



## 6

### Postcolonialism in *Hayavadana*

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Page No.32-36

**Abstract:** Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* has various cultural implications. This play also deals with every people, almost all characters of the play represent the term of 'hybridity' so characterization of *Hayavadana* is indeed remarkable.

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* represents hybridity in the most elaborate manner and Karnad's postcoloniality is a result of his innovative application of traditional dramatic forms. After colonialism Indian drama was suffering from acute identity crisis, which gave birth to hybrid dramatic forms. Karnad uses both plots as a catalyst to arrive the theme of hybridity and fragmented identity. This play starts with an invocation of Lord Ganesh, who known as 'Vigneswara' or the 'destroyer of obstacle'. Apart from the religious and cultural significance Lord Ganesh is brought at the beginning of the play intentionally. It represents that Lord Ganesha is hybrid, though he is invoked as the destroyer of incompleteness. *Hayavadana*, who has man's body and a horse's head, hybridity also portrayed through him, here we also see how mind or intellect is superior. As he finds his completeness and he change into a complete horse through the bless of goddess Kali. The most important characters, Devdatta and Kapila are play the theme of hybridity in *Hayavadana*. They present hybridity between minds and bodies that are not ordinarily consistent. When Kapila and Devdatta's heads get transposed, then Padmini transposes their heads, giving Devdatta Kapila's body and Kapila Devdatta's. Here we see hybridity, which is important term of Bhabha's theory on postcolonialism. We also see the separation of mind and body. Like the colonized people who borrowed western intellect to become superior and lose their native identity and become hybrid instead of western. Here Karnad did not directly mention east-west concept directly, but presented it through one's own body, it means presents hybridity between physical and psychological.

The concept of subalternity also presented in this play, through the character of Kapila and Padmini, as they have not power to say something against the upper caste people and male dominated society. Subalternity is another key concept of postcolonialism.

Descarte's theory of 'cartesian dualism' is also presented in Karnad's *Hayavadana*, as we see supremacy of mind except body.

**Key words:** hybridity, colonialism, identity crisis, postcolonialism, subalternity, cartesian dualism.

#### Background of Girish Karnad & Literature Review

Girish Karnad known as writer, Indian actor, film director and scholar, who usually writes in Kannada and also translates his plays into English. Basically, his works are based on Indian history and mythology. Folktales are vehicle of him to address contemporary issues and conflicts. His works had profound impact on Indian theatre and inspired so many playwrights and actors in that time. Karnad has been awarded with Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. Indian cultures are effectively employed in Karnad's plays and *Hayavadana* is no exception.



## Literature Review

In “Identity: A Post Colonial Perspective in Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana*”, Aparna Das also discusses about identity of Karnad’s theatre, that represents cultural difference, in which each character seeks completeness of experience. Karnad presents each and every characters are constantly in search of their own identity.

In “Postcolonial Subalternization in the Plays of Girish Karnad”, Dr. Krishna Singh says Padmini and Kapila define subalternity in *Hayavadana*. Karnad presents position of women in the society, where Padmini can’t find herself, she suffers from alienation. In the other hand Kapila and Devdatta present as best friends ‘one mind one heart’ still Devdatta satires his profession: “What do you know about poetry and literature?” it represents subalternity of Kapila.

Dr Gunjun Agarwal discussed how Indian ethos presented in Karnad’s *Hayavadana* and the issues of cultural identity, gender discrimination and colonial resistance. In this play a man with a horse head, who finds his own identity. In Indian culture marriage is the supreme blessings for a woman because it offers her salvation to her husband.

In “The Perplexity of Human Existence in Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana*”, Mahadeb Roy points out binary themes such as mind and body, desire and disappointment, completeness and incompleteness, primitive and contemporary etc. He also discussed people how *Hayavadana* fighting for his dual and unique, also confused identity. Karnad implemented several masks for illustrate hybridity.

Dr. T. Mahendran discussed hoe Karnad tries to revive the local culture and tradition. Karnad implores existentialism by intensifying the motif of incompleteness. When Kapila and Devdatta’s head get transposed, the identity crisis happens and presents supremacy of mind, He presents such issues as love, identity and sexuality with folk culture also with his imagination.

## Aim & Objectives

### Aims

Karnad presents post-colonial perspective in his play *Hayavadana* and almost all characters of the play present hybridity.

