

# The Analysis of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* Play

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## Abstract:

In the play "*Hayavadana*", Girish Karnad addresses the issue of Head and Body with the ethical and philosophical side of the problem which raises more significant issues concerning man's existence. He casts the female character in a different style and manner. His female characters are beautiful, intelligent, lively, and more central than male characters in the play "*Hayavadana*". Karnad through female character introduces the image of nowadays woman who is trapped between two notions, one of them is her search for idealism and completeness and the other is her quest for personal rights in a society dominated by males.

Karnad was extremely affected by Indian myths, traditions and history. Thus, he as a creative artist focuses on Indian myths, history, tradition, folklore, legends and theatres. He shapes a new face of modern man fighting for a new prospect with a new character and identity.

*Hayavadana* is a study of man's search for perfection in every area of universal experience, whether of love, marriage, friendship, motherhood or children, and here where the importance of the research lies. It is a trial to study the notion of identity in a folk story. It is a study of how the desire of a female ruined her and the ones around her by planting the seed of conflict, and this is the focus of the research problem.

**Key words:** Perfection, Identity, Desire, Mind, Body, Head, Horse Face.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Girish Raghunath Karnad is an Indian actor, director and writer. His emergence as a playwright in 1960s characterized the modern Indian playwriting. He received the Jnanpith Award in 1998, which is considered as the highest literary honor awarded in India<sup>(1)</sup>.

In composing his plays, he frequently used history and mythology to address present-day issues. His plays were translated into English and some other Indian languages because he wrote them in Kannada language. He found a new style of making use of historical and mythological sources to address new themes and existentialist calamity of modern man through characters imprisoned in philosophical and psychological conflicts. He

composed *Hayavadana* in 1971 which relied on a theme taken from *The Transposed Heads* a novella written by Thomas Mann in 1940<sup>(2)</sup>.

*Hayavadana* is his third play. It tackles human and society problems. It exposes the conflicts formed in human mind due to the differences resulted from clashes of forces of nature and social pressures and concerns, love and having children outside marriage scope and man's difficulty in achieving the unachievable<sup>(3)</sup>.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Idea and the Title of the Play**

#### **1- The Idea of the Play:**

The fame of the play lies in the idea that it tackles the seeking of identity which is a common quest, it delicately states that human's major problems are due to their unawareness about the self true nature. The self that is a mixture of all the three Conscious, Sub-conscious and Unconscious. The author has revealed this effectively and successfully through the characters of man's life within the three worlds: Divine, Human and Animal<sup>(4)</sup>.

Karnad maintains: "I remember that the idea of my play *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in my head right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanth (who eventually produced the play) about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre's relationship to music. The play is based on a story from a collection of tales called the *Kathasaritasagara* and the further development of this story by Thomas Mann in 'The Transposed Heads'. Two young men behead themselves and, when brought back to life, find that their heads have got mixed up. The story initially interested me for the scope it gave for the use of mask and music. Western theatre has developed a contrast between the *face* and the *mask*- the real inner person and the exterior one presents, or wishes to present, to the world outside. But in traditional Indian theatre, the mask is only the face 'writ large'; since a character represents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype, the mask merely presents in enlarged details its essential moral nature. (This is the reason why the characters in *Hayavadana* have no true names. The heroine is named Padmini after one of the six types into which Vatsyayana classified all women. Her husband is named Devdatta, a formal style of addressing a stranger. His friend is named Kapila, plainly 'the dark one.')

Music-usually percussion-the further distances the action, placing it in the realm of the mythical and the elemental. The decision to use masks led me to question the theme itself in great depth. Ganesha's mask then says nothing about his nature. It is a mask, pure

and simple. Right at the start of the play, my theory about mask was getting subverted. But the elephant head also questioned the basic assumption behind the original riddle, that the head represents the thinking part of the person, the intellect. It seemed unfair, however, to challenge the thesis of the riddle by using a god. God, after all, is beyond human logic, indeed beyond human comprehension itself. The dialect had to grow out of grosser ground, and the human, a horse-headed man. The play *Hayavadana*, meaning 'the one with a horse's head', is named after this character. The story of this horse-headed man, who wants to shed the horse's head and become human, provides the outer panel- as in a mural within which the tale of two friends is framed. *Hayavadana*, too, goes to the same Goddess Kali and wins a boon from her that he should become complete. The Logic takes over. The head is the person *Hayavadana* becomes a complete horse. The central logic of the tale remains intact, while its basic premise is denied"<sup>(5)</sup>.

