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**A Comparative Analysis of Three Female Characters in the Plays *Blood Wedding, Hayavadana and Phaedra***

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**Abstract**

This research article presents a detailed comparative analysis of three prominent female characters - Bride from *Blood Wedding*, Padmini from *Hayavadana* and Phaedra from *Phaedra*. These characters, though emerging from different cultural and historical contexts, exhibit striking similarities in their emotional conflicts, desires and tragic destinies. The study explores their psychological depth, societal constraints, moral dilemmas and expressions of agency. Through a close textual and thematic analysis, the article argues that these characters represent universal aspects of human experience, particularly the tension between individual desire and social expectations.

**Keywords:** Analysis, Bride, Characters, Comparative, Female, Padmini, Phaedra

**Introduction**

Literature across cultures has consistently explored the complexities of human emotions, particularly love, desire, identity and conflict, with female characters often positioned at the centre of these explorations. Such characters frequently navigate the tension between personal passions and societal expectations, revealing deep psychological and moral struggles. Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* and Jean Racine's *Phaedra* introduce three compelling protagonists - Bride, Padmini and Phaedra - whose lives are shaped by intense emotional conflicts. Although these plays emerge from distinct cultural and historical backgrounds - Spain, India and France - they share common thematic concerns, including forbidden desire, inner turmoil and inevitable tragedy. Each character embodies a unique response to these pressures, reflecting broader human experiences that transcend time and place.

As a dramatic form, theatre offers a powerful lens through which such emotional and moral complexities can be examined. In these works, the protagonists confront dilemmas arising from the clash between individual longing and social or ethical constraints. *Bride* is driven by an unfulfilled passion that disrupts the conventions of marriage, *Padmini* faces a conflict between intellectual compatibility and physical attraction, and *Phaedra* is consumed by a forbidden love that she recognizes as morally wrong. Despite differences in setting - early twentieth century Spain, post-independence India, and seventeenth century France - their struggles reveal striking similarities in the nature of desire and its consequences. Through a comparative perspective, these characters illustrate how deeply personal choices are shaped by cultural frameworks, ultimately leading to tragic outcomes that underscore the enduring tension between individual freedom and societal norms.

### **Hypothesis**

The study hypothesizes that despite cultural and temporal differences, the characters of *Bride*, *Padmini* and *Phaedra* exhibit similar psychological conflicts rooted in desire, identity and societal constraints, ultimately leading to tragic outcomes.

### **Objectives**

- To analyse the psychological and emotional dimensions of *Bride*, *Padmini* and *Phaedra*.
- To examine the role of societal norms in shaping their actions.
- To compare their attitudes toward love, marriage, desire and identity.
- To identify similarities and differences in their tragic trajectories.
- To evaluate their agency and decision-making power.
- To explore the tragic consequences of their actions.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars have long studied these plays for their thematic richness and psychological depth. Lorca's *Blood Wedding* is often interpreted as a tragedy rooted in passion and fate. According to Gwynne Edwards, Lorca's characters are driven by "elemental forces of desire that defy social conventions" (Edwards 45). Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* has been widely analysed through the lens of identity and existential philosophy. As noted by Anantha Murthy, the play "questions the completeness of human identity through symbolic narrative" (Murthy 78). Jean Racine's *Phaedra* is considered a masterpiece of classical tragedy. Racine portrays *Phaedra* as a character torn between moral duty and uncontrollable passion. As

Roland Barthes observes, "Phaedra is both guilty and innocent, a victim of her own emotions" (Barthes 112).

### **Comparative Analysis**

#### **Nature of Desire and Passion**

Desire serves as a central motivating force in all three plays, shaping the emotional trajectories of Bride, Padmini and Phaedra. Bride's passion for Leonardo, rooted in a prior emotional bond, persists despite her impending arranged marriage. Her feelings are instinctive and overwhelming, compelling her to follow her heart even when she is aware of the social consequences. In contrast, Padmini's desire is characterized by a striking duality. She is intellectually connected to Devadatta, appreciating his sensitivity and intellect, while simultaneously drawn to Kapila's physical strength and vitality. This division reflects a deeper philosophical tension between mind and body, raising questions about the nature of fulfillment and the completeness of human identity.

Phaedra's experience of desire presents the most intense psychological conflict. Her love for Hippolytus, her stepson, is both forbidden and morally troubling, creating a profound internal struggle. Unlike Bride and Padmini, who act upon or attempt to reconcile their desires, Phaedra is acutely conscious of the ethical implications of her feelings. She perceives her passion as a destructive force and tries to suppress it, yet remains unable to escape its grip. This results in deep emotional suffering and guilt. While Bride's response is impulsive and rebellious, and Padmini's is exploratory and assertive, Phaedra's is inward and self-tormenting. Thus, although all three women are driven by powerful desires, their differing responses highlight varied dimensions of passion - ranging from action and assertion to restraint and psychological anguish.

