
Identity Crisis and the Search for Completeness: A study of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

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Abstract: Girish Karnad, one of World's greatest contemporary English dramatists, In his play *Hayavadana* depicts a Man's quest for his own self across a web of complicated interactions. He illustrates imperfection on three levels of existence in the world: animal, human, and cosmic. The fight between the body and the brain is depicted in the play. The play's central story revolves around a romantic triangle involving two men, Kapila and Devdatta, best and most reliable friends, and a lady, Padmini, who is attracted towards both men for different reasons. Hayavadana, a person with a horse's head desiring fulfillment in life in the shape of a human person, is the subject of the sub-plot. His major works, such as *Nagamandala*, *Hayavadana* and *Tughlaq*, are reflections of our social and cultural context. Karnad draws influence from mythology and fairy-tale when it comes to our traditional culture. Also, with *Hayavadana*, he has returned us to the Hindu religious doctrine tales and traditions. The current study examines how each character in the drama suffers from a crisis of identity and a sense of inconsistencies, and how only Hayavadana, Devadatta's son, and Padmini will be able to reclaim their identity and wholeness.

Keywords: Isolation, disharmony, heterogeneity, existential crisis, incompleteness, mythology

Introduction: *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad is a courageous and excellent improvisation on a folk topic. Its plot is based on *Kathasaritsagar*, an old Sanskrit series of stories. Karnad's play, however, is based mostly on Thomas Mann's rendition of the story; *The Transposed Heads*. Mann gives the Sanskrit story, which is told by a ghost to an ambitious monarch, a mock-heroic twist. The original work presents a moral dilemma, whereas Mann uses it to mock the mechanical notion of life that separates body and soul. He mocks the philosophy that places the head above the body. The human body, according to Mann, is a suitable tool for the realization of human purpose. Even reversing the characters' heads will not free them from the cognitive restrictions imposed by creation. Karnad's play tackles a different issue: human individuality in the face of complex connections. Karnad skillfully employs the traditions and concepts of folk stories and folk drama in this drama.

Costumes, draperies, toys, and a narrative inside a story have all been used to build an unusual universe. It's a world of imperfect people, uncaring gods, talking dolls and kids who can't, the universe unconcerned about human desires, disappointments, delights, and sufferings. The enormous, irrational power of the stallion and its rider, who travel around the arena representing the tremendous but unchanging rhythm of life, is all that exists.

Loss of identity and the search for perfection:

In the post - modern world, the phrase 'identity' is a very difficult concept. It has many forms and is a subjective, variable, and continuing issue that varies throughout one's life. It is a representation of oneself. As a result, from the moment we are born until we return to the cemetery, we start to search for our identity. In reality, we are nothing more than a rhetorical question if we don't have an identity. Likewise, human existential crisis is a frequent occurrence and the most contentious subject in all cultures and ages. As a result, the question of individuality is not a clear and set idea that caused the crisis and turned into a phenomenon, as many people believe. Personality only becomes a problem when it is in danger, whenever anything assumed to be is not true. According to *Oxford Dictionary of English*, by Angus Stevenson:

“An existential crisis is a moment of uncertainty and perplexity during which a human's sense of self becomes shaky, usually as a

result of a shift in their projected goals or positions in society.” (143)

Girish Karnad, an Indian contemporary English playwright, wrote the successful and outstanding play *Hayavadana*. Karnad (1938-2019) was a Great thinker, artist, filmmaker, and multilingual writer. In the same way that Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar, and Mohan Rakesh did, his rise as a dramatist in the 1960s signified the arrival of a new and contemporary Indian playwriting in Kannada. Karnad composed many plays about contemporary Indian social structure, as well as Indian mysticism, history, and old dramatic models. His important plays include *Tughlaq*(1963), *Hayavadana*(1971), *Nagamandala*(1987), *Tale-Danga*(1990). Karnad's plays are structured in such a way that they successfully blend in the present environment. He also weaves huge issues of society, ancestry, ideology, and sexual identity into the fabric of his works. In his works, he employs Expressionistic tactics as well as Conceptual approaches to depict modern reality. Narshima Murthy in his article, *Myth Revived in Hayavadana* (2012) rightly says, “*Hayavadana* is an Expressionistic type of play that employs native folk play tactics to show man's painfully vain striving for completeness through a mythology.” (12)

The current story is from Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, which is based on one of the parts in *Vetal Panchvimshati*. The theme of *Hayavadana*

is primarily adapted from *Kathasaritsagara*, but the plot line is from Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, which is focused on one of the creation myths in *Vetal Panchvimshati*. The subplot about *Hayavadana* was introduced by Karnad.

