floor is swept by the goddess of wealth. In Devadatta's house, they've the goddess of learning for a maid. What could the stand in the way of bringing the families together? [Marriage, Music] Padmini become the better half of Devedatta and settled in his house. (Girish Karnad I: 126)

Their marriage is arranged as it is socially convenient and suitable to both the families and solemnized within the social conventions with due rituals and ceremonies. The crucial point is one does not know whether Padmini really wanted and yearned for a husband like Devadatta, and when she asserts her status as a married woman, we wonder whether she really desires and cares for Devadatta, her husband:

You are my Saffron, my marriage thread, my deity. Why should you be disturbed? I like making fun of Kapila- he is such an innocent. Looks a proper devil, but the way he blushes and giggles and turns red, he might have been a bride. (Girish Karnad I: 129)

The implications of Bhagavata's speech about the social desirability of marriage and of Padmini's assertion of socially recognized status of married woman postulate a social order and conventions. In other words, a cloddish world exists about these creatures. Before the marriage Bhagavata strikes an ominous note:

Two friends there were – one mind, one heart. They saw a girl and forgot themselves. But they could not understand the song she sang. (Girish Karnad I: 116)

And female chorus intervenes to sing:

Why should love to the sap of single body? When the stem is drunk with thick yearning of many petalled, many- flowered lantana. Why should it be tied down to the relation of single flower? (Girish Karnad I: 117)

Then Bhagavata adds to the song:

They forgot themselves and took off their bodies. And she took the laughing heads, and held them high so the pouring blood bathed her, coloured her, coloured her red. Then she danced around and sang. (Girish Karnad I: 117)

This ominous song takes on the garb of nightmarish dream of headless bodies and bloodbath. Karnad is not only defining but building up the thematic thrust casting shadows on the coming events. As he set on to developing his subject matter, he is subtracting the unnecessary and while making that an ambiguity pops up by giving the narration on preparation for the journey to the Ujjain fair.

PADMINI. You mean it's dangerous to be with him? The way you talk one would never imagine he was your best friend.

DEVADATTA. (incensed): Why do you have to twist everything I say...

PADMINI. (conciliatory): What did I say? Listen, if you really don't want to go to Ujjain today, let's not. When Kapila comes, tell him I'm ill.

DEVADATTA. But... you will be disappointed.

PADMINI. Me? Of course not, we'll do as you tell. You remember what the priest said – I'm your 'half' now. The better half! We go to Ujjain some other time... In another couple of months there is big fair. We'll go then – just two of us. All right? We'll cancel today's trip. (Girish Karnad I: 129-30)

Padmini is putting off her visit not out of love for her husband Devadatta, but to uphold nuptial vows. The conventions of the society are operative for Padmini at this stage at least. But when Kapila is told about the cancellation of the visit by Devadatta, Kapila is devastated as if “the whole world has been wiped out” (Girish Karnad I: 131) for him, and starts to go out.

Seeing disappointment in his eyes Padmini appears to announce change of her mind, addressing Kapila she says:

PADMINI. Why are you sitting here? When are we going to start? We are already late...

KAPILA. What’s wrong with me? I’m in perfect health. (Girish Karnad I: 131)

Earlier, Padmini’s conduct was in keeping with the social conventions that bind her to her husband’s wishes. The moot point is that social conventions are operative, and clash with them is not emerging clearly. But when Padmini looks at Kapila, her control over her, her domestic obligations, her sense of right and wrong collapse, her whole being vibrates at the sight of Kapila. She, all of a sudden, reverses her earlier decision to drop the visit. She is melting towards Kapila. Karnad is discovering and developing his experience dispassionately towards positive definition.

Next stage of mode of drama undertakes to give us the very process by which the conflicts between the rival attitudes take us into the emerging dialectic- all of which are the essence of dramatic presentation. We have crossed the first stage in the process when Devadatta is averse to the visit to Ujjain but Padmini by and by prevail upon him to undertake the journey, but in between, the conflict exists:

DEVADATTA. Padmini, I’ve told you ten times already I don’t like the idea of this trip. You should rest – not face such hazards. The cart will probably shake like an earth quake. It’s dangerous in your condition. But you won’t listen.