#### **Conflict Between Individual Desire and Social Norms**

The tension between personal desire and societal expectations is a defining aspect of the experiences of Bride, Padmini and Phaedra. Bride finds herself constrained by the institution of arranged marriage, which demands obedience and conformity. However, her enduring love for Leonardo compels her to defy these expectations, leading her to elope and openly challenge the social order. Padmini, similarly, questions conventional marital norms, though her approach is less impulsive and more reflective. Her simultaneous attraction to Devadatta's intellect and Kapila's physicality reveals a dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by traditional relationships, prompting her to seek a more complete form of fulfillment beyond accepted boundaries.

In contrast, Phaedra's struggle is largely internalized due to her deep awareness of moral and social codes. As a queen bound by duty and honour, she is unable to act upon her forbidden feelings for Hippolytus. Instead of open defiance, she experiences intense psychological conflict, attempting to suppress her desires while being consumed by them. This inward struggle results in emotional suffering rather than external rebellion. The differing responses of these characters illustrate varied modes of resistance to societal constraints: Bride's actions are openly defiant, Padmini's are intellectually challenging and Phaedra's are marked by silent endurance. Together, they highlight how cultural and moral frameworks shape not only the expression of desire but also the forms of conflict individuals experience when personal longing clashes with social expectations.

### **Concept of Identity**

The question of identity is central to the characterization of Bride, Padmini and Phaedra, though it manifests differently in each case. Bride's sense of self is largely shaped by her social roles, leaving little room for personal individuality. She is primarily defined as a bride within a prescribed marital framework and as a lover bound by past emotional ties. This limited scope reflects a socially constructed identity in which her personal desires struggle to find independent expression. In contrast, Padmini's experience is marked by an active search for completeness. Her attraction to both Devadatta and Kapila, and the symbolic head-body transposition, foreground a deeper philosophical inquiry into whether identity resides in intellect or physicality. Her dilemma highlights the fragmented nature of human identity and the desire to reconcile its competing aspects.

Phaedra's struggle with identity is shaped by moral awareness and psychological conflict. As a queen and wife, she is bound by duty, yet her forbidden passion creates a profound inner division. Unlike Bride, whose identity is externally imposed, and Padmini, who questions and negotiates her sense of self, Phaedra experiences identity as a burden defined by ethical responsibility and emotional turmoil. Her inability to align her desires with her moral obligations leads to a deeply internalized crisis. Thus, while Padmini's conflict is philosophical and introspective, Bride's is rooted in social limitation and Phaedra's emerges from moral consciousness. Together, these varied representations illustrate how identity in these plays is not fixed but shaped by the interplay of personal desire, social roles and ethical constraints.

### **Role in Tragedy**

The three protagonists - Bride, Padmini and Phaedra - play crucial roles in shaping the tragic outcomes of their respective plays, though the nature of their involvement differs significantly. Bride acts as a direct catalyst for external conflict. Her decision to elope with Leonardo disrupts social order and ignites a chain of events that culminates in violence and death. Her actions are driven by emotional urgency and the tragedy unfolds in a visibly dramatic and communal space. Padmini's role is more layered and complex. Her choices, particularly in the context of the head-body transposition, create a situation that intertwines love, identity and existential confusion. Her eventual decision to embrace death reflects both a personal resolution and a tragic acceptance of irreconcilable contradictions.

In contrast, Phaedra's contribution to tragedy is deeply internal and psychological, even though it results in devastating external consequences. Her confession of forbidden love sets into motion a series of events leading to Hippolytus's destruction and her own suicide. Unlike Bride's overt rebellion or Padmini's philosophical struggle, Phaedra's tragedy emerges from emotional repression and moral anguish. She is both a victim of her uncontrollable passion and an agent in the unfolding catastrophe. Together, these characters illustrate different dimensions of tragedy. Bride represents impulsive action leading to external conflict, Padmini embodies a philosophical and existential dilemma and Phaedra reflects the destructive power of internalized guilt and moral conflict. Their roles demonstrate how personal choices, shaped by emotional and ethical pressures, can lead to inevitable and multifaceted tragic consequences.

### **Agency and Decision-Making**

Agency, understood as the capacity to make independent choices, plays a significant role in shaping the actions and destinies of Bride, Padmini and Phaedra. Bride demonstrates agency through her decision to abandon societal expectations and follow her passion for Leonardo. Her choice to elope reflects a conscious rejection of imposed norms, highlighting her willingness to prioritize personal desire over social obligation. Padmini, however, exhibits a more complex and assertive form of agency. She actively navigates her conflicting attractions to Devadatta and Kapila, making deliberate decisions that challenge conventional ideas of marriage and fulfillment. Her actions reveal a strong sense of autonomy, as she seeks to reconcile intellectual and physical dimensions of love.

