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DEVADATTA, KAPILA AND PADMINI IN HAYAVADANA : A WEB OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT



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ABSTRACT

Jnapith award winner Girish Karnad is a unique personality known for his acting and plays written by Karnad in Kannada and English. He has become prominent for his works like Tuglaq, Hayavadana, Taledanda, Yayati, etc. His play Hayavadana, inspired by the work of Thomas Mann titled “The Transposed Heads” is a masterpiece. Mind is considered to be the best over matter in our socio-cultural context. In Shastras, the head epitomizes a man. Girish Karnad presents socio-cultural practices in India like Sati when Padmini commits Sati in order to prove her chastity. Hayavadana is all about the theme of incompleteness of human quest for perception, undying restlessness of the individual to reach the wholeness and extreme intricacies of human relationship.

KEYWORDS : human relationship, Karnad, perception, Sati, Hayavadana

RESEARCH PAPER

GIRISH KARNAD'S "Hayavadana" is one of the playwright's most-performed plays. This is hardly surprising given that the work provides the ingredients that would stimulate any innovative, intelligent troupe: a plot and sub-plot that intertwine to explore the tricky questions of identity and the nature of reality; the clever incorporation of motifs from traditional theatre — Yakshagana, a play within a play, dolls, masks; the irreverent inversion of mock-heroic mores. This is a text that begs experimentation and challenges players and audience alike to dare step "out of the box" into a whole new perception of reality.

In **ACT ONE**, the play Hayavadana starts with prayer to Lord Ganesha and Bhagavata sings the verses for the success of the play. In the verses, the narrator talks of the incompleteness of God. Bhagavata introduces the place and setting. It is the city of Dharmapura ruled by the King Dharmasheela. Devadatta and Kapila are introduced as the two lead characters. Devadatta is a son of Brahmin Vidyasagara. He is a great scholar with poetic abilities. Kapila is a son of Ironsmith Lohita. He is a heroic personality with amazing physical skills. He says that Devadatta and Kapila are indivisible friends like brothers. They are compared to Rama and Lakshmana, Lava and Kusha, Krishna and Balarama. An actor explains that he saw a horse that spoke when he was about to urinate on the road. The actor says that the horse with a thick voice tells him not to commit such thing in public. Bhagavata finds a bizarre being with the head of a horse and the body of a man. At first, he believes that the horse head is a mask and tries to remove to no use. After a few futile attempts, Bhagavata realizes that the horse head is certainly real and the being is half-man, half-horse.

The source for this work by Thomas Mann is "Kathasaritsagara", an old Sanskrit collection of stories. Karnad focuses on the incompleteness in the play. Hayavadana is written in two acts with the involvement of Bhagavata who is the commentator to the actions in the play. *Hayavadana* (1971) was based on a theme drawn from *The Transposed Heads*, a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, which is originally found in the 11th-century Sanskrit text *Kathasaritsagara*. Herein he employed the folk theatre form of Yakshagana. A German version of the play was directed by Vijaya Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar.

The Princess of Karnataka was a beautiful girl who was allowed to choose a husband of her own choice. One day Prince of Araby came to see her riding on his white stallion. She faints the moment she looks at the scene. King and the Queen decide that he is the right man for the Princess and make all the arrangements. The Princess announces that she is in love with the white stallion. She insists on marrying the horse and unable to discourage her feelings, the wedding is done. She and the horse live together for fifteen years and the horse transforms into a celestial being. The celestial being or Gandharva is cursed by Kubera for misbehaving and he regains his actual state after leading the life where he could get human love. After transforming into his former self, he offers the princess to come to the Heavens and live with him. However, she refuses and this act angers the celestial being. He curses her to become a horse and she feels very happy about the curse. Gandharva leaves the palace and goes to Heaven, Princess becomes a horse and roams freely; whereas, the fate of the child born to them becomes questionable. Hayavadana asks Bhagavata to suggest a solution. He names a number of temples and Hayavadana says that he has already tried them all. Finally, he asks Hayavadana to visit the Kali Temple of Chitrakoot. Hayavadana feels happy and says that he will start immediately. However, the narrator asks the actor to go with Hayavadana so that he won't lose the way. As the two exit the stage setting out for the Kali Temple, Bhagavata comes back to the story of the two friends – Devadatta and Kapila.

