

Transposition of the Body and the Mind in the Play Hayavadana By Girish Karnard – An Incisive Thematic Analysis

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Abstract: The play Hayavadana was written by Girish Karnard, a dramatist and prolific actor, in 1971. He borrowed heavily from the novel, *The Transposed Heads*, by Thomas Mann, a German writer who borrowed the plot from a short story from *Kathasaritsagara*, written by Somadeva of 11th century. Both Mann and Karnard have depicted sensuality, metaphysics, entangled identities, the problem of love and individuality, an existential humanistic perspective, a philosophical engagement with human conditions, relevance about human sufferings, desire and liberation, sense of alienation, freedom of choice, sensuousness and sensibility, stark reality, absurdity and metaphysical emptiness in their works. The play follows an age-old *Yakshagana*, which is a traditional theatre style, developed in Southern Kannada. By and large, the story of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini centers on the conflict between the mind and the body. And the conflict reaches its zenith after the transposition by the Goddess Kali. There is a subplot which also suffers from the alienation of body and mind. Although initially the head, personified by Devadatta wins, later, the body, personified by Kapila, demonstrates its equal power over human emotions and actions, ultimately it is mind that commands and controls the body sitting comfortably in the head. As Devadatta and Kapila are unable to reconcile this contrast, the two young men kill each other and Padmini burnt herself for being a craver of libidinousness and it is liberation from her desires. Jean Paul Sartre says in his *Being and Nothingness*, ‘The possibility of completion haunts humans and they continue to search for it even when they are convinced that it can never be achieved.’ Here Shakespeare should also be remembered in his *Merchant of Venice*, ‘Some there be that shadows kiss, such have but a shadow bliss.’

Keywords: body and mind, transposition, reconcile, matchless, destroyer, combination, *gandharva*, *swayamvara*, *kalpavriksha*, stallion, libidinousness, transitory, harbinger, frailty

Man is not satisfied with what he has, he goes on grumbling, moaning and complaining; for him heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter. At the beginning of the performance of a play, the mask of Ganesha, the harbinger of success, is presented on to the stage; it is worshipped and taken away. After that the Bhagavata sings and conjures up Lord Ganesha who is the destroyer of obstacles, though he is an 'embodiment of imperfection and incompleteness with an elephant's head on a human body with a broken tusk and a cracked belly. Thus the conflict is presented in the very first act by showing Lord Ganesha whose head and body are different. The Bhagavata introduces the theme of the play that in that very city of Dharmapura, ruled by Dharmasheela, there live two youths; one is Devadatta, handsome in appearance, fair and matchless in intelligence. He is the son of a reverend Brahmin Vidyasagara. He can never be defeated in debates on logic. Thus he is the apple of every eye in Dharmapura. The other is Kapila, the only son of a blacksmith of the very city; dark in complexion and plain to look at but he is matchless in physical skills and he is a tower of strength. Besides, the two young men are great friends and the city wonders at their friendship. They are like Caesar and Brutus, if one is found somewhere, the other is found there. The Bhagavata sings they are two friends, with one mind and one body. Yet, they are poles apart and the glaring contradiction comes later.

A cry is heard off the stage and following it an actor, Nata, rushes to the Bhagavata in a panicked and nervous state and says that he has seen a horse-headed man, on the road side, who speaks in human voice. Instantly, Hayavadana, a man with a horse head, comes on the stage and sits down. The Bhagavata is surprised as he sees the strange creature. When Hayavadana lifts his head, there are tears, running down from his eyes. A horse head with human feelings odd combination. The Bhagavata feels that the man is playing a trick by wearing a horse mask. So he commands the man to take it off. As Hayavadana doesn't move, the Bhagavata and Nata, the actor, try to pull it off but the attempt is futile. The actor declares that it is a real head. The Bhagavata asks him whether he has committed any sin to have that odd form.

Upon it Hayavadana becomes a little angry and after some exchanges he narrates his pathetic story. His mother is the Princess of Karnataka. She is known for her beauty. When she comes of age, her father decides to get her married. But he wants to give her a chance of choosing her husband. The news spread far and wide besides, many princes in the world are invited to the public assembly, *swayamvara*. But she does not like them. At last there comes the prince of Araby. Hayavadana's mother has fainted on seeing him. The king thinks that is the man she wants to marry. All the arrangements for the wedding are made.