Phaedra's experience presents a contrast, as her ability to exercise agency is significantly constrained by moral, social and even divine influences. Although she becomes aware of her forbidden desire, she struggles to control or act upon it freely.

Her decisions are shaped less by independent will and more by an overwhelming sense of guilt and inevitability. Even her confession, which appears to be an act of choice, emerges from emotional pressure rather than empowerment. In comparison, Padmini stands out as the most decisive and self-directed, while Bride's actions reflect emotional defiance. Phaedra, on the other hand, remains largely bound by forces beyond her control. Together, these portrayals illustrate varying degrees of agency, emphasizing how cultural, moral and psychological constraints influence the extent to which individuals can shape their own destinies.

### **Moral Consciousness and Guilt**

Moral awareness and the experience of guilt play a crucial role in distinguishing the inner lives of Bride, Padmini and Phaedra. Among the three, Phaedra exhibits the most intense moral consciousness. She is acutely aware of the impropriety of her feelings for Hippolytus and perceives them as both sinful and destructive. This awareness generates profound shame and inner turmoil, shaping her actions throughout the play. Her desire is not merely a personal struggle but a moral burden that she cannot reconcile, leading her to seek relief through confession and, ultimately, self-destruction. In contrast, Bride's response to guilt is less immediate and less consuming. Driven initially by passion, she prioritizes emotional fulfillment over moral reflection, only later confronting the consequences of her actions.

Padmini, on the other hand, demonstrates a comparatively limited sense of guilt. Her decisions are guided more by a pursuit of completeness than by adherence to moral codes. While her actions challenge conventional norms, she does not appear deeply troubled by ethical conflict in the same way as Phaedra. Instead, her focus remains on resolving the tension between intellectual and physical desire. This contrast highlights varying degrees of moral engagement among the three characters. Phaedra's identity is defined by her overwhelming guilt and ethical sensitivity, whereas Bride's awareness develops gradually in response to external consequences. Padmini's relative detachment from guilt underscores her prioritization of personal fulfillment over moral constraint. Together, these portrayals illustrate how moral consciousness shapes not only individual behaviour but also the nature and intensity of tragic experience.

### **Feminist Perspective**

From a feminist perspective, Bride, Padmini and Phaedra can be interpreted as figures negotiating and, in different ways, resisting patriarchal structures that seek to regulate female desire and behaviour. Bride's decision to defy the expectations of arranged marriage and follow her emotional instincts reflects a direct challenge to social norms that confine women within prescribed roles. Similarly, Padmini

questions traditional ideas of marital fidelity and fulfilment by asserting her right to both intellectual and physical satisfaction. Her actions suggest a refusal to accept incomplete or restrictive definitions of womanhood, thereby highlighting the possibility of agency within a constraining social framework.

Phaedra's experience, however, illustrates a more internalized form of struggle. Rather than openly resisting societal norms, she is deeply affected by the moral expectations imposed upon her, leading to intense psychological conflict. Her inability to reconcile personal desire with ethical duty underscores the powerful influence of patriarchal values on women's inner lives. Together, these characters reveal the limited space available for female autonomy and the consequences of crossing established boundaries. While Bride and Padmini express resistance through action and assertion, Phaedra's suffering exposes the emotional cost of repression. Their narratives collectively emphasize the complexities of female agency and the challenges women face in negotiating identity, desire and societal control.

### **Conclusion**

The comparative study of Bride, Padmini and Phaedra reveals that, despite their distinct cultural and historical contexts, they are united by a fundamental struggle between personal desire and societal expectations. Each character embodies a different dimension of female experience shaped by emotional, philosophical and moral tensions. Bride represents emotional rebellion, as she openly defies social conventions in pursuit of her passion. Padmini reflects a deeper intellectual and physical duality, questioning the nature of fulfilment and identity. Phaedra, in contrast, is defined by an intense moral and psychological conflict, as she grapples with a desire she recognizes as forbidden. These varied portrayals highlight how individual choices are deeply influenced by the constraints and values of their respective societies.

The tragic outcomes of their stories underscore the consequences of unresolved inner conflicts and restrictive social frameworks. While Bride and Padmini actively assert their desires, their actions lead to irreversible consequences that expose the limits of personal freedom within rigid structures. Phaedra's tragedy, however, lies in her inability to reconcile her passion with her moral consciousness, resulting in profound psychological suffering. Together, these characters illustrate the enduring tension between individuality and conformity, revealing the complexities of female identity across different cultural traditions. Their narratives not only reflect the universality of human emotions but also emphasize the continued relevance of dramatic literature in examining the intricate relationship between desire, morality and social expectation.

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