The sub plot of 'Hayavadana', the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by looking at it from different perspective. The horse man's search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered, the best in man, the Uttamaga, the human heads! Probably to make a point Karnad names the play 'Hayavadana', human's search for completeness.

The narrator speaks of the like mindedness of the two friends who are about to meet a girl. Devadatta is sitting in a chair when Kapila approaches him questioning his absence at the gym. Devadatta seems anxious while Kapila brags about his wrestling match against a great wrestler of Gandhara. Kapila is delighted to say that the wrestler praised the technique of him and said that he would have a great future. Devadatta says that he saw a girl and could not stop thinking of her ever since. He wishes to take her hand in marriage. Later on, it is announced through

Bhagavata that Devadatta and Padmini are married. Padmini is pregnant and the couple seems to prepare for a journey. Aside, Devadatta says that Kapila blushes in front of Padmini like never before and Padmini shows great affection without caring about her status. He says to Padmini that Kapila is not used to woman and she understands the suspicion in his words. Devadatta asks Padmini to go into a room and says that he would tell Kapila that she is ill. Padmini agrees and pretends to go into the room; however, she goes and stands in a corner as Kapila arrives. Kapila brings a hired cart and apologizes for being late. As he goes on speaking about the cart and the problems he had to face for hiring one. Devadatta says that Padmini is sick and they have to cancel the trip to Ujjain. Kapila becomes silent, but recovers to say that he will send off the cart. Kapila feels dispirited about the cancellation of the trip. He feels that the whole week would be in emptiness and he has nothing to do. Devadatta asks Kapila to sit to have a chat and Padmini comes in to their surprise. She asks them why they are not doing preparations. Kapila asks about the illness and she says that the headache disappeared after taking medicine. She goes to Devadatta and pleads him to proceed with the trip. She says that Kapila has done so much over the week with the preparations that it would be unfair to cancel the journey. Devadatta could not say anything and accepts her wishes. Padmini praises the driving skills of Kapila and reminds how awful Devadatta manages a cart. As they move on, she looks at a tree and is attracted towards the flowers. Kapila explains that it is a Fortunate Lady's Flower and goes to bring one to her. As he climbs the tree, Padmini is attracted by the strongly built body of Kapila. Devadatta feels jealous as he observes the looks of Padmini towards Kapila. He does not blame her as he knows that the body of Kapila is irresistible. Kapila brings a heap of flowers for Padmini. He explains that the flowers contain all the colours a married bride would have; hence the flowers are called Fortunate lady's Flowers. They speak of other matters and Kapila mentions of the Rudra Temple and Kali Temple in the vicinity. Devadatta suddenly remembers his oath to the two deities. Kapila asks them to visit Rudra Temple, but Devadatta insists that he would stay put. Finally, Kapila and Padmini decide to visit Rudra Temple without Devadatta. As they leave, Devadatta wishes Kapila and Padmini to be happy and walks towards the Temple of Kali. He begs forgiveness in front of the Kali idol for forgetting his promise after getting married to his love - Padmini. He finds a sword in the Temple and cuts off his head as an offering to Goddess Kali. Padmini and Kapila return only to find an empty cart. After waiting for some time, Kapila could not stop worrying about his friend and goes in search of him leaving Padmini in the cart.

