

THE HUMAN IDENTITY CRISIS AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEAD IS THE CENTRAL MOTIF IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *HAYAVADANA*: A MYTHOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This study examines Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* discusses a wide range of contemporary issues and subjects. Some are hundreds of years old, while others are fresh gifts from modern mind of technology. *Hayavadana* translates as "horse head man." This study explores the identity issue in the main plots of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini and the subplot of *Hayavadana*. Soma Deva's 'The Katha Sarit Sagara' incorporates Vetala Panchavimsati, which Girish Karnad draws for *Hayavadana*. Thomas Mann also adapted the story for his short novel. It also emphasizes the power of the mind over physical strength. Karnad also associates humanism with psycho social forms of existence. This is the story of Lord Ganesha represents three stages: divine, the prosperous human and the animal. He embodies perfection, imperfection, wholeness, and incompleteness. The Bhagavata's petition is highly provocative. *Hayavadana*'s suffering with the horse's head initially frustrates, but eventually generates sympathy after hearing his heartbreaking narrative. They urge him to worship Goddess Kali atop Mount Chitrakot to achieve wholeness and transformation.

Key words: Identity Crisis, Transformation, Lord Ganesha, Horse, Sympathy and Divine.

Introduction

Girish Raghunath Karnad is a well-known modern dramatist, actor, producer, director, and television artist. He also served as President of the Sangeet Natak Academy, Director of the Nehru Centre, and Director of the Indian Film and Television Institute. He has won numerous awards, including the Bharatiya Jnanpith, the Padma Shri, and the Padma Bhushan. Girish Karnad is one of the finest in contemporary Anglo-Indian playwright. His most noteworthy current works of art exhibit a combination of custom and advancement, positioning him as a conventional contemporary author. Girish Karnad is likely the first name that comes to mind when discussing Kannada theatre. Girish Karnad is an exceptionally talented writer. As of now, he has written fourteen plays. In contemporary India, Girish Karnad stands as one of the most renowned English playwrights. It's possible to classify him as a traditionalist/modernist writer because his most notable recent creations combine tradition with innovation. People across the nation have performed his plays for a considerable amount of time.

Karnad plays are unique in their inventive approaches to drama, distinguishing them from traditional Kannada theatres. He draws his inspiration from mythology, history, and folklore. *Hayavadana* is based on both Somdatta's *Kathasarithsagara*, a Sanskrit collection of stories, and Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*. Karnad's plays integrate contemporary themes with the tastes and concerns of the modern time. We must view the story through the lens of current philosophy to understand the constant flux of human identity. Placing a mythological story in a seemingly contemporary setting heightens the play's absurdity.

This article focuses on *Hayavadana*'s identity dilemma and its primary protagonists, Devadatta and Kapila. Both are extremely close friends. Despite his poor physical appearance, Devadatta is renowned for his academic abilities. Kapila is strong and robust. Devadatta falls in love with the daughter of a local businessman. If he wins her hand, he is willing to give his arms to God. Kapila acts as the intermediary. The former happily married her, while the latter maintains a strong friendship. During their trek to Chitrakot, Devadatta sacrifices his head to Goddess Kali. Kapila, who is looking for him, follows him after removing his head. Padmini, completely perplexed in the dark, goes in search of them and laments over the incident. Goddess Kali instructs her followers to resurrect the dead by fixing their heads and placing a sword around their necks. The resurrection of both characters' results in a transposed head, casting doubt on their identities. One lives with her, while the other disappears into the forest. It drives a duo. In Act II, they commit suicide after a struggle. Padmini performs 'Sati' on the cremation pyre, allowing her son, born to Devadatta, to be taken first to the hunters and then to her father.

The play intentionally confuses the plot's time period by combining classic and contemporary themes. In *Bhagavatha*, the narrator recounts the historical event of Devadatta-Kapila-Padmini in the city of Dharmapura, under Dharmasheela's control. The reference to Rishis and the fictitious country of Dharmapura suggests that the drama took place many years ago. However, the arrival of Padmini's son at the end of the play throws off the time period. *Hayavadana*'s singing of the national anthem adds a contemporary depth to the plot. The plot

combines the stories of Padmini, Devadutta, Kapila, and Hayavadana. Both works highlight the identity problem as the central thread connecting the two plots. However, both novels convey a powerful message about the sadness, turmoil, and absolute despair of human existence.

The tradition of *Hayavadana* and the *Theatre of the Absurd* contains many similarities. The play's setting is unfamiliar, and determining the time period of the plot is frequently challenging. The storyline does not follow the standard three- or five-act structure. The story divides into two acts, with the Padmini and *Hayavadana* stories overlapping in both. Human nature and relationships are at the heart of the drama. The conflict between the arbitrary nature of sexual tensions and preferences and societal expectations of human relations is what causes Padmini, Kapila, and Devadutta's misery and tragedy.

