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# A Study of Text and its Allegorical Accomplishments in Girish Karnad's Hayavadana

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## ABSTRACT

The plot of Hayavadana longs for the sixth story in Vetala Panchvimshati, a constituent of Somadeva's Kathasaritsagara. There, a beautiful woman is married to a washer man. One day, a couple and the better half's brother participated in a festival at Kali's temple. The husband sacrifices his head to the Deity, followed by the sacrifice of the better half's brother. When the woman prepares to offer her head, the goddess not only impedes her but also helps her by reviving the dead. But the woman mixes up the heads. The head of the husband is on the brother's shoulders and vice versa. The moral dilemma is: who is her husband? Vikrama solves this problem by deciding that the figure with the husband's head is the actual husband of the woman. He holds that this is the head that determines the recognition of a person.

The mythical story had a close resemblance to the story of Hayavadana. To understand the play, we need to understand the mind of Karna's reading in Thomas Mann's The Transposed Heads. Under the influence of Western ideology, Mann ridicules the basic concept of differentiating between Body and Soul. He holds that the embodiment is instrumental in the fulfilment of human destiny.

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*The mythical story had a close resemblance to the story of Hayavadana. To understand the play, we need to understand the mind of Karna's reading in Thomas Mann's The Transposed Heads. Under the influence of Western ideology, Mann ridicules the basic concept of differentiating between Body and Soul. He holds that the embodiment is instrumental in the fulfilment of human destiny. Girish Karnad deals with the question of head and Body for a different purpose. Interestingly, the main and the sub-plot of Hayavadana deal with the moral and philosophical aspects of the problem and uplift more issues relating to human existence.*

**Keywords:** mythical, ideology, philosophical, dilemma, embodiment, hayavadana.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The play begins with the worship of Ganesha and introduces three main characters: Devadatta, Kapila, and a beautiful girl named Padmini. In a subplot, there is a semi-human figure called Hayavadana, who has the body of a human and the head of a horse. The Bhagavata introduces the main characters, while Hayavadana makes his entrance later. Devadatta is a scholarly man with a frail body, while Kapila is a wrestler with a strong physique. They are close friends who care deeply for each other, often being compared to the legendary figures Rama and Lakshmana. Devadatta falls in love with Padmini but hesitates to propose to her. Instead, he seeks the help of Kapila, who gladly approaches Padmini on Devadatta's behalf.

Kapila successfully convinces Padmini of Devadatta's love, leading to their marriage. However, as Kapila continues to visit Devadatta, he is unaware that Devadatta is becoming increasingly dissatisfied. Padmini begins to praise Kapila in front of Devadatta, which he finds hard to bear, fueling his expanded resentment towards his friend. The mutual attraction between Padmini and Kapila intensifies, and she becomes enamoured with Kapila's muscular physique—a quality that Devadatta lacks. As a result, Devadatta's jealousy of Kapila deepens with each passing day.

## II. REACHING THE TEMPLE OF RUDRA

One day, the three plan to go on an excursion, but Devadatta does not like Kapila to accompany the couple. On one or the other pretext, he tries to cancel the programme, which his wife does not permit him to do. She insists on going accompanied by Kapila even at the risk of her pregnancy. Devadatta gives in for the benefit of his wife and old friend, whom he does not want to

offend. The three reach the temple of Rudra on a bullock cart driven by Kapila.

Devadatta gets tired and wants to ease up, whereas Padmini and Kapila intend to enjoy each other's company. Leaving Devadatta alone, they go for an outing further. While they arrive late, Devadatta's doubt about their relationship gains new dimensions. Unable to bear the pangs of jealousy, he goes to the temple of Kali and cuts his head off in the presence of the goddess.

When Padmini and Kapila return, they find him missing. Kapila starts searching for Devadatta and finds him dead in the temple. Fearing that people will hold him responsible for this death, he too, beheads himself. Padmini too reaches the sight and finds her husband and his friend dead. In confusion and horror, she starts blaming the goddess for being a mute witness to the two deaths. She prays to the goddess to bring the dead to life. The goddess grants the wish and empowers her to revive the two by joining their heads to the bodies. However, Padmini joins the head of Devadatta on the body of the Kapila and vice versa which further complicates the problem. She desires to go with the figure that has Devadatta's head and Kapila's body but both the figures show their claim over her as a wife.

### III. APPROACHING TO A RISHI

To resolve the dispute, they approach a Rishi who is living nearby and decide that the figure with Devadatta's head is the husband of Padmini. Feeling jubilated over the decision, Padmini goes with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body. Disappointed, Kapila gives the world and decides to live in a forest. The new combination, however, fails to interest Padmini for a long time, and her yearning to meet Kapila does not subside. One day, while Devadatta has gone to the Ujjain fair, she sets out to search for Kapila again. In the forest, she succeeds in locating him and expresses her love to him without any reservations. But his meeting does not last long as Devadatta also joins them. Caught in a strange situation, Devadatta and Kapila try to find some amicable solution to their problem but fail to do so.

