



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2023; 9(3): 148-151
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 12-12-2022
Accepted: 18-01-2023

Aasif Iqbal Bhat
Research Scholar, Pursuing
Ph.D. Desh Bhagat
University, Punjab, India

Chaos in maintaining self-identity: A critical study of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

Aasif Iqbal Bhat

Abstract

The Scholarly endeavour in this research paper shall be, for content and subject matter, drafted critically in line with Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* (1972) since there is multitude and abundance of material to be found in the play in accordance with the different thematic aspects like psychological imbalance, loss of identity, search for personality perfection, etc. Essentially, the play, though circumvents the traditional, religious and mythological ethos of India as a society, it in a dormant scheme is vibrated with multi-fundamentals that have bearing on culture, religion, myth and other fields of humanity cosmically. The play highlights human nature as a driving force for the quest of good and bad which together in Freudian psychology make human personality. This play spotlights Girish Karnad as a great moralist without the tinge of artistic inferiority trying to expose greed, sense of unnatural attitude in human longings, carnal pleasures, jealousy, the tussle between intelligence and foolishness and emotions versus witticism. However, the more dominant tire of substance that promotes disharmony in seeking perfection and order in the self-identity is in the plot the concept of womanhood and womanly grace. The in-depth study of the play unfurls the secrets of perfection and the maintenance of self-identity in the fundamentals of religion which is the source of goodness. The play pictures the loss of identity and the search for its maintenance on three planes which are Devadatta's psychological search for Kapila's bodily grace which makes him fall in the abyss of abnormality called jealousy, Padmini's search for all human qualities in Devadatta for his intellectuality impresses her less than the bodily charisma of Kapila and more importantly Hayavadana's longing for complete human personality. This character of Hayavadana inwardly unearths the third gender people, their problems and issues in living, their disapproval as complete beings by the society they live in. This paper shall come up with the theme mentioned very critically in light of all those resources that verify it as the plot of the play. It shall highlight the chaos in maintaining the self-identity according to the characterisation of Devadatta, Padmini and Hayavadana and in the process the religious elements shall be touched according to its need since religion has been viewed as the source of human perfection, a way of shunning of all evil and attaining all goodness which alone generates order in human personality.

Keywords: Chaos, identity, deity, quest, rishi, ostracised

Introduction

Originally, the play *Hayavadana* (1972) which is one of the famous plays, ever appreciated in dramatic ethos in Indian literature has taken its source from Somadeva's Sanskrit collection of old traditional folktales *Kathasaritsagara*. Additionally, this is pertinent to be introduced that this play has much bearing from Thomas Mann's novella *The Transposed Heads* (1940) in which Mann has given much significance to body over mind as in his introduction to the English version of this play, Kirtinath Kurtkoti writes:

The original problem poses a moral problem while Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. The human body, Mann argues, is a fit instrument for the fulfillment of human destiny. Even the transposition of heads will not liberate the protagonists from the psychological limits imposed by nature. (vii)

However, in *Vetalpanchavinshti*, an element of Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*, there is much prominence given to mind. In a framework of *Hayavadana* (1972), Girish Karnad has got consolidated inspiration from both of the sources though they vary to a great extent as far as the thematic approach is concerned. In *Kathasaritsagara* there is described an issue of morality which is the recognition of a woman's husband. In essence, "a washerman marries a beautiful woman.

Corresponding Author:
Aasif Iqbal Bhat
Research Scholar, Pursuing
Ph.D. Desh Bhagat
University, Punjab, India

