



# Symbolism in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

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## Abstract:

The present paper is an attempt to reveal the subtle psychology of Girish Karnad in context with the Indian imagination of human beings. In the play Karnad unfolds various layers of unfulfilled desires of human beings. It is a daring experiment of Karnad to use folk motifs, masks, dolls, female chorus, curtains, music and mime as symbols to signify the traditional requirements of contemporary society. The idea of using traditional symbols in a modern way is quite new and original on the Indian stage to give a new and remarkable impression on the minds of theatre lovers. The names used in the play do not have the same meaning in the ordinary sense of meaning, like Padmini (Lotus woman), Devadutta (a formal mode of addressing a stranger) and Kapila (the dark one). The technical use of masks raises the play to the supreme heights of glory. The presentation of Hayavadana, the protagonist of the sub-plot is also quite remarkable to study the different viewpoints of a character. From the dramatic point of view the play is exceptionally unique and meaningful which creates an everlasting impression on the minds of audience. Karnad was conferred the 'Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya' award for its immediate success on the stage.

**Keywords:** Masks, Dolls, Curtains, Music, Contemporary.

## Introduction:

The play *Hayavadana* begins with the invocation to lord Ganesha whose mask is put on the chair at the centre of the stage. The Bhagvata and the musicians sing the Ganesha Vandana for the success of their stage play. At the very outset, Karnad highlights the human cravings for perfection and completeness from the 'embodiment of imperfection'. To unravel this mystery, Karnad raises a serious question before the audience that how this very 'Vakratunda-Mahakaya' be the destroyer of all obstacles and hurdles at different levels—divine, human and animal level. He follows the Yakshagana tradition to begin the stage play with Ganesha pooja.

O Elephant-headed Herambha  
 whose flag is victory  
 and who shines 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.<sup>1</sup>

### Thematic Variety:

In addition to this, Karnad presents a major theme of dual personality prevailing in the contemporary society through the mask of Ganesha. He wants to highlight the duality of human beings having double standard in the society. What they appear before the world, have a different face at the back. Everyone tries to hide their real-self from others. By introducing the mask of Ganesha, Karnad succeeds to some extent in unfolding the hidden motifs of human beings in the existing world. But at the end, he expresses his gratitude to lord Ganesha for fulfilling the wishes of Hayavadana by making him fully equine. And he prays to God to give sense to the politicians of our country so that India may progress in poetry, science and industry.

Grant us, O Lord, good rains, good crop,  
Prosperity in poetry, science, industry and other affairs.  
Give the rulers of our country success in all endeavours,  
And along with it, a little bit of sense.<sup>2</sup>

Karnad named the heroine of the play Padmini who is one of the six types into which Vatsyayana classified all women in the world. According to Hindu mythology, Padmini means Lotus woman, one of the various types of classification. Padmini is the symbolic representation of a 'Fortunate Lady's flower—that means a married woman.' Kapila presents this flower to Padmini and says:

Because it has all the marks of marriage a woman puts on. The yellow on the petals. Then that red round patch at the bottom of the petals, like on your forehead. Then, here, that thin saffron line, like in the parting of your hair. Then—uhm...oh yes—here near the stem a row of black dots, like a necklace of black beads—<sup>3</sup>

The two wives of Ganesha—Ridhi and Sidhi—are the symbolic representation of prosperity and enlightenment.

### Female Chorus :

Padmini like all other sharp-minded women tries to lure two men with her charming body and make them dance to her tunes. When she was given chance to join the heads of the two men at that particular situation Karnad makes use of female chorus to present the mental agony of Padmini. She is not interested to be a sati-savitri or loyal woman for her husband. She immediately takes advantage of the chance and intentionally switches the heads of the two men without any shame or regret. The female chorus at the beginning and at the end clearly depicts her state of mind as: "Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?"<sup>4</sup>

This situation clearly highlights the inner desire of women to get a perfect husband both mentally and physically. They are never ready to make choice between the two.

### The Dolls:

The two talking dolls in the play are appropriately used by Karnad to show the cunningness of Padmini after the interchange of Devadutta and Kapila's heads. Here Padmini's sensuality is expressed through the talking dolls. She is attracted towards the two men—one for the intellect and other for the physical strength.

Doll I: Behind her eyelids. She is dreaming.  
Doll II: I don't see anything.

Doll I: Is this the one who came last night?

Doll II: And she won't even remember it tomorrow.<sup>5</sup>

The combination that arises after switching the heads of Devadutta and Kapila represents the hidden desire of every woman in the world over. But with the passage of time the two bodies come back to their original shape. This is the hard reality of life which one has to face in the contemporary society. Karnad has beautifully observed the physical transformation of the two men through the talking dolls.

Doll II: I know I've noticed something too.

Doll I: What?

Doll II: His stomach. It was so tight and muscular. Now...

Doll I: I know. It's loose...<sup>6</sup>

### Padmini's Door:

The two headed bird at the door of Padmini symbolises her split personality when she fails to dream of one out of Devadutta and Kapila. She was unable to make any headway between body and brain. This type of dilemma is faced by every modern woman in the society. C. N. Sastri rightly comments on Karnad's use of folk form: "Girish Karnad has succeeded to an amazing degree in blending tradition with modernity, mythological elements with psychological truths, fantasy with profound realism, thought with action and a comic melodrama with a tragic awareness that is found only in epic and classic drama."<sup>7</sup>

What Karnad draws here is really unexceptional and beyond the reach of ordinary human thought.

### Works Cited:

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