Hayavadana's mother gets up from her unconsciousness and declares that she has fallen in love with the stallion of the Prince, not with the Prince. Her father is awe-struck. For she is very obstinate, she is married off to the horse. After some years, she gave birth to a boy with a horse head. Fifteen years passed and one day in the place of the horse, a handsome celestial young man appears and tells her that he is in reality a *gandharva*, due to a curse he has got the horse form. Now, because of the human companionship for fifteen years, he is able to get rid

of the curse. Then he asks his wife to accompany him to his abode, but she declines the offer. The *gandharva* becomes angry curses her to become a mare forever and disappears. She, on becoming a mare, runs away happily leaving the boy of their marriage Hayavadana to his fate. He laments as to what he should do with his odd form and implores the Bhagavata how he can get rid of the horse head and become a complete man.

Hayavadana adds that in order to get rid of his horse-head, he has visited many holy places like Banaras, Rameswar, Gokram, Haridwar, Gaya, Kedarnath, the Dhargah of Khwaja Yusuf Baba, the Grotto of the Virgin Mary, Churches and also magicians, mendicants, maharshis, fakirs, saints and sadhus but there is of no use. The Bhagavata mused awhile and advises Hayavadana, to visit the Goddess Kali on Mount Chitrakoot, as a last-ditch effort. It is known that the Goddess there is very benevolent and is always awake to her devotees' supplications. Hayavadana thanks the Bhagavata profusely and proceeds for the temple having been accompanied by the actor, Nata, in search of getting completeness. The Bhagavata starts singing that two friends there are one mind, one heart.

The two great friends are Kapila and Devadatta, but Kapila stands for his physical strength and Devadatta stands for his powerful mind. One represents body and the other represents mind. The body and the mind seem to be a good match but they are poles apart and they have different wave lengths and parameters. Both look mono, but there lies a lot of complexity between the two. Though the people of Dharmapura think that Devadatta and Kapila are like Lava and Kusa, the two friends prove themselves what they really are when a young girl comes between them with her own likes and dislikes. In the words of the chorus, the disaster of the future of the three can be perceived. The female chorus gives rise to many speculations. She is really a harbinger of chaos between the two friends.

Devadatta enters the stage and sits in a chair. He is slender and delicate. Kapila also comes on the stage now and the conversation begins. Kapila talks unmindful of his friend's pensive mood first and later perceives that it must be some girl who bothers Devadatta's mind as has happened on many an occasion earlier. Devadatta tells Kapila that he has seen a young maiden whose face is like a white lotus and her arms are like the lotus creepers. He declares that he can outshine Kalidasa in writing, if she becomes his inspiration by becoming his wife. He goes on further to declare that if she becomes his wife, he will sacrifice his two hands to the Goddess Kali and his head to Lord Rudra.

Kapila understands the gravity of the situation. He consoles Devadatta and takes the responsibility of mediating with the beautiful maiden who lives in Pavana Street in a house at the top of whose door there is an engraving of a 'two headed bird.' The two heads are a symbol of inconsistency in thinking and it can be found in Padmini as a play continues. A knock at the door brings Padmini out and Kapila speaks to her for a while and muses that his friend has knocked at the wrong door. Devadatta's marriage with Padmini would be a mismatch, as both are incompatible. But he can't go back in the matter; there is no way other than proceeding so he speaks with her parents. Devadatta's house is an abode of the Goddess of learning whereas the Goddess of wealth dwells in Padmini's house. Thus there is nothing

that can stand in the way of bringing the two families together. Wealth and knowledge have become one and Padmini has become Devadatta's wife.

The marriage brings no change in the intimacy of the old friendship, besides it flourishes further. Devadatta - Padmini – Kapila, to the people of Dharmapura, are Rama - Sita - Lakshmana. But there comes something else as time passes. Due to the frequent visits of Kapila and moreover Padmini's admiration for his physique and civility, Devadatta feels that his friend has become a thorn in the flesh in their private moments. Padmini on the other hand, quite unmindful of her husband's thoughts, feels at home in Kapila's presence and so does Kapila. Very soon Padmini conceives. The trio plan to go to Ujjain on a short visit. On the day of the journey, Padmini looks through the window and asks for Kapila, which annoys Devadatta. They talked about Kapila but it is difficult to make it out from the conversation, whether Devadatta is jealous of Kapila or Padmini is in love with him; probably they are careful to each other's feelings. Devadatta says that Kapila is not merely a friend --- he is like his brother. He goes to the extent of saying that one has to collect one's merit for seven lives to get a friend like Kapila. He clarifies again that he is no longer jealous of him. Padmini in her turn says, assuring her husband that she is his better half and she is ready even to drop Kapila from the trip. The wife and husband employ mere duplicity to cover their real feelings.

Padmini's voice is steady and decisive. Everyone feels she is true to her husband in every sense of the word. Any husband feels elated when he hears such words from his better half. Thus the words pacify Devadatta and he reiterates that he is no longer jealous of Kapila and says that his friend's heart is made of gold. Shakespeare can be remembered here, 'All that glitters is not gold.' Devadatta says that what matters more to him is Padmini's health. Responding to it Padmini says that she has a womb of steel and she is fit like a fiddle. Yet, they decide to cancel the trip. But no sooner have they cancelled the trip than Kapila enters saying he has made all the arrangements for the trip. He feels his heart sinking on learning that the journey is called off.