There are light-hearted episodes with Bhagavatha, ghastly scenes of suicide, and poetic scenes where Devadutta declares his love for Padmini. The Avant Garde writers' use of comedy and tragedy together, which Aristotle harshly condemned in *Poetics*, is a stylistic element. It even conveys the idea of disunity through signals. *Hayavadana's* affinity for the Theatre of the Absurd stems from its depiction of misery and the meaninglessness of human existence. *Hayavadana* shows the concept of completeness as both inadequate and unfinished, eschewing logic and reason. The cyclical narratives of the Absurd Theatre conclude in the same manner as they began. Language is unnecessary and superficial, as it is nearly impossible to communicate with words. The story unfolds in a surreal setting, leaving the participants bewildered by the chaotic sequence of events.

The introduction of Chorus, who performs in the play and engages the audience in dialogue to provide a more realistic touch and lessen creative illusion, is another example of its Brechtian influence. The introduction of a play within a play is another common practice in the Epic theatre. *Hayavadana* speaks in a lyrical and meaningful way. The study of human relations takes precedence over the study of human nature, and it also makes use of songs and interconnected stories. As the name suggests, *Hayavadana* is a man who, disappointed by his lack of fulfilment in life, has the head of a horse and the body of a person. In the play, Padmini and *Hayavadana* had comparable experiences. Padmini, a symbol of the modern era's collective female sensibility, longs for a husband who possesses all the attributes of intelligence, beauty, and physical power in one man—a desirable balance of “fabulous body and fabulous brain.” Her search is fruitless, as true hunting does not exist. *Hayavadana's* attempt to achieve wholeness is also a complete failure.

In terms of dramatic technique, the opening scene is not only powerful but also ideal. The mask of Lord Ganesha, who represents the idea of incompleteness, appears at the beginning of the play. Thus, Ganesha and *Hayavadana's* onstage appearances metaphorically relate to Padmini's existence as a heroine. Bhagavatha, the narrator and critic, first introduces the audience to the characters. His discussion with the actor demonstrates how the Brechtian Epic theatre has had a significant influence on some of these avant-garde methods. The person who converses with the characters and offers commentary on their ideas is Bhagavatha. The primary sutradara, or thread, of the drama is Bhagavatha, who uses his songs and narration to link and re-connect the characters. He is interestingly a detached observer and a “spectator,” much like many Brechtian characters.

Bhagavatha is fully aware that he is performing on stage and engaging in his passion. He expects the audience to contemplate the particular issue he is addressing.

Hayavadana highlights the audience's rational thinking when he questions his civic sense. In the drama, *Hayavadana* sees the actors (Actor I and Actor II) teasing him on stage instead of performing. The characters converse with the actors to show the audience that they are witnessing a play, which is another example of the impact of Brechtian theatre. Karnad's use of dolls further enhances the play's essential dramatic beauty. Two dolls that are incredibly diverse and human-like in form make an impressive entrance. The act of doll interaction draws attention to the characters' extreme psychological comprehension. The dolls reveal the characters' innermost thoughts and emotions to the spectator. The audience would not have understood these characters' unknown emotions if Karnad had not used these dolls. The dolls highlight the paradox between the true personality and the hidden temperament, revealing the true nature of human minds.

Padmini also uses these dolls to interpret her dreams. The stage employs these amazing tools. These dolls portray the characters' actual personalities, revealing to the viewers their innermost thoughts. Kirtinath Kurtkoti appropriately notes Karnad's theatrical approach:

Karnad uses the conventions and motifs of folk tales and folk theatre-masks, curtains, dolls, the –within-a-story-to create a bizarre world. It is a world of incomplete individuals, indifferent gods, dolls that speak and children, who cannot, a world indifferent to the desires and frustrations, joys and sorrows of human beings. . . (*Hayavadana*, vii).

Throughout the play, the stage is filled with female choruses and Bhagavata songs. The play employs sati paintings, music, and dolls to create a sense of dramatic success. The writer also employs classical allusions; the Gandhiva and the Rishi do this while persuading the audience. These theatrical techniques not only capture the intensity of the theatre but also put Karnad in a different league from other playwrights. It created a unique space for modern theatre, replacing the traditional one. Karnad's heightens the ridiculousness of the drama by using dance, singing, masks, and mimes. Brechtian theatre uses the ridiculous technique to convey the futility of the human predicament and the limitations of rational understanding (Esslin xx).