## 2- The Title " Hayavadana":

The name of Hayavadana means 'horse face'. Hayavadana disrupts the play chief action to elucidate his origin story to the Bhagavata. Hayavadana is a character with a horse head and a man body who shows at the opening and end of the play to constitute the fundamental plot. He is the result of a marriage between a beautiful princess and a Celestial creature in horse form. He is anxious to get rid of his horse head and turn into a full man. He travels to the temple of goddess Kali to pray to be a full man, yet instead of that she turns him into a full horse. He is pleased to be a full being, but grieves that he maintains his human voice. When a boy goes into the scene and starts to mock him and sing with him, he is capable to lose the human voice, and thus becomes a full horse"<sup>(6)</sup>.

## Chapter Three

### The Women in the Play "*Hayavadana*"

Padmini is a major character in *Hayavadana*. She is beautiful. She presents a love triangle including Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. Padmini is innocent, beautiful, lively and cruel, all these traits embedded in her make her a incomparable character"<sup>(7)</sup>. Padmini has a charming body, as said by Devadatta:

Devadatta: "How can I describe her, Kapila? Her forelocks rival the bees; her face (both Devadatta and Kapila praise) is a white lotus .Her beauty is as the magic lake. Her arms the lotus creepers. Her breasts are golden urns and her waist"<sup>(8)</sup>.

Padmini is the daughter of the most important merchant in the village Dharmapura. She is rather thoughtful and rational, and because she was born in a rich family, thus she was loved to her complete contentment, and all her desires were fulfilled by her parents. When Kapila engaged Padmini for his friend Devadatta, she accepts at once, even before taking her parents' permission. The marriage from a well known family like that makes her glad and proud<sup>(9)</sup>. Kapila describes his friend Davadatta:

**Kapila: "Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. A poet. A pundit. Knows the Vedas backwards. Writes the grandest poetry ever. Long, dark hair. Delicate, fair face. Age twenty .Height five feet seven inches"<sup>(10)</sup>.**

Devadatta has these good merits in personality, yet he is bodily weak, emotional and over-romantic. He loves Padmini with her loveliness and her good-shaped body, yet he has not used his logic to examine her mind, nature and character. However, Kapila in his first meeting with Padmini recognizes that she is unsuitable for Devadatta<sup>(11)</sup>. Yet, Kapila expressed his opinions and feelings to Devadatta, saying:

**Kapila: "Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightning –and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel. But what can one do? You'll never listen to me. And I can't withdraw now. I'll have to talk to her family"<sup>(12)</sup>.**

Thus, the life after marriage between Padmini and Devadatta does not seem to be happy with satisfaction for Devadatta the fragile and delicate is inappropriate for her. Her anticipation of a muscular and physically well-built individual moves her away from the husband to his friend Kapila. Hence, she holds a hidden and secret desire for Kapila, awaiting his advent and being restless and impatient if Kapila does not come to the house. Still, Devadatta does not like the frequent presence of Kapila in their house, for when Devadatta protests about Kapila's annoyances in his reading of Bhasa's and censures Padmini for his over amusement<sup>(13)</sup>, Padmini reacts without hesitation, **"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"<sup>(14)</sup>.**

Therefore, she takes the role of a rescuer every time Devadatta makes Kapila responsible for annoyances and disturbs in their life after marriage. Padmini wishes that her husband gives a lot of attention for her desire, but Devadatta wastes his time in reading poetry and plays and

neglecting her needs and desires. Thus, the journey to Ujjain is a chance for her to spend much time with Kapila. Accordingly, she insists for a trip to Ujjain after Kapila's arrival with the cart and forcing Devadatta to put his personal luggages in the cart. She expresses her passion for Kapila's 'iron-black-body' when she watches him from the very close side when he leaves to get **“the Fortunate lady’s flower that is meant for a married woman...”**<sup>(15)</sup>. She describes her great admiration of his body and his movement as:

**Padmini: "How he climbs-like an ape. Before I could even say ‘yes ,’he had taken off his shirt, pulled his dhoti up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back-like an ocean with muscles rippling across it- and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless”**<sup>(16)</sup>.

The words for Kapila’s body and his movement expose Padmini’s strong desire for Kapila’s strong body. Devadatta recognizes that she is in love with Kapila when he watches her, her interest in Kapila’s body and her hidden thought to have him<sup>(17)</sup>. Thus, Devadatta expresses his emotions in Rudra’s temple:

**Devadatta: "Good-bye, Kapila. Good-bye, Padmini. May the Lord Rudra bless you. You are two pieces of my heart-live happily together. I shall find my happiness in that”**<sup>(18)</sup>.