Then they have a dual thinking that whoever will win will have the claim over Padmini. But none survives, and Padmini is left with no choice except to perform, Sati knowing not for whom she is making this sacrifice. The story of the sub-plot contributes towards the development of the action of the play in its way. Harnessing the 'epic theatre' technique of Brecht and the traditional elements of Indian drama, the playwright attempts to explore a metaphysical theme. With the religious background of the ancient Indian drama, he grapples with modern philosophy like existentialism. The paramount issue in Hayavadana is the complexity of human relationships. All the characters in this play appear as incomplete halves searching for their completion. Devadatta and Kapila "who are Rama and Krishna, Krishna and Balarama" for the people who love each other. Like Devayani and Sharmishtha in Yayati, their existence appears to be interlocated initially. First, Devadatta and Kapila are like body and soul to each other, and after Devadatta marries Padmini, they are like "Rama-Sita-Lakshma". But when Devadatta smells affection between his wife and Kapila, he begins to execute him. This hatred soon overpowers their relationship, and he compares Kapila with a dog: he only has to see her, and begins to wag his tail and sits up on the hind legs as though he were afraid to let her words fall on the ground, and that pleading in his eyes.

Devadatta feels hurt because his wife ignores his gestures of love and prefers spending time with his friend. He feels betrayed by both his friend and his wife. To him, Padmini is like Sita and is not supposed to develop any affection for his friend, while Kapila, who he sees as Lakshmana, should not look at his wife with ill intentions. The close relationship between the two causes him significant distress.

Devadatta is reluctant to have Kapila accompany them on their trip to the temple in Ujjain, as he wants to preserve their privacy. However, Padmini has shifted her affections from Devadatta to Kapila, which is why she insists on bringing him along, disregarding her husband's feelings. When Devadatta suggests cancelling the trip under the pretence of her pregnancy, she firmly

refuses, stating that she has a "steel womb" and that there is no reason to abandon their plans. The situation becomes particularly interesting because none of the three wants to openly offend the others with a definitive yes or no. This ambiguity in their actions adds complexity to their relationships.

Devadatta is never straightforward enough to tell Kapila he is no longer welcome in his house. He also does not explicitly prevent his wife, Padmini, from talking to or meeting Kapila. Instead, he conceals his true feelings when Padmini questions him about his irritation with Kapila's name. He responds, "I'm not upset, Padmini. Kapila is not just a friend; he is like my brother. It takes seven lifetimes to earn a friend like him." Kapila suffers from the same reluctance; he also avoids expressing his feelings, knowing it could lead to a confrontation between the two friends. He wishes to maintain both relationships: his friendship with Devadatta and his affection for Padmini.

Padmini too is not free from this complex. She too is very secretive about her attraction for Kapila. She cannot tell Devadatta that she likes Kapila for his beautiful body, something which he lacks and so she loves him no more. When Devadatta indiscreetly expresses his dislike for the intimacy between her and Kapila, she implores him thus, look now. You got annoyed about Kapila. But Why? You are my saffron, my marriage thread, and my deity. Why should you feel upset? Devadatta and Padmini return to Ujjain temple as well as find Devadatta missing. Kapila feels concerned for Devadatta and his joy. He repeatedly asserts his sincerity for him. He regrets that he did not leave the couple alone, knowing very well that Devadatta did not like his association with them. The goddess Kali significantly points out that Kapila is selfish even in his sacrifice. He has sacrificed his head to Kali not out of any reverence for her but not out of the fear of being publicly humiliated for the death of his friend.

#### IV. MEETING IN THE FOREST

Meeting Kapila in the forest, Padmini discovers that he is also suffering from the feeling of

incompleteness. He confesses that he has "no peace" and "no salvation." Like Padmini, he desires to return to the past, but the thought frightens him. Seeing Padmini reminds him that his arduous journey is still not over: "I thought I had won this long and weary battle. Why did you have to pursue me? What do you want now, another head, another suicide?" Perhaps he has realized that there is no one to do him a favour. "Go back, back to Devadatta. He is your husband," he urges her. Knowing his plight, Padmini begins to blame herself, realizing that she started the story of "no peace." Despite having obtained the head and body of her choice, she still feels like a loser. She readily accepts the responsibility for the suffering of both Devadatta and Kapila: "It is my fault I mixed the heads up, and I must suffer for it."

Padmini stands as a silent observer, feeling cheated yet again. Her solutions hold no value for them, so they never seek her input on resolving their conflicts. They fight as if her feelings do not matter, disregarding whether they live or die. Consequently, Padmini sees death as her only option and chooses to perform Sati. Karnad, with a blend of humour and critique, skillfully manipulates the concepts of rationality and physicality. The diverse characters, along with their unique physicality, interact with one another, creating intricate patterns of human relationships. By showcasing these human emotions amid an increasingly intense clash of personalities, Karnad presents a profound exploration of humanity.

