



## **Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana: Analysis of the humanism and the idea of completeness**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper deals the Girish Karnad's Play Hayavadana: analysis of the Humanism and the idea of completeness. Girish Karnad is regarded as one of the luminiferous stars in the universe of Indian theatre. His plays are renowned for its innovative tone and aesthetic appeal. Hayavadana, his third play, spins around the theme of identity and quest for perfection. Two plots appear intertwined in Hayavadana- one is the triangle relationship of Padmini, Kapila and Devadatta and the other is a sub plot which deals with the story of Hayavadana. The story of Padmini's inexhaustible desire for a perfect husband aptly fits into a play which deals with the theme of human completeness. Hayavadana appears to be foregrounding concerns of completeness and appeasement under Spencer's and Nietzsche's ideals of 'superhero' or 'superman'. In the human world of Devadatta and Kapila, transposition offers a symbolic but temporary resolution to the problem of mind/body dualism: for a brief period of time, Devadatta-Kapila possesses the ideal mind as well as the ideal body, while the other hybrid being, Kapila-Devadatta, is deficient in both respects. The three characters are complete in every sense and send a message to everyone that God looks upon those who are only patient, righteous and innocent of sins. Padmini is the only character in the play who is left out without a proper validation. Padmini is the only character who is left incomplete in the play.

**Keywords:** Girish Karnad, play, Hayavadana, humanism

### **Introduction**

Hayavadana puts forward this notion of incompleteness and also suggests the ensuing journey of human beings for perfection. The play begins with an invocation to lord Ganesha. Lord Ganesha has an elephant head with a human body but is neither considered as an animal nor as a human but as God. The invocation ends by the lines: "O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, / we pay homage to you and start our play"<sup>[1]</sup>.

A stimulation in thinking happens when it is observed that philosophers, such as Seneca, or Sartre happened to be the prominent playwrights of their time. These philosophers have raised philosophical concerns, like reality, truth, humanity, life etc. in their plays. In other words, they have articulated philosophy in the attire of characters. Tom Stern observes that "many of the traditional concerns of philosophy-truth, reality and representation, action and its consequences, living the right kind of life-are explored in a variety of theatrical context" (158). However, the plays of philosophers, like Voltaire seem to be dramatizing philosophical issues, springing from the experiences of people, regarding their existence. Thus the dramatists have tended to focus on exploration of human experience in their plays. The focus of the present paper is that Girish Karnad has dramatized the idea of completeness in the play, Hayavadana. Humanism is one of the branches of philosophy, which deliberate on such issues.

### **Connections between Drama and Humanism**

Hayavadana (1975) is the third play written by Girish Karnad. The play is based on Kathasarithsagra and Thomas Mann's Transposed Heads. It blends myths, legends and folk techniques to create a potion tinged with humour, sarcasm and social criticism. According to M.K. Naik,

"Hayavadana presents the typical existential anguish, but does not stop at the existential despair. Going beyond it, the play suggests a strategy for the achievement of integration in a world inevitably cursed with absurdity and irrationality"<sup>[2]</sup>. Human life is essentially not perfect. Each individual experiences flaws of one kind or another. They are not the ultimate beings or the centre of all activities as the anthropocentric discourses suggest. Superiority of human beings and their supposed existence akin to the sun in the solar system is basically a myth.

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### **Karnad's Thoughts on Hayavadana**

The main plot revolves around three characters- Padmini, Kapila and Devadatta. Devadatta and Kapila in the outset of the play are bosom friends. While Devadatta is renowned

for his exemplary scholarship and Kapila is bestowed with a robust body. Both of them thus stands as an epitome of two qualities and hence reminds of the binary relation between body and mind. The plot takes a major twist with the entry of Padmini. Devadatta gets enchanted by Padmini's beauty and falls for her. Their wedding takes place. Padmini admires the sharp intellect of Devadatta but feels dejected as he lacked good physique. Humans who have a perfect amalgamation of both a robust body and a sharp intellect are considered as rare. One who has intellect may lack a good physique and vice versa. Such flaws are mostly considered as inherent. But Padmini was ambitious. She couldn't compromise her desires. She was enchanted by the robust body of Kapila, which Devadatta shockingly discovers. Padmini's desire for a perfect husband can be read in the light of transhumanism.