Hayavadana is the result of a selfhood, as well as a problem of isolation — the separation of brain and spirit. We have a lot of crucial characters in the drama that have a muddled existence and are missing something in one way or another. We have characters like Padmini, Kapila and Devdatta in the play's central story, all of whom are searching for their actual personalities and wholeness. The condition develops, especially after incorrect head displacement. Hayavadana, another major figure from the discussion thread, represents deficiencies and wants entire personality by possessing the body of a human and the head of a horse. We also have a child born from the character name, Padmini of Devedatta's face and Kapila's physique, which represents utmost conflict and doesn't understand who he relates to. The drama *Hayavadana* begins with a prayer and devotion of Lord Ganesha, who experiences from isolation and is the personification of deformity and incoherence. His body and head are mismatched because he has an elephant face and a human body. As Bhagavata explains:

"May Vighneshwara, the Conqueror of Difficulties, who eliminates all stumbling

blocks and rewards all efforts with prosperity, greet our current strength. He appears to be the epitome of imperfection, of incoherence, of a human body with an elephant's head, a damaged tooth, and a fractured abdomen. How can one comprehend the paradox that this Vakratunda-Mahakaya, with his twisted face and malformed physique, is the Supreme ruler of Prosperity and Greatness?" (Karnad, 73)

Karnad has combined the two in a wonderful manner. Padmini is Devedatta's spouse and Kapila's love interest, if Lord Vinayaka is the spouse of Riddhi (glory) and Siddhi (wisdom). Thus, the true personality conflict is represented within the connections of Padmini, Kapila and Devedatta respectively.

Hayavadana's main plot takes place in town of Dharmapuri, where two young men named Kapila and Devdatta live together as inseparable friends. Despite belonging to the two opposites poles on socio-cultural and philosophical dimensions, Lav and Kush, lord Ram and Lakshman, lord Krishna and Balaram are defined as 'one intellect, one spirit.' Devedatta, the child of a Hindu Brahmin, is a man of brilliance who is unmatched in knowledge, while Kapila, the child of a blacksmith, is physically gifted. They get more complex as a result of this

contradiction. Padmini, the central character, on the other side, wishes for a perfect partner who is both mentally and physically strong. She went on to marry Devedatta, although she has feelings for Kapila. Padmini takes on the role of a 2 headed bird in this scene. Personality like that shouldn't be maintained since one head would always try to impose superiority over the rest. As a result of Padmini's desire, her relationship with Kapila blossoms, leading to a severe identity problem. In this regard Harpreet Kaur in her book, *In Search of a Theatre* (2012) writes:

“Numerous romances were used to depict disintegration, all of which terminated in a similar context of incoherence.” (121)

Padmini, Kapila and Devedatta decided to take a quick trip to Ujjain for a day. When Padmini observes a tree on their journey, Kapila climbs it immediately to bring her flowers, and her infatuation with Kapila climbing the tree can be noticed in her activities, which are laden with sexual meaning, Padmini says:

“She thought to herself as she watched him. How does he rise like an ape? He had stripped off his clothes, pulled up his dhoti, and swung up the branch so that I could even answer 'yes.' What a lovely floating shape! Such a vast back, like a river with muscles vibrating across it, and then

that little, defenseless waist.”.(Karnad, 96)

She sees him as a supernatural figure, completely absorbed in his masculine form, his motions resembling a ballet to her. From the other side, Devedatta experiences an identity crisis, a sense of alienation, and a sense of insufficiency as a spouse and a mate as he witnesses Padmini and Kapila's mutual affection.

Throughout their travels, Devedatta visits the Devi temple while Kapila and Padmini visit the Shiva shrine. The latter seeks the deity Kali's mercy for failing to keep his commitment to her. On account of accomplishing his dream, he promised god Shiva that he would offer him his head and deity Kali that he would offer her his body. Devedatta then uses a blade to sever his head. Kapila discovers Devedatta killed at the Devi temple while searching and then he laments:

"You've shaved your hair off! You've shaved your hair off! What have you committed, my beloved mate, my brother? Was it something you despised? And you forget, in your rage, that I was prepared to sacrifice for you? I would have jumped into flames if you had told me to. I would have left the nation if you had asked me to. I would have agreed to go down inside a river if you had asked. Did you hate me

enough that you cannot even ask that question? I made a mistake. But, as you know, I'm not clever enough to realize what more I should really have done. Then you've drove me away because I couldn't think? I can't survive without each other, Devedatta. Without each other, I can't even breathe. My brother, my man, and my mate, Devedatta." (Karnad,101)

Kapila believes he is entirely to blame himself for Devedatta's demise and, as a result, he chops off his skull and offers it for his friend.