She becomes self-centred and aware of the probable events. She recognizes that she will be responsible for their fatality: **“And who’ll believe me? They’ll all say the two fought and died for this whore. They are bound to say it. Then what’ll happen to me?”**<sup>(19)</sup>

The people will surely argue that Padmini had extramarital relation with Kapila and in their struggle to possess her body, they killed each other. Within the social burdens, she determines to sacrifice her life before the goddess Kali. So, She asks the goddess Kali to rescue her from the hard event by which her husband and her lover have killed themselves. Hence, the goddess asks her to put **“these heads back properly. Attach them to their bodies and then press that sword on their necks”**<sup>(20)</sup>. By that, they may return back to life. However, she wrongly places the heads, the head of Devadatta on the body of Kapila and the head of Kapila on the body of Devadatta. This wrong placement of heads serves her double purposes in one hit for now she has got the mind of Devadatta and the body of Kapila in one person<sup>(21)</sup>.

When Kapila declares her as his wife on the basis that it is his body with which Padmini spent days and nights. Also he states **“This body**

she's lived with all these months. And the child she's carrying is the seed of this body"<sup>(22)</sup>. Devadatta says: **"When one accepts a partner in marriage, with the holy fire as one's witness, one accepts a person, not a body. She didn't marry Devadatta's body; she married Devadatta-the person"**<sup>(23)</sup>.

Thus, he has Devadatta's head and he becomes Devadatta. Furthermore, she goes with Devadatta as she finds safety and stability in Devadatta after he obtained the body of Kapila in him and thus she may rescue herself from the censure and criticisms of society. She feels happy for having a full man with intellectual mind and well-built body at the same time. They both express their happiness<sup>(24)</sup>.

Devadatta: **"You know, I'd always thought one had to use one's brains while wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body just doesn't wait for thoughts-it acts!"**

Padmini: **"Fabulous body- fabulous brain- fabulous Devadatta."**<sup>(25)</sup>

Devadatta attempts to prove his maleness and strength and Padmini is completely content with wonderful body and mind in one person for her. Yet, this happiness does not last long when he turns to learn, read and write. His well-built iron body grows weaker within few days, as a result the body degenerates into its earlier state, i.e. thin and lean<sup>(26)</sup>. Accordingly, Padmini is frustrated and disappointed and her mind returns her back to Kapila as she states:

Padmini: **"What are you afraid of, Devadatta? What does it matter that you are going soft again, that you are losing your muscles? I'm not going to be stupid again. Kapila's gone out of my life forever. I won't let him come back again. (pause) Kapila? What could he be doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still, and his face dark? (long pause) Devadatta changes. Kapila changes. And me?"**<sup>(27)</sup>

Her words expose her inside feelings towards Kapila and she obliges her husband to leave for the Ujjain market to buy new dolls. She declares 'it's unlucky to keep torn dolls at home'<sup>(28)</sup>. By this reason, if Devadatta goes out, she will be able to search for Kapila. Moreover, she convinces her husband to go to Ujjain and in his absence she goes to the jungle with her baby to meet Kapila. She shows him the baby's mole, **"the same mole on his shoulder."**<sup>(29)</sup>

When he rejects to hear her and asks her to return back to her husband, Padmini grows emotional and painfully admits<sup>(30)</sup>:

Padmini: **"I will. But can I ask a little favour? My son's tired. He's asleep. He has been on my arms for several days now. Let him rest a while. As soon as he gets up I'll go. Yes, you won, Kapila. Devadatta**

won too. But I –the better half of two bodies- I neither win nor lose. No, don't say anything. I know what you'll say and I've told myself that a thousand times. It's my fault. I mixed the heads up. I must suffer for it. I will. I'm sorry I came- I didn't think before I started-couldn't. But at least until my child wakes up, may I sit here and look at you? Have my fill for the rest of my life? I won't speak a word"<sup>(31)</sup>. ..... (He lifts his head and stares at her. She touches his face like a blind one to imprint it on her finger-tips. Afterwards, she puts her head on his shoulder)....."My Kapila! My poor, poor Kapila! How needlessly you've tortured yourself"<sup>(32)</sup>.