PADMINI. 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. I only to stumble and you act as though it’s all finished and gone... (Girish Karnad I: 127)

Metaphorical crescendo (with phrases like ‘earthquake’ in the moving ‘cart’ – “I only have to stumble”, and “you act as though it’s all finished and gone...”) anticipates the coming ‘earthquake’ in the lines of the protagonist that will “all finish”, will wipe them out.

The dialectic continues, so does Karnad’s scrutiny:

DEVADATTA. You’ve no sense of what to say. So long as you can chatter and run like a child...

PADMINI. (back at the window): Where is Kapila?

DEVADATTA. ... and drool over Kapila all day.

PADMINI(taken aback). What do you mean?

DEVADATTA. What else should I say? The other day I wanted to read out a play of Bhasa’s to you and sure enough Kapila drops in.

PADMINI. Oh! That's biting you still, is it? But why are you blaming me? He was your friend even before you married me, wasn't he? He used to drop in everyday even then...

DEVADATTA. But shouldn't he realize I am a married man now? He can't just go on as before...

PADMINI. Don't blame him. It's my fault. He learnt a bit about poetry from you and I thought he might enjoy Bhasa. So I asked him to come. He didn't want to but I insisted. (Girish Karnad I: 128)

Besides the conflicting attitudes, the language persists with ironic qualifications as the thematic projection is being built up. Shifting of images from one to another is only what Yvor Winters calls 'qualitative progression' which only presents connotative pattern, not logical coherence, not movement. Movement depends on the psychology of the protagonist, which is missing in Karnad's play, so will be the depth as and when the emotional upheaval comes.

Movement towards climax begins with the Ujjain journey in the cart. The journey as part of the expressionistic technique carries the movement from inward to outward, from the inner recesses of the conscious into the daylight of the conscious as the sexual implications are overriding:

PADMINI. How beautiful you drive the cart, Kapila! Your hands don't even move, but oxen seem to know exactly which way you want them to go... I remember when Devadatta took me in a cart. That was soon after our marriage... oxen took everything except the road. He only had to pull to the right, and oft they would rush to the left! (Girish Karnad I: 133)

Consciously or unconsciously Karnad has used 'cart' (earlier Kapila was reported to be having the 'cart' repaired) as one of the central symbols which acts like an axial in the wheel of the play – sex symbol – shaping the developing experience. As the Ujjain party stops the cart, getting down Padmini slips but Devadatta supports her, but she slips all the same as Kapila climbs the tree to bring her Fortunate Lady's flower:

PADMINI (watching him, aside). How he climbs – like an ape. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back, like an ocean with muscles rippling across it...

(aside). He is like a celestial being reborn as a hunter. How his body sways, his limbs curve – it's dance almost.

(aside). No woman could resist him.

DEVADATTA (aside). No woman could resist him – and what doesn't matter that she's married? What a fool I've been. All these days I only saw that pleading in his eyes stretching out arms, begging for a favor. But never looked in her eyes. And when I did, took the white of her eyes for their real depth. Only now I see the depths. Now I see these flames leaping up from depths... look at those yellow, purple flames. Look how she's pouring her soul into his mould. (Girish Karnad I: 134)

Kapila's strong body is pulling her irresistibly. And Padmini wonders how long she can go on like that. Devadatta's and Padmini's eyes meet, both look away. This is embarrassing

moment for both of them, yet more for Padmini as she is an explosive bomber. This is an important milestone in the developing structure of the play as it picks up the significance of Hayavadana's mother's strange story and strengthens the thematic trajectory. Hayavadana's mother did not choose any one of these princes, who came from China, Persia and Africa, for a husband.