Transhumanism is usually defined as a set of philosophies or as a socio-cultural process that is based on the assumption that human beings can be improved drastically by the application of sophisticated technology. "Transhumanists promote the view that human enhancement technologies should be made widely available..." [3]. Transhumanism is an extension of humanism and looks forward in improving the abilities of humans. "Transhumanism do not speak in one voice, and the movement expresses a variety of impulses (...) Several themes are common to transhumanist discourse: the view of evolving human nature, the focus on biotechnological enhancement that will exceed ordinary human physical and cognitive traits, a deep concern for longevity..." [4]. Padmini's quest is also synonymous with such transhuman perspectives. Human body and mind forms the focus of Padmini's thoughts.

### **Karnad's Approach to Hayavadana**

The play can be read as an interrogation into the basic idea of human itself. Hayavadana who is born as a result of the communion between a human princess and a celestial human being or gandharva (in the form of horse) shatters the premises of hetero normative human communities where a human male is assumed as the centre. Moreover, Hayavadana in the end of the play changes into a complete horse. The son of Padmini could establish communion only with Hayavadana. This may indicate that the animal world of Hayavadana is much better than the human world which is full of scrupulous agendas and frailties.

Padmini's quest for perfection doesn't end with experimentation on Devadatta's and Kapila's bodies. Before embracing death after Devadatta and Kapila passed away, Padmini instructs Bhagavatha on how to bring up her son. She instructs that her son must be handed over to Kapila's people in the forest and after five years to Devadatta's father as his grandchild. First he should be taught by Kapila's people, so that he can gain a stout and strong body. Then, he should be made the disciple of Devadatta's father so that he will be bestowed with a keen intellect. Padmini is here playing with the parentage of her son. She paints an ambiguity regarding her son's father. With the transposition of heads, Devdatta's body was fitted to Kapila's head. This creates a confusion regarding the real father of Padmini's son. It evokes the question of to whom does the child belong to; to Devdatta's face or to his body (which are not united anymore!)? Karnad here questions the ambiguity which envelops the notion of human itself. Is it the head or the

body which identifies a being as human? Or whether it is the union of the two?

Padmini is trying to convert her son from being an average human being; she wants him to be perfect with a sharp intellect and good physique. Padmini's strategizing can be due to suspicion about human being's inherent nature of imperfection. Padmini may have assumed that a transfer of genes from his parents won't grant a successful life to her son. Genes can be tricky. Nobody can be sure about the traits which flow through the genetic creeks over generations. Having a 'desirable' parentage which combines all the qualities therefore doesn't need to grant the child with all those perfect qualities. Also, from her previous experience she understood that circumstances and environment can also affect the faculties. Artificial changes inculcated on the body at a later stage on life may not remain permanent. So, she wanted to train her son from his infancy itself. Such notions about inculcating new faculties bring forth the concept of human enhancement. "Due to genetic engineering, humans are now able not only to design themselves, presumably to get rid of various limitations, but also redesign future generations thereby affecting the evolutionary process itself" [4].

### **Conclusion**

In a transhumanistic world, the genes, mental and physical attributes and even desires can be installed even before birth. Fortunately, when such a world becomes a reality, it will also provide them with many more opportunities for further enhancements and modifications. Nobody has to be dissatisfied with their flaws, if such services and processes are distributed in an egalitarian manner. Transhumanism envisions a 'flawless', world thus challenging even the premises of human evolution. But even then, there is dark cloud that looms over the head of human beings, the impending warning that an overuse or abuse of science and technology may prove to be bane and will result in catastrophe. New discoveries erase the old ones by projecting its flaws and such a technology when encountered with a slight aberration will lead to disastrous consequences. There are also certain conditions and emotions in human life which science couldn't decipher. Except from theoretical standpoints, a transhumanist world still exists as a mirage, as no such enhanced communities are manufactured till now. Hence, similar to the oddities that persist in the concept of transhumanism, the play also displays oddities regarding the notion of perfection.

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