Once he sets out on a journey with his wife and brother-in-law. On the way, he comes across a Kali temple where he offers his head as a sacrifice to Goddess Kali” (Das 149). On this brother-in-law repeats brother-in-law’s act. Since wife also moves to do the same act of offering her head, it is said that Goddess halted her and commissioned her in getting the dead back to life by her grace. Out of anxiety and mental disturbance the wife exchanges the heads unwittingly over the two bodies. Consequently, brother happens to claim his sister as wife when the actual husband also has the same claim. Thus, there happens to have identity crisis at its peak. Lastly, this crisis of recognition is solved by the judgmental discretion of the king Vikrama who in his verdict declares that the body having husband’s head has to be taken the lady’s husband as he believes, “it is the head that determines the identity of a person” (Gill 73). Similarly, in Mann’s *The Transposed Heads* (1940), the two friends Shirdaman and Nanda happen to face the same problem when Sita the actual wife of Shirdaman in total confusion restores the heads to the wrong bodies while obeying Goddess Kali’s order and ultimately the case of identification of Sita’s actual husband gets resolved by the wise Kamadamana who declares the claim of body having Shirdaman’s head lawful but later on it results in the severe identity crisis of the trio. Girish Karnad borrows deeply from Mann’s story aforementioned briefly but his play *Hayavadana* (1972), “poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationships.” (Kurtkoti vii)

Without any suspicion *Hayavadana* (1972) as a play in the subject matter is quite equivocal to the story in Somadeva’s *Kathasaritsagara* since much more subjective prominence is given to the head however there is a certain degree of divergence in *Hayavadana* (1972) in comparison to Somadeva’s sort for there happens utter chaos and confusion when even it is exposed that the person wearing Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body is the husband of Padmini as the *rishi* declares, “As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs”(Karnad 40). This elates Padmini as her, “innate desire gets fulfilled. Now, she has a complete man who is supreme in mind and body” (Wadikar 120). However, the growing idleness and weakness of Devadatta wearing Kapila’s body leads Padmini to the loss of interest in him that consequently results in her chaos in maintaining self-identity which is voiced in the dialogue of Girish Karnad’s play *Hayavadana* (1972) between Padmini and Devadatta in the following manner:

PADMINI. What’s happened to you these days? You sit at home all day. Never go out. You’ve forgotten all your swimming and sports.

DEVADATTA. I’m a Brahmin, Padmini. My duty...

PADMINI. I’ve heard all this!

DEVADATTA. It was fun the first few days because it was new. All that muscle and strength. But how long can one go on like that? I have family a tradition to maintain—the daily reading, writing and studies...

PADMINI. I don’t know. (46)

Identity crisis in *Hayavadana* (1972) is purely psychological issue viewed and expressed nevertheless this emerges as a biological problem also. Identity is an umbrella term; it has grounds in psychology, religion, politics, etc. and altogether generates the sense of completeness, therefore, work to be mentioned as what is known as identity. Any lack of the

dimensions letting crisis in identity emerges to flow chaos in the maintenance of the same. Man by nature longs completeness to complete the personality which in all the times as history is witness that this longing of completeness more often remains a dream like situation. As a result, the unfulfilled wishes tear down the cloth of humanity. This reality is deeply related to the playwright himself as P. Dhanavel remarks, “Karnad invented the story of Hayavadana to solve his own identity crisis in his dramatic career.” (40)

Hayavadana (1972) discusses the problem of chaos in the characterisation of Devadatta. No doubt, “Devadatta is a scholar and a poet, so he symbolises thought or mind or head in the play” (Gill 99). Still then all these qualities fall flat to his wife Padmini; therefore, his unhappiness pushes him to sense some incompleteness in himself. Moreover, his psychological tranquility crumbles down thrice in the play significantly. Prior to the encounter with the experience of his deep love for Padmini which he fails to convey her himself and this makes him feel perturbed in his intellectual mind and outlook. He stoops to the grace of her and, in consequence, he feels himself incomplete in her absence. This situation of longing for Padmini at the cost of avoiding intellectuality of himself, he brings round his friend Kapila to plead his proposal to Padmini according to Karnad:

KAPILA (jumps up). Then why didn’t you tell me before? You’ve been wasting precious time...

DEVADATTA. I don’t understand...

KAPILA. My dear Devadatta, your cloud-messenger, your bee, your pigeon is sitting right in front of you and you don’t even know it? You wait here. I’ll go, find out her house, her name...

DEVADATTA (*incredulous*). Kapila—Kapila...

KAPILA. I’ll be back in a few minutes...