The last one to come was the Prince of Araby. My mother took one look at that handsome Prince sitting on his great white stallion – and she fainted. (Girish Karnad I: 113)

She fainted because she had realized her choice for a husband and on seeing a white stallion was a violent rupture in the natural scheme of things and also a violent shedding of social codes. But her whole being becomes vibrant, is shaken to its foundation. She, in other words, was shocked before she could shock the world about her, when she recovered, marrying not the Araby Prince but his white stallion, a fully grown stout bodied horse, overriding all protests and oppositions. Unbelievable marriage of a royal princess to a stallion (symbolizing wild sexual male energies) is revelation of woman's primordial sexuality. The whole episode may be taken as a metaphor for woman's sexuality which connects with Padmini's do and die struggle for fulfillment. Hayavadana's Princess Mother achieved her fulfillment living a happy married life with the horse for fifteen years, and had a child also. Sexual implications in the outer frame of the structure link up with Padma's grueling struggle. Karnad is controlling his structure rationally, working out the consequences of Padmini's instinctual swell. We can note here that the movement is slow and the psychological depth of the heroine's motivation is missing.

The process of development is linear. We have seen, Karnad started with subtractions, pick up the clash of rival attitudes, 'dialectic arose out of the grosser grounds'. He is now heading for showdown keeping the social mainstream conventions in view as Kapila explains the significance of the nature's colour-scheme in the Fortunate Lady's Flower:

KAPILA. [It is called Fortunate Lady's Flower] because it has all marks of marriage a woman puts on. The yellow on 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 – her near the stem a row of black dots, like a necklace of black beads...( Girish Karnad I: 134)

All the coloured marks in the flower are the coloured marks a married woman wear representing her proud status in the order of society. Conventions are at work against the basic derives and urges of the being. In the creative process the theme is being defined, mode is mythical and progression is qualitative. Soon the swell in Padmini acquires a volcanic eruption in the head transformation act in the goddess Kali temple. By this stage Karnad is attempting to evaluate his thematic substance by giving a chance of fulfillment to Padmini's wild wish through the use of magic. It is not confusion, on part of Padmini, in the exchange of heads but the overwhelming surge of the unconscious drives – the unconscious drives of woman's sexuality. As part of technique the evaluation is rooted in exploration, so Karnad explores the experience after Padmini got what she always wanted the strong body of Kapila, the head of Devadatta is her social security. It may be mentioned here that the use of magic is dramatized accomplishment of certain ends at dream level or at level more than natural. Dreams become a technical device in the hands of the author. The resonance of nightmarish song of Bhagvata in the beginning of blood pouring heads bathing the singing girl red echoes in the temple as Padmini handles the beheaded bodies and bleeding heads. The outcome,

though look propitious, is disastrous. Karnad is exploring the reactions of Padmini after she exchanges virile and vigorous body of Kapila with Devadatta's head. Here after Devadatta presents Kapila's body, Kapila presents Devadatta's body.

DEVADATTA(embracing Padmini). My Padmini, my lovely Padmini.

PADMINI. My King – My Master...

DEVADATTA. My little lightening...

PADMINI. The light of my joy...

DEVADATTA. The flower of my palm...

PADMINI. My celestial bodied Gandharva.... My sun faced Indra...

DEVADATTA. My Queen of Indra's court...

PADMINI(caressing his shoulders). Come. Let's go quickly. Where the earth is soft and green grass plays the swing.

DEVADATTA. Let us. Where there the, banyan spreads a canopy and curtains off the skies.

PADMINI. What a wide chest. What another canopy I need? (Girish Karnad I: 132)

Padmini's wish for a canopy of wide chest – her wish, in other words for male sexual vigour – is being fulfilled for the first time after marriage. Her impatience connects her with Hayavadana's mother's insisted marriage with stallion, and reinforces the theme of woman's sexuality. Delay is agonizing. Yet before she disappears with Devadatta, she tells Kapila, ominously, that they will meet again. Karnad is not using any arbitrary device for revealing the character motivation or for heightening the dramatic interest through the narrowing the perspective upon the material, rather he is subtly defining the theme, controlling the structural thrust and penetrating the outer human crust to get the essential human truth.