Padmini's acute identity dilemma comes in the play when she messes up the brains of the two pals in her joy and terror. Kapila and Devdatta both have tried to commit suicide in Devi temple, Padmini discovers. Her sense of perspective is lost. She, too, presents herself as a tribute to the deity Kali since she can't live without the two because her identify and personality is wrapped in one of them. Padmini says: "No! Devdatta and Kapila are no longer with us. Allow me to accompany them." (Karnad,102) Devi Kali stops Padmini from attempting suicide and gives her wish, instructing her to place the heads on their shoulders and the weapon on their collars, and they will resurrect.

Padmini, however, transforms the original heads in her troubled state of mind, as the amazing brain with the stunning body was often Padmini's choice. Devedatta's head is placed on Kapila's physique, and Kapila's brain is placed on Devedatta's body. For all 3 of them, such an utterly unstable environment leads to a severe crisis of identity. "Whose spouse, is she? is now a difficult matter of individuality." (Karnad,108). Padmini is claimed Kapila, who has Devedatta's body. He claims that Padmini made her marital vows before the holy fire by her body, and that the kid she is growing in her stomach is the spawn of that nervous system alone. Even Chitrakoot's deity Kali, the creator of all creation, looks unconcerned with the characters, further complicating their identification and wholeness.

All of them go to a renowned rishi for help with their major existential problem, and he gives them an unequivocal answer which is transcript by Bhagavata:

"The head, like the celestial Kalpa Vriksha, reigns foremost amongst body part. As a result, the soul with Devedatta's head is Devedatta, and he is Padmini's legitimate spouse." (Karnad,112)

"My heavenly Gandharva, my solar Indra," (Karnad,113) Padmini exclaims of the decision, which brings her and Devedatta great joy. She is ecstatic to have her "beautiful body, great brain, fantastic Devedatta" (Karnad,115). Kapila, with

Devedatta's fragile physique, is understandably heartbroken and abandons them in the deep jungle. Padmini's situation, as dramatist describes as:

“The dilemma of the advanced, liberated, and strong woman caught between opposites, a woman who loves both her husband and another person for two important perspectives of their personality.”
(Karnad,117)

Kapila is now a symbol for existential problems and inadequacy. He is dissatisfied with Devedatta's fragile body. However, with the flow of time and proper physical training, he develops a strong body. Devedatta, on the other hand, who has Kapila's energetic body, loses his power and grasp due to a lack of physical maintenance. Padmini is now dissatisfied with the situation. She inquires about Devedatta's masculine odour. She is once again aware of her inadequacy. She starts to pine for Kapila. So, under the guise of acquiring new dolls, she dispatches Devedatta and travels to the forest to see Kapila. Kapila is initially unhappy to meet her and inquire about her.:

“What exactly are you looking for? Is there another brain? Padmini expresses herself as a being stuck between two separate associations' identities. Yes, Kapila, you succeeded, and Devedatta won as well, she

says. But I, the stronger of the two bodies, am neither victorious nor defeated.”
(Karnad,127)

However, Kapila and Devdatta eventually realize that as much as they love Padmini, they never dwell together as the Draupadi and Pandavas which described in the famous classic The Mahabharata. As a result, they battle and murder one other, and Padmini walks the cremation pyre as a sati. Padmini makes it apparent before she sacrifices her life that she will not be able to achieve completeness in her next life. As she expresses herself to the deity Kali:

“Even to this day, you must still be telling a joke. Other women can die hoping to marry the very same man for the rest of their lives. You haven't provided me with even a smidgeon of comfort.”(Karnad, 131)

We meet Hayavadana, a guy with a horse's head, at the opening of the play, who is suffering from a crisis of identity and a sense of insufficiency. He is the offspring of the Karnataka Royals and a white steed who transforms into a divine entity later on. For Hayavadana's personality and wholeness, his parents go to the trunk region. Hayavadana, on the other hand, is left with such a flaw. His ambition to shed his horse head and just be a fully human creature, but to what extent is this conceivable? 'Is any individual person complete?' is the most pressing question.