### Objectives

- (a) To discuss ‘hybridity’ term in *Hayavadana*.
- (b) This play presents inequality in religion.
- (c) To discuss about societal norms and gender roles.
- (d) It also presents complexities of human relationships and themes of identity.
- (e) Superiority of mind, that means conflict between mind and body.

## Concept of Postcolonialism in Indian Drama

Postcolonial aspects are prominent topics in Indian English drama. Cultural hybridity is common aspect in Indian drama, as well as in our livelihood. Hybridity emerged in postcolonial theory and questioning natural and complete definitions of identity and contemplation as central to identity making. In Indian culture, hybrid has become generally accepted within criticism as well as literature. Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, Salman Rushdie, Amitava Ghosh are known as postcolonial playwrighter.

Hybridity often explores how individuals and communities negotiate their identities in postcolonial world. It is a way of understanding the complexities of postcolonial identity, which is often characterised by a sense of being in-between cultures and traditions. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is a prime example of postcolonial novel, the protagonist Saleem Sinai represents the hybrid identity and it explores the theme of identity and the impact of



colonialism. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* portrays Gogol Ganguli as he navigates the complexities of cultural identity between his Indian Heritage and American upbringing.

### Background of *Hayavadana*

Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* draws inspiration from the *Kathasaritsagara* a 11<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit collection of tales and Thomas Mann's philosophical novella *The Transposed Heads*. *Hayavadana* itself is written in the regional Indian language Kannada and uses elements of Indian yakshagana and natak theatre. In Somdeva's *Kathasaritsagara* the story of 'The Heads That Got Switched' contains a simple riddle. A woman travelling with her brother discovers the men's decapitated bodies in the temple of Parvati, receives a boon from the goddess to bring them back to life, but switches their heads by mistake. The resulting problem of true identity happens in *Kathasaritsagara* and in the same way it happens in *Hayavadana*. Thomas Mann in his *The Transposed Heads* presents supremacy of the head that is both sustained and challenged far beyond the moment of crisis. Story of Devdatta,

Kapila, and Padmini in Karnad's *Hayavadana* follows elements of characterization and order of events in Mann's novella closely enough to be considered as Indian version of it.

### Hybridity in *Hayavadana*

In Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*, we see the theme of hybridity in the characters of this play. Karnad used the technique of hybridity in its simplest terms. Instead focusing on the east-west conflict, he suggests that difference occur at very micro-level. A man himself can be blend of different persons, that is, he may have different versions of himself. This can be perceived from two different angles: physical and psychological. These differences lead to the higher forms of race and culture. It also presents the tension between mind and soul or body. In the plot of the play Karnad uses the themes of hybridity and fragmented identity.

The play starts with praise of Lord Ganesha who is also known as destroyer of incompleteness.

"O Elephant-headed Heramba  
whose flag is victory,  
and who shine like a thousand suns.  
O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi,  
seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake.  
O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness,  
we pay homage to you and start our play." (Hayavadana,1)

Apart from the religious and cultural significance, taking a look at the physical appearance of Lord Ganesha is the embodiment of fragmentation although he is the destroyer of incompleteness. So, the mask of the Lord Ganesha aware that fragmentation is not incomplete. The Hayavadana, who has a man's body and horse's head, also represents hybridity. He searches his own identity throughout the play. His prayer to goddess Kali "Mother, make me complete." to help him find his identity, then he transforms into a complete horse, though his voice is like human beings and when he laughs with the boy then it slowly changes in a horse's neigh. Through his transformation he may understand completeness is impossible for human beings.

Kapila and Devdatta are the most important character who contribute themselves to present the theme of hybridity. When the play opens, we see Devdatta and Kapila as a best friend: 'one mind, one heart'. Devdatta is the man of intellect, where Kapila a 'man of the body'. Their relations get complicated when Devdatta marries Padmini. Kapila falls in love with Padmini and she also feel attracts to Kapila for his body, "I Know what you want, Padmini. Devdatta's clever head and Kapila's strong body". When Devdatta and Kapila sacrifice



themselves in front of goddess Kali, Padmini seeing themselves, prays for their lives. Then she transposed their head may be intentionally. The mixing up of their heads create the conflict of the play. When their heads are transposed, they suffer from identity crisis, as they lost their existence. Kapila's body with Devdatta's head starts living with Padmini and Devdatta's body with Kapila's head get his previous figure for his hard effort. But, Devdatta stops reading texts, does not write poetry, and also does not maintain the body. In this way one's mind controls another person's body.

