

**A Sense Of Completeness And A Search Of Human Identity In
Girish Karnad's Play Hayavadana**

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Abstract: Drama, being an audiovisual medium of expression, has been a very effective and powerful genre in world literature. Girish Karnad, recipient of Jnanpith award is a living legend in the arena of contemporary Indian- English Drama. His Journey from *Yayati* to *the Fire and rain* holds a mirror to the very evolution of Indian theatre during nearly four decades. Karnad is India's leading playwright and one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts. This paper is an attempt to explore the theme of **"A Sense of Completeness and a Search of Human Identity in Girish Karnad's Play Hayavadana."**

Key Words: Audio-visual medium, Contemporary Indian- English Drama, Search of human Identity.

History of Drama: The birth and development of drama in Greece, Rome, England and India emphasizes upon the fact that it has always been an integral part of culture, highlighting and evaluating moral commitments, religious convictions, philosophical approaches, and social and political changes in various countries. Drama is a mimetic representation of life combining in itself the real and the fictional, art and reality and presents the events and characters within a dimension of space and time. It combines the qualities of narrative poetry with visual arts.

Indian- English Drama saw the first light of the day when Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote '*The Persecuted*' in 1813. However, the real journey of Indian English Drama began with Michel Madhusudhan Dutt's '*Is this called civilization*' which appeared on the literary horizon in 1871, though it was not followed by a sustainable creative effort for decades together. After a long hiatus of a few decades it was only

by the early 20th century that Indian English Drama gathered momentum under the influence of British Drama.

In the post –independence era the most prolific playwright, Asif Currimbhoy wrote and published more than thirty plays on a wide range and variety of subject matters. History and contemporary politics, social and economic problems, the east west encounter, religion, philosophy, art were the several issues he wrote on. Another important name in this field is Girish Karnad who is a play writer, actor critic and emissary of Indian art and culture. He is among the foremost media persons of our time. Karnad's achievements as a playwright have received widespread recognition both nationally and internationally. As an actor director, anti-critic and film star Karnad is a man of many achievements though he is at his best in playwriting. He accepts, "I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I have been actor, a publisher, a filmmaker. But in none of these I felt quite as much at home as in play writing"¹

Karnad's five plays *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana* *Nagamandala* *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain*, have been translated into English, the first two by Karnad himself. His plays are steeped in Indian culture for the themes are taken from myths, legends, folk tales and history, but his approach is modern. He combines classical, folk and western theatrical tradition in his plays. His contribution to Indian English Drama is immense. Contemporary drama gives a brutal account of the social and political realities.

In-depth study of Karnad's play Hayavadana: Hayavadana is a third play of Karnad which was published in 1970. The symbolic core of Hayavadana comprises the philosophic crisis of estrangement between mind and body. This play is thoroughly modern in outlook and spirit. Karnad goes back in time to make a very relevant social comment. Only here the inspiration is not history but mythology and folk core. Karnad here explores all the modern concerns through the lens of the eternal emotion of love. Through folk tale and myth Karnad gives us an insight into the issues of modern life in entirely new ways. Vanashree Tripathi feels that "Karnad's confabulation of the classics with the folk tales of the transposed heads and the story of a half-man, half horse, playfully dilutes the prototypical themes

(Shakuntalam and Mrichhakatikam), where the ideal balance between duty and passion is restored. Hayavadana, in exploring the realm of love: erotic—man-woman, male bonding, parent- child, offers us insight into the desires, hopes, fulfilment and frustration it breeds "²

The meaning of Hayavadana is 'the one with the horse's head' named after a horseheaded man, who wants to shed the horse's head and become human. The central episode of Hayavadana is the story of Devadatta and Kapila comes from Vetala-panchavimsati in Kathasaritsagara that is an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit and is blended with the myth of Hayagriva in the Mahabharata. However, of his own admission, Karnad has "drawn heavily on Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in 'The Transposed Heads.'" ³

The story is about Devadatta and Kapila, two close friends. Devadatta is a man of "intellect", and Kapila a man of "muscles". Devadatta falls in love with Padmini and marries her. When the play opens Kapila and Devadatta are not only best of friends they are "one mind, one heart."⁴ Kapila also falls in love with her and slowly Padmini gets attracted towards him. Padmini is travelling with her insecure and jealous husband Devadatta and his friend Kapila. Devadatta, suspecting his wife's loyalties, goes to a temple of Goddess Kali and beheads himself. Kapila finds the body and, rightfully feeling that he will be accused of having killed his dearest friend because he, Kapila, coveted his wife, in turn beheads himself. Dhanavel explains that "Karnad has plainly suggested that reconciliation with one's self and one's environment is the best course of action for the incomplete and insatiable human beings for the attempts of persons to achieve completeness and perfection usually end tragically and/or comically."⁶

As of now Kapila is not aware of her sexually but an indication of the coming catastrophic events is reflected in Kapila's soliloquy: "Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can 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...." ⁵

When Padmini finds the truncated bodies' of the two men in her life she is beyond consolation. Afraid of the scandal that is bound to follow, she too prepares to kill herself. Now the goddess Kali takes pity and comes to her aid. Padmini needs only to rejoin the heads to the bodies and the goddess will bring them back to life. Padmini follows the instructions; the men come back to life—except that in her confusion she has mixed up the heads. And this creates a major confusion in their lives. There arises the confusing question regarding who is the real Devadatta. The head, or the body? This incident gives Karnad an opportunity to explore the crisis of identity that modern man is experiencing.

The confusion of identities in the main plot of Devadatta- Padmini Kapila reveals ambiguous nature of human personality. After their heads are transposed Devadatta and Kapila do not retain their original selves. Thus they lose themselves. Padmini, who after the exchange of heads, thinks that she has the best of both the worlds, slowly reaches disillusionment. The play seems to suggest that if perfection or completeness means fusion of two polarities, such completeness is not possible. Padmini's research for the complete man, who must have the best attributes of mind and body, is frustrated in spite of her best efforts and she realizes that it is the intellect that is supreme and always determines what a man is or becomes. The myth has been reinterpreted and has been used to present a very modern problem of tangled relationships in the contemporary society.

Padmini's predicament is the predicament of a modern emancipated woman in our society who is torn between two polarities - a woman who loves her husband but at the same time is also attracted towards someone else for a different aspect of his personality. The 'sub-plot' of Hayavadana deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plain. The horseman's search for completeness ends with his becoming a complete horse and the triumph of the animal head over the so called superior human intellect.

Conclusion: Hayavadana presents a universal and very real emotional dynamics that lie close under the whimsical surface of the plot: friendship and jealousy, self-possession and self-doubt, and most importantly, love. Hayavadana is unique in sense that it encompasses all the aspects of life and experience. All three

spheres of existence - divine, human and animal are encompassed and Karnad looks at the problems of each with a sympathetic and discerning eye Hayavadana is a complex play and it reflects and symbolizes Karnad's deep concern and keen understanding of human problems. The whole of the story of the sub-plot of Hayavadana though inspired by the myth of Hayavadana from Mahabharata has been invented by Karnad. The conclusion does indicate that Hayavadana has succeeded in achieving completeness and he is happy with his completeness. As the play draws to its end Hayavadana has lost his human voice too and he is enjoying his complete animal hood.

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