The play explores the theme of incompleteness at three levels: the animal, the human, and the divine. Ganesh represents imperfection at the divine level, while the human characters embody this theme on the human level. Incompleteness is an inevitable part of life, and human relationships are bound to be affected by it. Padmini's absurd attempt to achieve a perfect combination of head and body illustrates this point. Similarly, Hayavadana's mother transforms her husband into an idealized figure through her lover, only to be abandoned and cursed. She also fails to attain what is realistically possible within human limits.

This contrast of human existence is symbolized in the grotesque figure of Kali.

In the works of Girish Karnad, as seen in William Shakespeare's plays, the use of a subplot is a common technique. Notably, the title of the play does not derive from the name of any character in the main plot; instead, it is named after Hayavadana, who is the central figure around which the subplot revolves. Hayavadana possesses a human body and a horse's head, creating an intriguing contrast that parallels the figure of Ganesha, who has an animal's head and a human body. While Ganesha is revered for his perfection, Hayavadana is in search of this same ideal. Despite invoking Ganesha, Hayavadana ultimately cannot attain perfection. The literary genetic framework of the triadic relationship among Karnad, Kalidasa, and Vyasa suggests that the theme of "Hayavadana" is less about the "mad dance of incompleteness" and more about the plight of abandoned children in an indifferent world. The author further draws parallels between the lives of Shakuntala and Hayavadana.

#### V. HAYAVADANA'S PLIGHT

Shakuntala is the daughter of a great Rishi and a celestial being, while Hayavadana is the son of a great princess and a celestial being. In both cases, the parents abandon their children; Shakuntala is initially cared for by birds and later by Kanwa. Similarly, Hayavadana is forsaken by his parents—his celestial father returns to heaven, and his mother, cursed by her husband, transforms into a horse and joins the horse family. Hayavadana exists as a blend of celestial, human, and animal traits. He poses the poignant question to the Bhagavata: "But where is my society? What can I do?" These mournful words echo Vyasa's "Shakuntala." The text highlights that Hayavadana's plight is even worse than Shakuntala's, as he finds himself neither fully a man nor entirely an animal.

Some critics argue that the play explores the issue of identity. The characters in the main plot continuously struggle to assert their identities, and Hayavadana is no exception. His primary challenge revolves around identity. Despite having the head of a horse, he yearns to be human,

believing that this will allow him to establish his identity more fully. However, he remains unaware of the struggles faced by human beings like Kapila and Devadatta. Devadatta experiences failure despite having a privileged background, while Kapila faces his challenges as a flawed human. In contrast, Hayavadana is a failure despite being the son of a celestial being. He exemplifies the concept of incompleteness at the animal level.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Hayavadana is not only an object of attraction and humour due to his animal head and the human body, but he also serves as a symbol of irony, wit, farce, and laughter. In his quest for completeness, he seeks the help of various deities at sacred sites such as Banaras, Rameshwar, Gokarn, Haridwar, Gaya, Kedarnath, and even the Dargah of Khwaja Yusuf Baba and the Grotto of Virgin Mary. However, none of these interventions prove helpful. Ultimately, as suggested by Bhagavata, he turns to Kali of Mount Chitrakoot for assistance. Unfortunately, similar to the situation with Padmini, Kali complicates his problem further. Instead of transforming into a complete man, Hayavadana instead becomes a fully formed horse with a human voice. After trying all the gods, Hayavadana finds hope in singing the national anthem loudly, which always seems to have "ruined their voices." However, it "does not seem to work" for him. Through Hayavadana, the playwright satirizes the hypocrisy of Indian leaders who sing the national anthem loudly more for show than for any genuine patriotic motive. The playwright showcases his sharp satire when no god but Padmini's child aids him by at least providing the neigh of a horse. The irony comes full circle when, instead of becoming a complete man, Hayavadana transforms into a complete horse. Bhagavata ironically comments that the mercy of the elephant-headed Ganesha is indeed unfathomable.

Devadatta and Kapila, the friends of Dharmapura, kill each other after entering the forest. Except for Anju Mallige, which is set in England, all other plays of Karnad have Indian settings. In Nagamandala the whole action takes place in Appanna's house, which has a Naga living in its

courtyard. Tale-Danda too is set in the city of Kalyan in Karnataka. The action takes place in the Brahmin's quarter, in the Queen's chamber, in the god's room and the front yard of the king's palace. But the action in Hayavadana and Tughlaq shifts from one place to another. If it shifts from Delhi to Daulatbad in Tughlaq-it is from Dharmapura to the forest in Hayavadana.

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