Kapila becomes a little introvert and muses why he feels as though the whole world has been wiped out because of the cancellation of the trip and he makes up his mind not to come there for a week or he may lose his heart. In the meantime Padmini who observes the whole thing, and announces that she is ready to go on the trip, which shocks both the friends. Shakespeare is remembered again, 'Frailty thy name is woman.' Later she tells Devadatta that she cannot see the gloomy face of Kapila, but there is no point in it. The journey begins and Kapila drives the cart. Padmini compares that the driving of Kapila is far better than that of her husband. Devadatta maintains silence and thinks, 'The head is bidding good-bye to the heart.' When Kapila climbs the Fortune Lady's tree for flowers, Padmini admires the strength of Kapila silently.

Padmini sees a celestial being reborn as a hunter in Kapila. The forlorn Devadatta needs no litmus test to be conversant with Padmini's passion for Kapila. He notices how she is pouring her soul in Kapila's mould. In her eyes he sees flames leaping up from the depths of her mind. But it is late.... yes it's too late. There is some conversation but it is merely a platitude. In the meantime, Kapila says that the river of Bhargavi, the temple of Rudra and

also the temple of the Goddess Kali are around the corner. That startles Devadatta and he remembers his unfulfilled vow. At last, when Kapila and Padmini leave for Rudra temple, Devadatta goes to Kali temple, begs forgiveness for his failure in his promise and cuts off his head with a sword that he has found there. A right action at the wrong place, he has promised his head to Lord Rudra.

Kapila and Padmini are worried on their return as Devadatta is not found. Being more worried than Padmini, Kapila reaches the temple of the Goddess Kali, witnesses the agonizing locale, feels guilty and beheads himself. Their long absence brings Padmini to Kali temple. It is already dark. She stumbles over the dead bodies, yells out a cry, blames them both for leaving her alone in the forest and readies to kill herself as she can't go home alone. But then, with a terrible voice there appears the Goddess Kali who calls Davadatta and Kapila 'rascals' and really she calls a spade a spade. Kali feels very sleepy, she yawns and yet she is annoyed with Devadatta who has promised head to Rudra and hands to her and she is cross with Kapila too, since he is a liar who has died not because of his friendship but accusation. Kali yawns again and tells Padmini that she is pleased to give them life and asks her to attach the two heads to the two bodies carefully. Padmini, in a hurry, attaches the two heads to the wrong bodies. Both of them come alive. She is stunned to see 'the transposed heads.' Kapila's body has Devadatta's head and vice versa. It is felt that her mind might have hijacked her body which has transposed the heads. This transposition of heads has taken the conflict between body and mind to the zenith.

First there is some fun and laughter but that comes to an end when Kapila with Devadatta's body, claims Padmini. His point of argument is with his very body Padmini has taken the vows of marriage at the sacred fire and has a baby in her womb. Ironically, Padmini turns against Kapila. It can be understood that Devadatta has Kapila's body. Devadatta insists that it is the head that matters, not the body, so Padmini is his. But it makes no difference to Kapila. Finally, they go to a wise saint who announces that just as *Kalpa-Vriksha* is supreme among all the trees, and it is recognized by the part above the ground, not by the roots beneath the earth and so 'the head' is supreme of all the human limbs. With this judgment Kapila decides to stay back in the jungle and the two Devadatta and Padmini return to Dharmapura gaily. Padmini is now at the happiest point as she has got the finest parts of Devadatta and Kapila. So far so good and Padmini gives birth to a boy.

Here the playwright introduces the talk of the two dolls brought from Ujjain. They become talking masks on the stage and reveal the hidden feelings and the changing psychological state of Padmini. Like Bhagavata, the role performed by the dolls becomes imperative. They disclose that Devadatta's strength fades over time, and they narrate Padmini's changing choice of preference and her dreams to the audience as she longs for Kapila now. She longs for hearing the unheard melodies. The doll-episode is remarkably the playwright's innovation which helps him clarifying to the audience the emotional dilemma of the characters, the passage of time and especially the inner conflict of Padmini. The first doll reveals the change in Devadatta's physique; he has been strong six months ago and now he is delicate. Due to some difference of opinion, the two dolls fight with each other and their

clothes are torn and so Padmini suggests her husband that he should go to Ujjai fair to buy new dolls for the child. This suggestion turns the tables in the play as she wants to find out what has happened to Kapila, in the absence of her husband. Padmini sets aside all her husband's other alternatives and insists on going the fair of Ujjain for new dolls. The two dolls don't like it for they suspect that Padmini would go to Kapila, but they can do nothing. Here ends their role.