Devdatta(stops): What do you mean?

Kapila: I mean Padmini must come home with me, shouldn't she? She's my wife, so she must...

(Exclamations from Devdatta and Padmini.)

Padmini: What are you talking about, Kapila?

Kapila (explaining): I mean, you are Devdatta's wife. I have Devdatta's body now. So you have to be my wife. (146)

This presents superiority of mind. It also presents cultural hybridity between mind and soul. But Padmini when get the mix up body she feels happy for that, a man with intellect and manly body. In postcolonial era, people of colonies with some western education, want to fit themselves in that Western culture. Others consider themselves as superior as they belong to culture of Europe. But perfection is not identity with borrowed attire, but one's own. In the same way, Kapila and Devdatta could not achieve perfection, their identity is at crisis. They never had individual existence. So, she says, 'We are three.'

Thus, their identity crisis and fragmentation present that human lives are beautiful with all its imperfections and celebrating their existence.

Kapila: Do you remember how I once used to envy your poetry, your ability to imagine things? For me the sky was the sky, and tree only a tree. Your body gives me new feelings, new words- I felt awake as I'd never been before – even started writing poems. Very bad ones, I'm afraid. (They laugh)

There were times when I hated it for what it gave me.

Devdatta: I wanted your power but not your wildness. You lived in hate- I in fear.

Kapila: No, I was the one who was afraid.

Devdatta: What a good mix- no more trick. (They Laugh) (Lines 700-711)

Imperfection can be beautiful it presents by Karnad through this great and successful play.

## **Subalternity and Cartesian Dualism in *Hayavadana***

The play *Hayavadana* also present subalternity which is also an important aspect of postcolonial study. Padmini and Kapila both are present subalternity in this play. Padmini and Kapila both are present subalternity in this play. Padmini belongs to a family of leading merchant of Dharmapura, but she has not any rights to take decision about her marriage partner. Karnad plays are also presents, if adultery done by a woman can't be acceptable in India, where a man can have extra-marital relationship, but for woman's, chastity is supreme, more than her life. Padmini decides to be 'sati' because she knows very well, society will never accept her if she has in a relationship with Kapila. On the other hand, Devdatta and Kapila are best friend, but sometime we see Devdatta presents his superiority for his intellect and also as he belongs in a brahmin family, where Kapila is belong from iron-smith family. Here, we see how upper caste people dominate the lower caste and also oppressed by those people. This term subalternity discussed by Gayatri C. Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* She presents



how subaltern people dominate by upper class people. Sometime they can't tolerate and choose the way of death.

On the other hand, we also see Descarte's theory of 'cartesian dualism' in Karnad's *Hayavadana*. When Kapila and Devdutta's head transposed, Padmini may be interchanges their head consciously, here mind play a crucial role. Kapila's body get the head of Devdatta. In that time bramhin is learned and wise person but physically weak. Kapila is not wiser than his friend Devdatta. In Descarte's theory we see mind can thinks that's why mind is superior than body. In this way we see supremacy of mind in *Hayavadana*, how Devdatta's mind takes decision that Padmini lives with Devdatta's although he has body of Kapila.

## Conclusion

Hybridity is a key concept of postcolonialism and it commonly refers to any mixing of East-West and the creation of new transcultural forms. Hybridity is existed in almost every character in Karnad's *Hayavadana*. Karnad presents 'incompleteness' or 'hybridity' in three level – divine, human and animal level. He also presents the concept of head superior to body. As we see Devdatta decides that Padmini lives with his head not with his body, here we see the concept of superiority of the mind. When *Hayavadana* finds completeness, then we also see triumphs of head over the body. The play *Hayavadana* is also hybrid, where the basic plot from *Kathasaritsagara* addresses a moral problem, while Thomas Mann uses it in the mock-heroic form to address the mechanical conception of life which differentiate between body and soul. Through this play he does not want to highlight the term incompleteness as suffering, he may be celebrated hybridity as he presents this term in almost all the characters.

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