She cannot believe that Kapila is more worried about Devadatta than her. Kapila moves near the Temple of Kali and is shocked to see his decapitated friend. Kapila says that if Devadatta wanted he would have jumped into fire or drown in a river. His actions towards Padmini are nothing but actions of a brainless man. He feels that if Devadatta would have guided him, he would have come out of that dark situation. He speaks of Devadatta and claims that he is his friend, brother, guru. He picks up the same sword and cuts off his head. It is dark and Padmini is complaining about the men who have not returned to her. She imagines that Devadatta would be grumpy with Kapila for his actions. She decides to go in search for them and reaches the Kali Temple. She finds the two dead bodies and feels terrified. However, she does not express grief over their deaths but expresses concern about her situation when she returns home. Padmini feels that this act will show her as a whore for whom the two men fought and died. Therefore, she decides to kill herself when Goddess Kali appears to stop her. Goddess Kali asks Padmini to express her desire. Padmini shows the dead bodies and Kali tells her to reattach the heads to the bodies and press the sword on their necks. She tells that the act would make them alive. Kali says that she needs to sleep and orders Padmini to do it speedily. Padmini asks a question to Goddess Kali. She asks the Goddess why she did not stop Devadatta and Kapila while they were killing themselves. The Goddess gives two reasons - her sleep and the lying nature of the two men. Goddess Kali reminds that Devadatta promised to offer her his limbs and the head to Rudra. But, he offers his head here as the Rudra Temple is visited by Padmini and Kapila. She admits that Devadatta is noble in his actions and did not hesitate to fulfil his promise despite confused about the offering. Goddess Kali speaks of Kapila who does not even mentions her while giving his life. Goddess Kali orders Padmini to reattach their heads and she does that. With great drums and lights Kali disappears leaving Padmini to her fate. As Padmini opens her eyes she realizes her mistake. She switches the heads of Devadatta and Kapila, attaches them to the bodies of Kapila and Devadatta. Padmini feels horrified, but the two men laugh out about their situation. They feel that they are now blood relations and thank Padmini. Devadatta with Kapila's body claims that head is superior to body; hence, he claims Padmini. Kapila with Devadatta's body claims that Padmini used to live with the body of Devadatta; hence, he claims Padmini. Padmini feels that she should be with Devadatta who has the body of Kapila. But, Kapila with the body of Devadatta does not accept her choice and the argument goes. Bhagavata, the narrator, comes as every character freezes and questions the audience about the solution. The parallel between

expectations and realities is drawn by Girish Karnad through the first act. Hayavadana is a completely righteous character who cannot escape his fate. Padmini is shameless and honestly admits to want more than one man in her life. Devadatta and Kapila are neither good nor bad and are drawn to react based on the situations. Girish Karnad uses Goddess Kali to judge the three individuals - Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. Kali emphasizes that Devadatta is noble but forgets his promise; Kapila hides his true feelings even before killing himself and Padmini is warned for being too honest.

In ACT TWO, the narrator poses the same question again to the audience about the solution to the problem. He refers to King Vikrama who faced a similar problem while answering the questions of Bethala. King Vikrama answers that the head is superior to body; hence **the person with the head will be identified as the real individual**. Bhagavata reveals that the three have gone to meet a sage (Rishi) to get a solution for the problem. In the background, the verdict of the Rishi will be announced after the narration. The sage states that **the person with the head of Devadatta shall be called as the husband of Padmini**.

Devadatta and Padmini are so happy with the decision. They bid goodbye to Kapila and move along. Before separating, Padmini goes to Kapila in order to reconcile him. She tells Kapila not to worry as it is his body that is with the head of Devadatta. Kapila does not say anything and the couple move forward. Bhagavata explains that Kapila goes into the forest and the couple moves to their city to enjoy their married life. Padmini gave birth to a beautiful boy child. Padmini asks Devadatta to take her and the child to the lake. However, Devadatta reminds that he is a Brahmin who needs to perform his duties. His initial interest in sports and swimming are not with him anymore. Devadatta moves the doll to take a book and the doll tells the other one that his hand felt very soft. The dolls agree that Devadatta changed over time and his stomach loosened. Bhagavata spots Kapila who becomes his former strong self. Padmini walks across the forest and confronts Kapila. He is paralysed to see her after a long time. He inquires after a long pause about her presence in this part of the forest. She explains that she wanted her child to experience Nature. He asks about the child and she says that the child belongs to Kapila as well (because of Kapila's body). However, Kapila does not accept that and says that Devadatta is the child's father. He takes the child and Padmini remarks that he has mole on the same spot as in the body of Kapila. He does not care about it. Then he goes on about the difficulties he faced with the body of Devadatta in the forest. He says that he finally wins and has become stronger like the old