DEVADATTA. I won’t ever forget this, Kapila... (15)

Here the reader ascertains the incompleteness in the identity as the product of tussle between the intellectualism and romantic feelings, therefore, depicts two facets of his personality in sheer discord and chaos despite, “Devadatta (literally the God-given) is endowed with all the accomplishments expects of a brahmin youth” (Bala 191). Therefore, Devadatta’s personality is more complex and paradoxical in line with his scholarly getup. Devadatta’s longing for Padmini if scrutinised on the parameters of feministic criticism, he is introvert, lover of carnality and more vividly as manly understanding of woman but all in fluctuation. At first he adores her and lastly his adoration is proved as found in utter ambivalence which outs itself in the dislike of Devadatta for Padmini’s praise for Kapila in the play:

PADMINI (*watching him, aside*). How he climbs—like an ape.... And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back: like an ocean with muscles rippling across it—and then small, feminine waist looks so helpless.

DEVADATTA (*aside*). She had so much to talk about all day, she couldn’t wait for breath. Now, not a word. (Karnad 26)

Since then as of Devadatta one other dimension is Padmini’s unexpected turn towards Kapila which results in the loss of completeness in the mind of Devadatta. To some extent Devadatta considers this eerie turn as a matter of fatalism out of which, excellently the mingling sort of Kapila with Padmini is apt under divine wish as evident in the following lines from the play:

DEVADATTA. Good-bye, Kapila. Good-bye Padmini. May Lord Rudra bless you. You are two pieces of my heart—Live happily together. I shall find my eternal happiness in that thought. (Agonised.) Give me strength Lord Rudra. My father, give me courage.... Bhavani, Bhavani, Kali, Durga, Mahamaya, Mother of all Nature, I had forgotten promise to you.... You gave me Padmini—and I forgot my word. Forgive me, for I am here now to carry out my promise. (Karnad 28)

This is a fact of his relationship to his belonging to high cast Brahmins. Here, without the slightest inkling of uncertainty he exposes himself however subjectively the discipliner, controlling his anger suggesting his scholarly patience for which he wins pathos in the process of catharsis. Inwardly, his quest of completeness is not of the nature the longing of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus did; his sense of completeness ends at some time, with self sacrifice offering his head to Maa Kali which, therefore, amounts to be matter of religious faith whereas Doctors Faustus' longing lasts with the submission to devil.

Devadatta falls down from the pedestal of psychological equilibrium when he realises that bodily grace also even predominantly matters in the assimilation and development of emotional union. He realises that emotions are at their peak in tallying with desired desires in the biological sense wherein bodily perfection acts as a stimulus. He comes to have the experience that reason or intellect is a different thing all above the emotions, yet it matters less in the realms of sentimentality. His agony intensifies at a greater level by the realisation of having no bodily attributes in him which all are embodied in Kapila as he, "represents the image of a rough, sturdy, robust and a man of steel" (Budholia 52). It enough is to highlight human ego, its imbalance owing to the unfulfilled wishes which in Sigmund Freud's psychology find other ways to attain the satisfaction in dreams and slips most often for, "The unconscious wish has already made its way to the day remnants, either during the day or at any rate with the beginning of sleep, and has effected a transference it" (489). The whole of the chaotic elements in the play are found on work in the character of Padmini. Socially, under norms she belonged to Devadatta as a wife but in heart she has Kapila as the best choice for her wishes and satisfaction:

PADMINI. Don't be sad Kapila. We shall meet again, shan't we? (In a low voice, so Devadatta can't hear.) It's my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I'm going with your body. Let that cheer you up. (Goes back to Devadatta.) Good-bye, Kapila. (Karnad 41)

Therefore, there is bipolarity in her personality which attracts Kapila and has no attraction for Devadatta. This chaos unties the knots of many psychological principles. A society not taken at heart as it is and should be, brings all things to chaos. Here, psychologically for Padmini, Devadatta is even no second to Kapila. She though married inwardly longs for pleasure from Kapila and in that she happens to have schizophrenic condition. Her inward longing evicts the understanding that she is the puppet in vacillation controlled utterly by Id. Her longing advances at the cost of carnal pleasure activity at the end of play in a forest when Shakespearean saying that frailty thy name is woman comes true as she visits with her little child in arms to Kapila in the forest unknown to her and full of insecurity as in the play Kapila voices, "You shouldn't have lost it this

far. Wild beasts—robbers—pathless paths—all sorts of dangers" (Karnad54).