The trio of Devadutta, Padmini, and Kapila to convey the concept of loneliness in the characterization. There is an unbridgeable divide between Padmini and Devadutta. We depict Padmini as constantly lusting after Kapila. Devadutta expresses her displeasure about Kapila and Padmini's increasing connection. He complains about Padmini's "drooling" over him, as he senses her passion for Kapila's physical beauty. Kapila declares his devotion in silence. Devadutta can easily observe the sexual tensions between Kapila and Padmini. The tragic and unexpected demise of the love triangle occurs when the two commit suicide in front of the goddess Kali. Even the Goddess is disinterested and uninterested in the sacrificers' pointless offering. Kapila attests that he is dying for friendship, while Devadutta swears that he is surrendering his life in exchange for

a promise he made many years ago when he wanted Padmini in his life. He declares that he would give his hands to Rudra and go to Kali if he ever got her. Until he became disillusioned with his wife's and his friend's infatuation, he had not taken the vow particularly seriously.

The sleeping goddess recognizes the falsity of the sacrifice's justifications. She does nothing to prevent the two from taking their own lives. Their stated motivations for taking their own lives are ludicrous, much like their interpersonal interactions. Their realization of the absurdity of their living circumstances leads them to commit suicide. When they encounter a stalemate in their personal circumstances, they turn to drastic measures. Mixing the heads creates another bizarre scenario where the identities become intermingled and confused. The uncertainty regarding who is Devadutta and who is Kapila causes pandemonium. Devadutta denies Kapila's assertion that he is Padmini's husband, arguing that since Kapila's head is superior, he is Padmini's legitimate husband. Padmini is confused and pleased to select Devadutta's head above Kapila's body. The prudent course of action would secure her the object of her desire and her husband's recognition from society. The disappointed Kapila leaves his town and settles in the woods. In a few years, the scenario repeats, resulting in the deaths of the trio.

The drama of *Hayavadana* starts with instructions for the stage. The stage is completely empty when the curtain rises, with the exception of a table and a chair in the rear area. They place Ganesha's mask on the chair. The play opens with the story of Lord Ganesha. People worship Lord Ganesha as the destroyer of incompleteness due to his "embodiment of imperfection" (Karnad, *Three Plays* 73). The musicians start the play in the right way according to the Hindu Yakshagana custom, and Bhagavata sings a prayer to Ganesha, who is the Lord and Master of success and perfection:

O Elephant headed Herambha whose flag is victory and who shines like a thousand suns, O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi, seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake, O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness... (Karnad, *Three Plays* 73)

Folk theatre requires an image of Lord Ganesha to be brought to the stage for puja. After puja, the Bhagavata sings a song to honor God and show respect for Him. Accepting Him as the most important thing, Bhagavata sees that God is naturally paradoxical, including having an identity problem. Despite being the son of Lord Siva and Parvati, Lord Ganesha remains incomplete due to his elephant head, broken tusk, and cracked belly. He is, however, the "destroyer of incompleteness" (Karnad, *Indian Literature* 99). His significance stems from his non-participation in the lives of Karnad's main characters and his absence from any portrayal. Karnad used Ganesha's mask to name another unfinished figure, *Hayavadana*, in this context. Karnad sees Ganesha as an outside force that makes sure the play succeeds and designs it in the traditional Yakshagana style. The text of *Hayavadana* introduces hybridity as the optimal way to live, a strong theme. However, in the theatre production, Ganesha doesn't show up, taking away from this theme's strength.

Since *Hayavadana* is about being whole, starting the play with Lord Ganesha is Karnad's way of saying that a person's perfection has nothing to do with how they look, which the audience may not fully understand. Some human characters, like Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini, seem better than the unfinished *Hayavadana* in this play. It's easier for readers of the text to understand because they see a distorted and incomplete god right at the beginning of the play, worshipped by people who look like they are whole.

Conclusion

Consequently, the play generates a range of issues. The transfer of heads leads to a change in personnel. They are affected by the integrated body's function. Both became disintegrating bodies. Devadatta's head and Kapila's body inspire the name Padmini. Again, disruption prompts Kapila, together with Devadatta's body, to travel to the forest in order to reclaim his former shape and size. Devadatta's son lacks the ability to laugh, communicate, and wonder at items. The audience understands the complex human identity that comes with a disorder. The play's two narratives revolve around the idea of striving for perfection. The two plots are antagonistic to one another as well as complementary. Padmini seeks the best qualities from both her betrothed and desired partner. Padmini's difficulties begin when the desired combination becomes less sustained, whereas *Hayavadana's* difficulties begin when the superior aspects of the man or nature species sustain him. He has a human voice and a horse's body from birth.

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