Padmini, Kapila, or Devdatta might have been pleased with what they had or who they were if that had been the case, and their narrative wouldn't even have ended in tragedy? Hayavadana is completely unaware of himself, his worth, and he lacks self-knowledge. He visits a number of temples, mosques, and other locations as a result of his discrepancies, and he encounters a number of men, but his attempts are in vain. He states;

“Democracy, Economics, Nationalism, Patriotism, Interpretation and discussion, and the Socialism Pattern of Community all sparked my curiosity in the state's socialisation. Everything has been tried. But where has my culture vanished to? Where?”(Karnad,92)

Afterwards, on Bhagavata's (the play's storyteller and presenter) advice, he visits the Kali temple, where the goddess Kali granted his wish to complete him. However, in her haste to accomplish it, she turns him into a horse with a person's voice rather than a "whole man. I have become a whole horse - but not a fully human! This human voice – this horrible human voice – hasn't vanished! I'm not sure how I can call myself complete. How can I get rid of this human voice?" (Karnad, 141) says the Hayavadana. As a result, Hayavadana is left incomplete once more, and his quest for fullness endures.

Hayavadana's family, we might conclude, are the source of his incompleteness. He is the offspring of an unfair union between a divine and a terrestrial lady. His mom is a Karnataka queen who infatuated with a white horse during her swayamvar, when a slew of princes from all over the world had come to court her for wedding. Despite this, she marries the horse and spends the next 15 years with him blissfully. She comes across a lovely celestial person who urges her to join him in paradise one summer morning in his location. She, on the other hand, has made it clear that she would not accept him. The cause for this is because if she accepted a person instead of a stallion, he might suffer from the aforementioned issues, which would have an effect on her either explicitly or implicitly. Her quest for wholeness led her to a horse. This celestial being, on the other hand, was angry by her rejection and damned her to turn into a horse before departing for his celestial dwelling. Surprisingly, Hayavadana's mom was unfazed by her transformation into a mare and rode back to meet the herd of horses. As a result, she becomes a full person. However, their son, Hayavadana, is left alone with only the male body and the horse's head.

Another crucial character, Padmini's kid, who is psychologically damaged, introverted, and angry and constantly grips the dolls, also has an identity issue. However, the infant is Devedatta's biological son, he has a mole from Kapila's body on his neck. The boy, like his mother, preferred the physical to the mind, the horse

to the human. Hayavadana was the only one who could make him giggle. The latter, who inherited the horse head from his dad and the human form from his mom, becomes a metaphor of inadequacy and identity struggle. Finally, through mutual love and care, the two offspring of two unequal marriages discover fullness in each other's incompleteness. "His male voice is no longer audible. He could only snort and jump around joyfully." (Karnad, 138)

Hayavadana's yearning for wholeness is mostly motivated by his misunderstanding of his own self. *The Bhagavata Gita* says, 'There is no reason for sorrow.' The human dilemma of strife and sadness is addressed in this sacred text. Hayavadana's issue stems from the inadequacy that every human being experience. A person's incapacity to deal with a specific situation stems from a lack of comprehension that every current issue stem from the basic human dilemma of an inferior self. Life will continue to be a difficulty unless someone identifies themselves to be a sufficient self. The search for a secure identity and sense of completion is a never-ending process. Hayavadana, who feels inadequate primarily because of the horse's head and hurts from estrangement, goes through a similar dilemma.

Conclusion: In *Hayavadana*, Karnad analyses existential crises and the sense of incompleteness that each and every person in the contemporary society feels. Mostly every individual in the play is portrayed as a reflection of

contemporary society, including Devedatta, Padmini, their child, Kapila, and Hayavadana. They're all looking for their true selves and a sense of completion. We may see two parts of the psychological and moral aspects of the problem of existential crisis here. As a result, practically every internal crisis of beings arises, is resolved, and then arises again. And, because there is always a shortage of it, the everlasting search for identity and completeness never finishes. As M.K.Naik in his *A History of Indian English Literature* says, "In order to attain assimilation, civilization must reclaim his feeling of infantile enthusiasm, surprise, and enjoyment at life's mere inconsistency." (59)

The play's opening and finish are both beautifully presented. as Karnad begins the play through the storyteller Bhagavata with a prayer to Lord Ganesha, who is the personification of imperfections, and closes it with a prayer: "Give us, Please Lord, good rainfall, good harvest, prosperity in literature, knowledge, trade, and other matters. Give our world's rulers success in all attempts, as well as a smidgeon of common sense." (Karnad,142)Karnad paints a holistic image of human creatures on their quest for purity and wholeness.

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