By this, she succeeds in expressing her love for him and she attempts to keep both of them under her control. Yet, Kapila and Devadatta at the end stand face to face and the struggle between both of them results in their terrible death. Finally, she recognizes that she is responsible for their death with bloodshed in this way<sup>(33)</sup>. She grieves the cause for their death and for her personal action as:

**"Kali, Mother of all Nature, you must have your joke even now. Other women can die praying that they should get the same husband in all the life to come. You haven't left me even that little consolation."**<sup>(34)</sup>

Karnad casts the important changes in the female character of Padmini. The ambitious Padmini wishes to have a combination of traits: clever, good-looking, intellectual and well-built body in one person and that person would be her perfect husband. She sees Devadatta very clever, good-looking, intellectual and poet. While she sees Kapila as violent, rough and the personification of courage and iron strong body. Thus, she deliberately mixes both heads in Kali temple, for her concealed desire to have an ideal perfect man. And hence, her dream of an ideal man becomes true when she finds that Devadatta has got Kapila's body. By this, her search for perfection reaches to an end and she begins the life of pleasure and enjoyment. But this enjoyment does not lead longer in her life because Devadatta could not keep and rescue the strong body of Kapila for he is basically a scholar and a poet. Accordingly, he gradually loses the strong muscles, consequently she protests saying, **"Your body had that strong, male smell before –I liked it."**<sup>(35)</sup> Thus, she once more plans to send Devadatta to Ujjain market to buy new dolls for her baby, and by that she would get the opportunity to meet Kapila in the jungle<sup>(36)</sup>.

#### **Conclusion:**

In the end of " *Hayavadana*", it is not Devadatta-Padmini-Kapila who realizes completion, but Hayavadana, who is content, that is the reason

of the title "*Hayavadana*", because it is the animal, not human, who is content with his troubles and difficulty.

Karnad made Padmini, the heroine of the play, victim of her tragic dreams of perfection. Actually, it is a foolish idea of her for a perfect man in mind and body together. And that was her tragic desire. Nonetheless, all through the play, she poses questions against the paternal system. She suffers behind the patriarchy bars. Patriarchy makes a victim of both men and women through various strategies. Although she is a liberated woman, but she could not dare trespass patriarchy. Her problem lies in the dream of completeness. To achieve her dream, she disobeyed the social norms. This was possibly because of her superficial knowledge of the factual nature of existence.

After all, we may conclude the following:

- 1- There is a confusion of identities which exposes the vague nature and the ambiguous characteristic of men and women's personality.
- 2- Human dissatisfaction with his/her life.
- 3- Rebellion against tradition and patriarchy.
- 4- Obedience to physical and sexual desire which blinds the eyes to the truth.
- 5- Repentance on bad deeds where no benefit for remorse

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## تحليل مسرحية الكاتب جيريش كارناد "هيافادانا"

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### الملخص:

في مسرحية "هيافادانا"، يتناول المؤلف جيريش كارناد مسألة الرأس والجسد من الجانب الأخلاقي والفلسفي للمشكلة التي تثير المزيد من مسائل وقضايا أكثر أهمية بشأن الوجود الإنساني. ويصب الطابع الأنثوي بأسلوب مختلف وطريقة مختلفة. وشخصيات الإناث لديه جميلة، وذكية، وحيوية، ومحورة أكثر من شخصيات الذكور في مسرحية "هيافادانا". ويقدم كارناد من خلال شخصية الأنثى صورة المرأة المعاصرة بين فكرتين، الأولى هي بحثها عن المثالية والكمال والأخرى هي سعيها للحصول على الحقوق الشخصية في مجتمع يهيمن عليه الذكور.

تأثر كارناد بشدة بالأساطير والتقاليد الهندية، والتاريخ الهندي. بالتالي، فهو كفنان مبدع يركز على الخرافات، والتقاليد، والتاريخ، والتقاليد، والفنون الشعبية والأساطير والمسارح الهندية. وقام بنقش وجه جديد للرجل الحديث الذي يقاتل من أجل أفق جديد بشخصية جديدة وهوية جديدة.

تعد مسرحية هيافادانا دراسة عن بحث الإنسان عن الكمال في كل مجال من مجالات الخبرة الشاملة، سواء في الحب، أو الزواج، أو الصداقة، أو الأمومة، أو الأطفال، وهنا تكمن أهمية البحث. المسرحية محاولة لدراسة فكرة ومفهوم الهوية في قصة شعبية. هي دراسة عن كيف دمرت رغبة أنثى نفسها ومن حولها من خلال زرع بذور الصراع، وهذا محور ما تدور حوله مشكلة البحث.

### الكلمات المفتاحية:

الكمال، الهوية، الرغبة، العقل، الجسد، الرأس، وجه الحصان.