Though mind, sitting securely in the head and can't survive without body, it is the command center of the body. It imposes the likes, dislikes and memories on the body. Milton says, 'The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.' As a result, Devadatta's body surrenders itself to his mind. His muscles begin to give way because of his desk work, reading, thinking and writing. Padmini doesn't get any sweaty strong male odour from Devadatta and that makes her remember Kapila. As Devadatta's body becomes sensitive, Padmini thinks Kapila's body might have become stronger. At last, she sends her husband to Ujjain and she sets off, along with her son, for the forest to see Kapila. She knows well where he lives. Kapila is awestruck, when he catches sight of her and he doesn't like her coming there. Looking at the child in her arms, Kapila asks if the child is hers and she replies that the child is his. Kapila hesitates to accept it. She observes that the jungle hard work has converted the delicate body into a strong one. Kapila also says that his body has accepted his head. Padmini re-kindles the old fire in Kapila who, first, resists but when she touches him, the body recognizes her touch. She presses his head into her bosom and then rests her head on his chest. She feels that her search for completeness has taken a full circle. Padmini stays with Kapila for two days.

At this juncture, Devadatta arrives there with a sword in one hand and two dolls in the other. Kapila is neither shocked nor surprised; in fact he is awaiting and expecting him. Padmini comes out of the hut and stands watching them. Both Devadatta and Kapila look at each other that are as they have been once physically because the minds have changed their bodies. After a little conversation, they confess that both are in love with Padmini. The two come to a pact that they must live with her like Pandavas with Draupadi but it is promptly ruled out by Padmini. Then the final solution is a fight between the two till they die. The duel begins and ends with the death of both. Padmini is left alone with the child and the two dead bodies. She hands over the child to the Bhagavata to put him in the care of the hunters in the forest, telling them that he is Kapila's son and when he gets five, he should be given to Devadatta's parents with the information that he is their grandson. Here she does some justification to body and mind. Padmini prepares for *sati* and arranges a large funeral pyre and burns herself with the two dead bodies. Death is the end of minds and funeral is the end of the bodies.

The Bhagavata does a *namaskara* to the audience to give the feeling that the play has come to an end. Meanwhile the Actor II rushes on to the stage in a hurry and reports to Bhagavata that he has seen a horse, which is singing the National Anthem and other patriotic songs aloud. There is a commotion again and Actor-I enters now with a boy of five in his hands. The boy is very morose, serious faced and even sulky. There's not a trace of smile or

laughter on his face but he is holding two dolls. Actor - I says again that when he is on his way back home, a tribal woman gives the boy to him. Actor - I says that the boy never allows anyone to touch the dolls.

At this juncture they hear the 'National Anthem' *Jana Gana Mana*. They all stare in the direction of the song. A horse enters on the stage singing and the Bhagavata remembers that it is Hayavadana. The old acquaintances meet again and when they laugh, the boy also starts laughing. The two dolls fall from his hands as he claps his hands. He does not take the dolls again. When the Bhagavata asks the story of Hayavadana, he says that it is a long story. He has gone to Kali Temple, picked up a sword which lies there. Kali appears and asks him what he wants. He requests her to make him complete, she makes him a horse and disappears. Here too the mind becomes important as the Goddess Kali looks at the head changes the body.

Hayavadana is totally disappointed with the Goddess Kali who is indifferent to the yearnings of humans. He has become a complete horse but not a complete being as he is a horse with a human voice. He finds no way to get rid of the voice. So he sings the National Anthem and other patriotic songs to spoil his voice but it doesn't work out. But when Hayavadana laughs, on the boy's asking him to laugh, the laughter turns into a perfect neigh. The human voice is lost; he neighs and leaps around joyfully with the boy on his back. Bhagavata asks Actor-I and Actor-II to go and tell the revered Brahmin Vidyasagara that his grandson is returning home. The two dolls are thrown out. The Bhagavata declares the end of the drama with a prayer to the God Ganesha to give a little bit of sense to the rulers of the country.

Conclusion: The play ends with a prayer to Ganesha who has fulfilled the desires of all and solving the complexity of the transposed heads: a grandson to a grandfather, a smile to a child, a neigh to a horse, an end to the transposed heads and death to the lady who wants complete perfection which is impossible for completion is a part of incompleteness and incompleteness is a part of completion. But in one sense, the end of the play is tragic as the two friends killed each other and the lady committed *sati* and the boy is left parentless. Though mind depends on body for its survival, it keeps the body under its command. In most of the cases man must be satisfied with what he has. The play encompasses psychology, physiology, sociology, mythology, desire and liberation.

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