As law of probability operates in the artistic endeavor content and form reshapes each other in the developing of thematic contours. We see in the act two the focus on this aspect getting sharper, but soon losing its sharpness as Karnad's own logic takes over. Devadatta is telling Padmini that some unexpected thing happened at Ujjain fair from where he has brought dolls:

DEVADATTA. ... there was a wrestling pit and a wrestler from Kamarupa was challenging people to fight him. I don't know what got into me. Before I'd even realized it, I had stripped and jumped into the pit.

PADMINI(fondling the dolls). You didn't! You've never ever wrestled before...

DEVADATTA. Didn't think of anything. I felt inspired! Within a couple of minutes, I had pinned him to ground...

PADMINI(caressing his arm). That day in the gymnasium you defeated the champion in a sword- fight. Now this! Don't over it; people may start suspecting.

DEVADATTA. Of course they won't. I was standing barebodied and not a soul suspected. A friend even asked me if I'd learnt it from Kapila.



PADMINI. You have, after all!

(They laugh)

DEVADATTA. You know, I'd always thought one had to use one's brain while wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body doesn't wait thoughts – it acts! (Girish Karnad I: 140)

His is the most desirable body for Padmini and she makes no secret of it, and in possession of what she ever dreamt of. But the thesis expounded by the sage in the play that the head represents the man, and controls the body is being questioned. Here the body is in fact impelling the brain to think its way – something contrary to the thesis. But at the next moment when Devadatta pulls Padmini into his arms, she is not responsive, rather is sulking:

PADMINI(Pause). Devadatta...

DEVADATTA. Yes?

PADMINI. Why do you have to apply that sandal oil on your body!

DEVADATTA. What?

PADMINI (hesitating). Your body had that strong, male smell before – I liked it.

DEVADATTA. But I've been using sandal oil since I was a child!

PADMINI. I don't mean that. But when we came back from the temple Kali – you used to smell so manly...

DEVADATTA. You mean that unwashed, sweaty smell Kapila had? (Incredulous) You like that? (Girish Karnad I: 170-71)

Firstly Padmini's sexuality is overwhelming, recalling the image of the white stallion, that's what the theme is about. Secondly, the logic of head controlling the body is asserting.

PADMINI. ... what's happened to you these days? You sit at home all day. Never go out. You've forgotten all your swimming and sports.

DEVADATTA. I'm Brahmin, Padmini, my duty...

PADMINI. It was fun first few days because it was new. All that muscle and strength. But how long can one go on like that? I have a family tradition to maintain – the daily reading, writing and studies...

PADMINI. I don't know.

DEVADATTA (affectionately). Now look here, Padmini (puts his hand round her shoulder, she suddenly shudders.)

PADMINI. Nothing – I don't know why – I suddenly had goose flesh. (Girish Karnad I: 157-58)

Karnad is following the logic – head controlling the body, Kapila's body is being molded into a frail frame of earlier Devadatta's fragile frame. This metamorphosis is also brought out through dolls. Here the role of dolls – the folktheatre device of masks – becomes functional

to dramatise – what a soliloquy would do in western play – the inner process of thoughts of a character:

DOLL 1. He touched me and...

DOLL 2. Yes?

DOLL 1. His palms! They were so rough once, when he first brought us here. Like a labourer's but now they are soft ... sickly soft ... like a young girl's.

And after a while Padmini sings a lullaby:

PADMINI. Here comes a rider!... the white clad rider rides a white charger. The white horse gallops across hills, streams and fields....(half way through the lullaby , Devadatta comes in and sits by Padmini's side, reading. They don't look at each other. At the end of the lullaby, they fall asleep)

DOLL1. Behind her eyelids, she is dreaming.

DOLL2. I don't see anything.

DOLL1. It's still hazy – hasn't started yet. Do you see it now?

DOLL2 (eagerly). Yes, Yes. (They stare at her)

DOLL1. A man.

DOLL2. But not her husband.

DOLL1. Someone else.

- - - - -

DOLL1 (baffled). But he's climbing tree!

DOLL2(almost a wail of disappointment). He's dived into a river!