Reason, emotion and the concept of beauty are totally in disagreement in the play. Physical grace and physical vigor in the play are seen as two forces subjugating reason and intellect. Socially, any norm when violated brings undoubtedly chaos and disorder. However, it so happens when a single knot in the chain is broken apart. Perfection is a situation of elements that accept congenial nature. It is in following the law and conduct and be satisfied with it; beyond it what all remains is or proves imperfect as such Padmini's unbridled desire in violating social fiber takes tragic stand as L.S. Gill observes:

Padmini's desire for perfection becomes the tragic trait of her personality. She gets an intelligent man as her husband but she is never satisfied with him. She has only a passing fascination for him but in her heart of hearts she is keen to have a virile body like that of Kapila. When she messes up the heads in the temple, her suppressed desire for a perfect man gets articulated. (104)

Basically, Padmini is a failure of Devadatta's notion of perfection about her in the sense that such notion came to be as the product of emotionality; it was not rationally what Devadatta thought of. What brings forth the disorderliness is actually all that goes against the expectation. Emotions make man blind very often, to realities. It is obvious that an unreal thing seems to be real and a real thing seems to be unreal in emotional domain. Culturally, a woman finds expectancy as a blessing from God. She never wants to lose it at any cost but when it comes to Padmini, "she even risks her pregnancy for the sake of Kapila's company when she goes to Ujjain on a cart" (Gill 104). From the point of feminism that views woman as the victim of patriarchal dominance does not find aptness when it comes to Padmini rather there is the prevalence of woman dominance dominating intelligence and reason altogether in the characterisation of Devadatta as, "The woman's body, argue feminists, has been represented as mother, seductive, material, sexual and procreative" (Nayar 99). There in the play *Hayavadana* (1972), it goes against itself since Padmini finds Kapila as sexually more enduring, full of valor and bodily strong which attracts her at the cost of her marital chastity as a, "Lust mixed desire keeps a man's intellect and discriminative faculties covered." (Varma 139) To an expert reader the play seems to be highly significant as far as its roots in supernaturalism are there. In reality, the whole play can be a scrap without that supernaturalism. Here, the chaos is exposing itself from two divergent poles of divergent personalities. The search of completeness from *Hayavadana* 'a man with horse's head' is obviously of that stature which demands a serious and critical insight on part of the reader. He is a sign of being cursed or more aptly the product of curse of his father given to his mother in Karnad's play as *Hayavadana* articulates, "He cursed her to become a horse herself. So my mother became a horse and ran away prancing happily. My father went back to his Heavenly Abode. Only I—the child of their marriage—was left behind". (9) Girish Karnad introduces *Hayavadana*'s scene at the inception of the play in the requirement of comical strata and highlighting the existential recognition which essentially lacks in *Hayavadana* for the quest of his completeness emerges at the time when it is not there available. This existential dilemma in the play is a more deliberate element employed by the playwright to call

attention to the incompleteness of human life philosophically. Inwardly, it is reminiscent of Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) as far as the act for completing the task is concerned. *Hayavadana* (1972) as mouthpiece of Girish Karnad determines the scheme of incoherencies mythically on psychological and biological foundations which never concord to coexist and never they meet even. This play, therefore, is a haphazard structure of less fulfilled desires and numerous unfulfilled wishes and desires. P. Dhanavel remarks, "The Identity crisis of Hayavadana is physically manifest as an objective correlative for Padmini's; in a distorted form, he has a horse's head on a human body" (41). Girish Karnad through *Hayavadana* inwardly is voicing human absurdity born out of blind belief about deities as the source of human emancipation and perfection. Therefore, the traditional religion and the associated convictions to him are to a greater length null and void. It is actually the chasteness that flows from human hearts as a blessing to attain the ambitions of perfection that too while being optimistically determined. Human agony and imperfection have no cure in the process of adoring deities which themselves have no power to transmute and transfigure the realities as voiced in the play:

HAYAVADANA. The goddess appeared. Very prompt. But looked rather, put out. She said—rather peevishly, I thought—'Why don't you people go somewhere else if you want to chop off your stupid heads? Why do you have to come to me?' I fell at her feet and said, 'Mother, make me complete'. She said 'So be it' and disappeared—even before I could say 'Make me a complete man!' I became a horse. (Karnad 68)

The worldly chaos is the outcome of being unhappy with the realities of life. In a clear analysis the play somehow sheds torch to the misfortune of human life when the quest of perfection in reality is nothing but the escape from realities which in existential philosophy is not solution to the problems rather it multiplies to human ill will and despondency. Traditionally, deities are seen in the play not more than the agencies of curse that for goodness are mute and helpless themselves. From certain angles Girish Karnad's character of Hayavadana is a product of innocence that deserves human pathos since it came to live as a sign of curse from both matriarchal and patriarchal side. He would not have been the mixture of two different bodies if his mother had not disobeyed her husband at the time of living heavenly in the realms of deities. Hayavadana's mother denotes unnatural longing for unnatural sex and does not want excellence and transformation. This suggests Karnad raising questions on the theory of migration which with consolidation summarises the theory of virtue and vice and evils are shown overlapping the concept of virtues.

In Indian society, Hayavadana symbolises at certain degree the people belong to the third gender class who in India and the world are shown and seen in biological sense striving for perfection in terms of rights and provisions snatched from them. Their survival for the fittest is on verge to fall in the deep well of negligence though, "The transgender communities have a right to dignified life which is one of the most important aspects of Article 21 of the Constitution of India" (Agarwal148). On ground level as Hayavadana is ostracised as far as his identity crisis is concerned, the third gender people witness a similar kind of experience in being excluded from the familial legacies and forced to move on

the roads, in slums and cities to dance and merry-make in order to make others happy as, "This lack of recognition had segregated them from the society and more worst, in the matter of civil rights" (Mittra 1579). Hayavadana is shown on the stage when the audience laughs which in substance is another trick to attain the unprivileged perfection.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1972) is a play of multifarious themes which reflect the present society in its socio-political, cultural and religious domains substantially. But more conspicuously, the psychological aspect has been touched heavily to convey the audience and readers the fact that the journey towards the completeness of human persona is a never ending process which exposes the reality that the crux of struggle of human life lies in the unfulfilled desires of man as they do not allow him to remain static in a society that demands from him dynamic role to live in it actively active with optimism in order to be a responsible being. The play thus articulates that the chaos in worldly life is purposeful in the sense that it provides a way to carry on the chariot of life with universal experience of issues like identity crisis, deception in society, religious devotion, psychological trauma in human existence, etc.

Works Cited

1. Agarwal Sourav. Civil and Political Rights of Transgenders in Indian Constitutional Perspectives, *Journal of Law Research*. 2017;4(4):144-160.
2. Bala Suman. This mad dance of incompleteness: Search for Completeness in *Hayavadana*. The Plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives, edited by Jaydipsinh Dodiya. Prestige Books; c2009. p. 190-198.
3. Budholia OP. Girish Karnad: History and Folklore. B.R. Publishing Corporation; c2011.
4. Das, Sangeeta. Identity Crisis in *Hayavadana*. Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana: A Critical Study*. L.S. Gill. Asia Book Club; c2005. p. 149-152.
5. Dhanavel P. The Indian Imagination of Girish Karnad: Essays on *Hayavadana*. Prestige Books; c2009.
6. Freud, Sigmund. The Interpretation of Dreams: Freud's Seminal Work in Understanding the Human Mind. Translated by A. A. Brill. FP Classics; c2021.
7. Gill LS. Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana: A Critical Study*. Asia Book Club; c2005.
8. Karnad, Girish. *Hayavadana*. Oxford UP; c1975.
9. Mittra, Ms. Anugya. Educational Inequality in India: A Review Paper for Transgender Population, *Ijtsrd*. 2017;2(1):1577-1584.
10. Nayar, Pramod K. An Introduction to Cultural Studies. Viva Books; c2020.
11. Varma RR. The Bhagwat Gita: Symphony of the Spirit. FP Belief; c2020
12. Wadikar, Shailaja B. Girish Karnad: A Contemporary Playwright. Atlantic; c2018.