

Karnad's *Hayavadana*: Quest for Completeness

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Abstract

Hayavadana is a masterpiece of modern Indian English theatre by Girish Karnad that explores the philosophical and existential issues of completeness. Karnad uses old Indian writings like the *Kathasaritsagara* and Thomas Mann's work on the switched heads, to build a web of tales that deals with identity, fragmentation and uniqueness. The play posits that humans are inherently flawed and strives for wholeness. Karnad examines the dichotomies of desire and morality, societal norms and personal fulfillment, as well as the body-mind dualism. He projects his story with the narratives of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. This article analyses Karnad's portrayal of human quest for completeness via folklore, myth and dramatic techniques, by questioning its attainability.

Keywords: Existentialism, fullness, uniqueness, myth, dissolution and dramatic tension

Introduction

Girish Karnad is one of the most remarkable writers of modern Indian English literature. He is known for his plays on mythology with modern existential issues. His play, *Hayavadana* is a great example of a mythological story. He retells myth in the light of current issues by enabling one's existence in this world.

The main idea of the play is quest for completeness. The characters of the play have brain, emotions and bodies, yet they struggle for completeness. They struggle due to their conflicting desires, social pressures and moral dilemmas.

Karnad uses myth not just to retell stories but also paves way to think critically. He selects the theme of quest for completeness by reworking the classic legends. His play invites

the audience to reflect on their own fragmented identities and aspirations for perfection.

Using traditional Stories and Myths as a Structure

One of the best skills of Karnad about Hayavadana is how he uses folklore and myth. Karnad takes a new look at Thomas Mann's version of the *Kathasaritsagara's* story of exchanged heads. Karnad's version has a very Indian feel to it since it draws on local theatrical traditions like *Yakshagana*.

The myth provides a symbolic framework for exploring profound philosophical ideas. The tale of Devadatta and Kapila's head-swapping, raises the question of whether the mind or the body contains the key to a person's identity. What matters more: ¿a person's intellect or body?

The subplot of *Hayavadana*, the horse-headed man, makes the notion of incompleteness even stronger. *Hayavadana* is born incomplete, but Devadatta and Kapila become incomplete. Ironically, a search for human perfection converts him into a complete horse, which suggests that being complete can entail giving up being human.

Myth in the play has a function beyond being merely decorative; it lets Karnad look at existential issues in a manner that is both deep and easy to understand.

Split personality

The fundamental struggle in the play comes from the loss of one's sense of self. Kapila represents strength and energy, whereas Devadatta stands for intellect and emotion. Padmini is stuck between these two conflicting tendencies. She wants to meet a man who is ideal in every way: smart and good looking.

When Devadatta and Kapila's heads are exchanged by accident, it becomes hard to tell who is who. Even if Kapila was still alive, Devadatta was still the rightful spouse since, according to common belief, a person's identity is based on their head (the seat of intellect). But this deal does not bring about peace.

In reality, the characters are far more unhappy than that. As Kapila separates from his previous self in Devadatta's body, Devadatta's physical strength slowly disappears. Padmini discovers her ideal blend right away, but she rapidly realizes that it won't last.

Karnad says that one's identity is not fixed, but rather may change. Since every person rely on each other, trying to achieve complete harmony, is an unattainable goal.

Padmini Role: Want and unhappiness

Padmini, one of the most complex characters in the drama, represents the natural restlessness and desire of the human soul. She doesn't back down when she says she likes Kapila, which sounds different.

She wants a mate who is smart like Devadatta and powerful like Kapila so that she may feel whole. She wants the heads to be moved, but it doesn't make her happy.

Padmini's character shows how strange human desire is. Though our needs meet, we find other reasons to be dissatisfied. She undergoes emotional pressure and commits sati in the end, which reveals that she can't settle her inner issues.

Karnad uses Padmini to show that an idea of absolute fulfillment is an illusion and to attack the idea of completion. She symbolises the individuals who are continually caught between what they already have and what more they want.

Hayavadana: A Sign of incompleteness

Hayavadana's character is important since it is a strong symbol of incompleteness. People make fun of him and kick him out of society because he has a horse's head and a human body. He has a simple goal: to live life as a whole human being.

But things look different when he turns into a horse instead of a human. This alteration raises questions about what it means to be whole. Is it worth to shed one's humanity to become something else?

Hayavadana's story is quite different from Devadatta's and Kapila's. *Hayavadana* moves from being entire to falling apart, while they go from being whole to falling apart. But this level of detail isn't necessarily a good thing.

Karnad's reading of *Hayavadana* says that fullness is a personal choice. From one perspective, what seems to be completion may instead signify a loss. So, the character makes the play's major argument that the desire for wholeness is full of irony and uncertainty.

Existential element

Hayavadana is mostly focused on existential themes. The play contends that humans are flawed and devoid of significance in this absurd world; this is a core principle of existential philosophy.

Everyone feels anxious and unhappy at some point in their lives, and the characters' situations are similar. Padmini is stuck in a never-ending cycle of crisis. Devadatta and Kapila can't bring themselves together to satisfy Padmini. *Hayavadana's* transformation is even more absurd as it urges for completeness.

Karnad's portrayal of these issues aligns with existentialist concepts of autonomy, responsibility and free choice. The characters have the power to make their own choices, yet those choices have unexpected results, which shows how life is full of surprises.

Unique theatrical and dramatic techniques

Karnad employs many theatrical techniques to enhance the play's themes. Using a meta-theatrical framework, Karnad reminds the audience that the play is made up of complex characters.

The duality and fragmentation theme is made stronger by using music, dancing and masks from traditional Indian theatre. Dolls make things more sarcastic and distant by talking about what's going on.

These techniques improve both the play's artistic value and its philosophical topics. Karnad's work is unique as it combines old and new methods to create a theatrical experience that stimulates human mind and soul.

Imperfection: A reality

One of the key ideas of *Hayavadana* is that imperfection is the fact. The characters' attempt to become whole, lead to even greater unhappiness and fragmentation.

Devadatta and Kapila's change of bodies does not help Padmini to work out her problems. Their transformation of bodies has created inner crisis. Padmini is still unhappy even if her desire comes true. Like *Hayavadana* gives up its form to reach the goal, Padmini has given up her quest for completeness. She is not happy with the transformation of Kapila and Devadatta.

Karnad asserts that the inherent incompleteness of people is essential to their existence. It's reasonable to desire, to quest, yet that aim will always be out of reach.

Conclusion

Hayavadana goes deep into the common longing for satisfaction. The play is a great piece of art through its theme, plot, characters and theatrical effects.

Karnad encourages people to think again about what it means to be perfect and complete. He talks on the idea that completeness shows the boundaries of human existence instead of being an aim in itself.

The play suggests that the secret of happiness and satisfaction is to accept yourself exactly as you are. *Hayavadana* is a wonderful and unavoidable reminder that humans aren't perfect, even if they constantly attempt to be.

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