- - - - -

(Padmini wakes up and mime putting the baby to sleep)

PADMINI(suddenly vicious). Change! Change! Change! Change!( Girish Karnad I: 160)

Karnad, in short, embraces the *Kathasaritasagra* thesis without questioning it or questioning its premises and presents the thesis along the professed lines that head controls the body. Devadatta's body now turns into its original self, so has Kapila's body. Padmini obsessed as she is with the smell of strong male body is faced with last time choice of her life – rather faced with the gnawing crisis at the decisive moment of her existence. Her obsession is getting overpowering gliding out of her control. She for once throws away the net of social constraints, and dashes to meet Kapila into the dark forest where when the day dawns “the fun begins. The circus in the tree tops and the cock-fights in the shower of features. And the dances! The tiger dance, and the peacock-dance” (Girish Karnad I: 165).

The images of cock-fights in the “shower of features” and the dances reveal her emotional state of mind, her growing hopes to join Kapila who has now become tough and muscular.

When she meets him, she is transfixed for a while. Kapila is surprised to see her in the thick forest, and asks her to return instead of stirring old memories. She says she would, only after her child wakes up from sleep, meanwhile she may sit there look at him, and have her fill for the rest of her life without even speaking a word.

KAPILA. What does it matter now whether you stay or go? You've done the damage. I had buried all those faceless memories in my skin. Now you've dug them up with your claws.

PADMINI. Why should one bury anything?

KAPILA. Why shouldn't one? Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?

PADMINI. Whose incompleteness? Yours?

KAPILA. Yes, mine. One beats the body into shape, but one can't beat away the memories trapped in it. Isn't that surprising? That the body should have its own ghosts, its own secrets? Memories of touch – memories of a body swaying in these arms, of warm skin against this palm – memories which one cannot recognize, cannot understand, cannot even name because this head wasn't there when they happened.

PADMINI. Kapila...

KAPILA(without anger). Why did you come? You came. You touched me. You held my hand, and my body recognized your touch. I have never touched you, but this body, this appendage, laughed and flowered out in a festival of memories to which I'm an outcaste.

PADMINI. Poor Kapila!

KAPILA. Don't pity me.

PADMINI. Be quiet, stupid. Your body in a river swam and danced in it. Shouldn't your head know what river it was, what swim? Your head too must submerge that river: the flow must rumple your hair, run its tongue in your ears and press your head to its bosom. Until that's done, you'll continue to be incomplete.

(Kapila raises his head and looks at her; she caresses his face, like a blind person trying to imprint it on her finger-tips. Then she rests her head on his chest)

My Kapila! My poor, poor Kapila! How needlessly you've tortured yourself.

(Kapila lifts her up and takes her in)( Girish Karnad I: 170-71)

Needless to comment that Padmini's speech is filled with sexual overtones. Before Devadatta arrives, they have been together for four days, as is testified by Bhagawata.

At this critical stage Karnad ruffles only the hard emotional glossy crust and is not penetrating deep into the depth to rock bottom existential truth, to the truth of her whirling response to Kapila's body. He is contemplating the experience all right but not getting deeper. What is creditable, otherwise, is Karnad's control over shaping the narrative as he

handles admirably several threads, the preceding and ongoing, in the story, knits them into meaningful momentum. In other words, the past images and symbols keep coming up with their connotations and building up the thematic thrust.

As the narrative heads towards disastrous slope, Padmini extends her negative response to Kapila's proposal for living with both of them who are madly in love with her, citing Dropdi's example. She infact recoils at the thought not only of her being shared by two men but also, of the two men sharing each other. She reveals her mind – her logic – before performing 'Sati':

... I couldn't say, 'yes'. No, Kapila, no, Devadatta. I know it in my blood you couldn't have lived together. You would've had to share not only me but your bodies as well. Because you knew death you died in each other's arms. You could only have lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you to death. You forgave each other, but again, left me out. (Girish Karnad I: 176)

Padmini's logic of reflection of the proposal veers round to possible sexual jealousy which ultimately will lead to their mutual destruction, and leave her out again. The mundane world about her, which she defined even through the dark and wild animal infested forest, is overpowering her. She at last is exhausted and burnt out. Her decision to perform 'Sati' is simple enough to gloss over her desire without having her soul stirred.

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