Kapila. Devadatta comes to the forest in search of Padmini and confronts Kapila. They feel that they are back to their normal selves. Then, Kapila praises the greatness of Devadatta's body. Kapila hopes that the three can live together without any problem; but, Padmini expresses nothing. Therefore, Devadatta comes directly to the point and draws a sword. He asks Kapila to bring his sword as well. They understand that the problem to this everlasting solution is the death of them. Devadatta and Kapila fight and die together. Padmini is left alone and she thinks of her predicament. She says that both the individuals finally forgave each other and died without any concerns. But, she was the one who needs to face life. Bhagavata enters and is in shock at the sight of the dead bodies. Padmini asks him to take care of the child resting in the hut. She instructs the narrator to take the child to the hunters in the forest and tell them that it is the child of Kapila. After five years, she asks Bhagavata to take the boy and give him to the father of Devadatta - Brahmin Vidyasagara and tell him that boy is the son of Devadatta. Bhagavata inquires about Padmini, wherein she declares to undergo *Sati* along with Devadatta and Kapila. In fact, the boy is the son of Padmini.

Hayavadana enters and greets Bhagavata. Hayavadana starts to narrate his journey and how he became a complete horse. Hayavadana explains that after entering the Temple of Kali, he finds a sword and offers his head to the Goddess. Hayavadana says that Kali asked of his wishes for which he said he wanted to be complete. She grants the wish and disappears. However, he says that the Goddess did not completely listen to the wish and made him a complete horse instead of making a complete man. Bhagavata feels sorry, but Hayavadana is happy and claims that being a horse is great. However, Hayavadana feels bad about the presence of human voice, which still makes him incomplete. Bhagavata cannot come up with a solution to this problem. The boy sings the lullaby that Padmini used to sing to him. Hayavadana feels that the song is a bit tragic but is happy to see the child smile. He asks the boy to sing another song, but he cannot think of any. So, he sings the same song and Hayavadana tries to laugh and the laughter slowly turns into a neigh. Hayavadana becomes complete with his human voice gone. Bhagavata asks the actors to go to Brahmin Vidyasagara about the arrival of his grandson on a grand horse. The narrator thanks Lord Ganesha for fulfilling the desires of Vidyasagara, the boy and Hayavadana. They all pray together for the prosperity of the land and the play comes to a conclusion. The second act starts with a sage proclaiming that **head is superior to the body**. Indeed, it is proven in three instances. Devadatta gradually loses the bodily strength of Kapila and becomes a Brahmin again.

Kapila gradually loses the weak body of Devadatta and becomes a strong personality again. Hayavadana, who has a horse head, is granted the body of a horse instead of a human head and body.

The sexuality of a woman has been put forth in a very unassuming way by Karnad. Padmini though married to Devadatta is attracted to Kapila. Her consistent existence depends on the presence of either of them. She needs both or either of them for her satisfaction and resorts to Goddess Kali. Eventually, she finds herself in intense euphoria when she combines the head of Devadutta and the body of Kapila thereby according herself a high degree of sexual freedom. Padmini's end portrays the subjugation of women in our country wherein they have to time and again prove their chastity.⁵

Padmini is the only character in the play that is left out without a proper justification. Bhagavata is used by Girish Karnad to knit the play and his entrance at the right time at the right place helps the scenes to move forward. Goddess Kali shows indifference towards humans indicating that gods are not interested in the matters of mankind. This is a contradiction to the belief that God watches over every person and comes to rescue in times of need. Padmini is the only character who is left incomplete in the play. Devadatta and Kapila forgive each other before death and die without even concerned about Padmini. The fruits of righteousness, patience and innocence are reaped by three characters. Vidyasagara, who was patient enough to allow Devadatta marry Padmini. In the whole play, there is no mention of Vidyasagara or his presence. Therefore, he is gifted with a grandson who is happy and playful. Hayavadana, who remained righteous till the end without slightest of deviations was blessed with a complete body. Hayavadana finds a new friend in the boy and is very happy to live as a horse. The boy who is innocent of the sins of Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila is rewarded with a grandfather and a dear friend - Hayavadana.

Hayavadana also explores the complexities in relationships. "The play focuses on the incompleteness in terms of desire of Kapila, Devdatta and Padmini. Padmini wants a perfect husband, but Devadatta doesn't match up to this and so she starts liking Kapila, Devadatta's friend, who fulfils her idea of a perfect man. But even Kapila isn't perfect so Padmini veers towards Devadatta. The constant search for fulfilment of desires results in a tragic end."

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