

## Exploring the themes of Identity Self-Discovery and Wholeness in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

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### **Abstract:**

*Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana is a thought-provoking work that raises questions about the nature of identity and self-discovery. The play follows the lives of the central characters: Padmini, Devadatta, Kapila, and Hayavadana, to explore themes of identity, self-discovery, and wholeness. The study will also examine the various elements of the play's structure, including its use of mythology and folklore, to help contextualize these themes. Hayavadana is a rich and multi-layered work that challenges its audience to consider the complexities of identity and self-discovery. Identity and self-discovery are central themes in Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana as the play explores the complex nature of identity and the challenges of self-discovery, Through its exploration of these themes, the play invites its audience to question their understanding of identity and to consider the many different factors that shape a person's sense of self.*

**Keywords:** Identity, self-discovery, wholeness, mythology, folklore, cultural context, cultural influences, gender roles, illusion, and reality

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Girish Karnad is a renowned Indian English writer and playwright. Born in Matheran, Maharashtra in 1938, Karnad is considered one of the leading voices in modern Indian theater. He is known for his powerful and thought-provoking plays that explore the complexities of Indian society and its political, cultural, and historical context. Karnad's plays are written in English, but they often draw on elements of Hindu mythology, folklore, and classical Indian theater. He uses a unique blend of traditional and modern storytelling techniques to create works that are both entertaining and insightful. Some of his most well-known plays include **Hayavadana**, **Tughlaq**, and **Nagamandala**.

**Hayavadana** explores themes of identity, self-discovery, and the sense of wholeness. The play is centered around two friends, Devdatta and Kapila, who both desire the same woman, Padmini. However, the woman marries Devdatta, causing Kapila to go on a journey of self-discovery. Through a series of events, Kapila's head is eventually swapped with that of a horse, leading him to question his own identity and the meaning of life. The play raises questions about the nature of reality and the fluidity of identity. **Hayavadana** explores the themes of identity, self-discovery, and the search for wholeness. The play is a mixture of Hindu mythology, folklore, and classical Indian theater, and it features the characters of Hayavadana, a man with the head of a horse, Kapila, a dancer, and Devadatta, a scholar, and Padmini.

The central conflict of the play revolves around the quest of Hayavadana to find his true identity and achieve a sense of wholeness. The play also explores the idea that external appearances can be deceiving and that the true nature of an individual lies within. In the end, the characters are forced to confront the reality of their limitations and their inability to completely control their lives.

Karnad's works have received numerous awards and accolades, and they have been performed and adapted in many different languages and countries. His plays continue to be performed and studied, and he is widely regarded as one of the most important Indian English writers of the 20th century.

The use of mythology and folklore in Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* is significant in several ways:

- **Tradition and Modernity:** Karnad's use of Hindu mythology and folklore allows him to explore the theme of tradition versus modernity. The play questions the cultural and social values of modernity and how they contrast with traditional Hindu beliefs and practices.
- **Identity:** The mythological figure of Hayavadana is used as a symbol of the struggle for identity and self-discovery. Through the character of Hayavadana, the play explores the idea that external appearances can be deceiving and that the true nature of an individual lies within.
- **Themes:** The use of mythology and folklore enables Karnad to address complex themes such as the search for wholeness, the nature of reality, and the limitations of the human experience. The play uses the characters and symbols of Hindu mythology to engage with these themes in a meaningful and impactful way.

- Cultural Context: Karnad's use of Hindu mythology and folklore helps to place the play within a rich cultural context. It allows the play to draw on the cultural and historical traditions of India and explore how these traditions continue to shape contemporary Indian society.

The use of mythology and folklore in Hayavadana allows Karnad to address important themes in a unique and thought-provoking way. It also serves to highlight the enduring significance of Hindu mythology and folklore in contemporary Indian society.

The title of Girish Karnad's play **Hayavadana** has several levels of significance:

- Mythology: Hayavadana is a Sanskrit word that translates to "horse-headed." In Hindu mythology, Hayavadana is the name of a demigod with the head of a horse and the body of a man. The title of the play references this mythological figure and draws on its symbolism to explore the themes of identity and self-discovery.

- Identity: The character of Hayavadana in the play represents the idea that external appearances can be deceiving and that the true nature of an individual lies within. The title serves as a metaphor for the theme of identity and the search for wholeness.

- Cultural Significance: The title of the play also has cultural significance as it draws on the rich tradition of Hindu mythology. The use of the term Hayavadana in the title serves to place the play within the cultural and historical context of India.

- Themes: The title of the play also reflects the themes of the play, including the search for identity, the limitations of the human experience, and the nature of reality. Through its title, the play raises important questions about the relationship between appearance and reality and how external appearances can shape our perceptions of ourselves and others.

The title of Girish Karnad's play **Hayavadana** has a significant meaning that relates to the themes explored in the play. "Hayavadana" is a Sanskrit word that translates to "horse-headed". The title refers to the central character of the play, who is a man with the head of a horse. The use of the title Hayavadana serves as a metaphor for the theme of identity and self-discovery that is central to the play. The character of Hayavadana is torn between his physical appearance and his inner self, and he is forced to grapple with the question of what it means to be truly human. The title also highlights the theme of external appearance versus internal reality. The character of Hayavadana is physically unusual, but he is still a human being with thoughts, feelings, and desires. The title serves to challenge the idea that outward appearance is an accurate indicator of a person's true nature.

Wholeness is one of the central themes in Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana. The play explores the idea that wholeness is a desirable state, and that individuals are often in search of wholeness as they try to understand who they are and their place in the world. In the play, the central characters are each grappling with a sense of fragmentation or incompleteness. Padmini is torn between her cultural identity and societal expectations, while Devadatta is striving for recognition as a great warrior. Hayavadana is searching for wholeness as he tries to reconcile his human and horse halves. Through their interactions and experiences, the characters come to realize that wholeness is not an absolute state, but rather an ongoing process of self-discovery and growth.

Karnad uses the play to explore the idea that wholeness is a cultural construct, shaped by societal norms and cultural influences. He suggests that wholeness is not a fixed or singular state, but rather a constantly evolving and dynamic concept. Through its exploration of the theme of wholeness, the play invites its audience to consider how societal expectations and cultural norms impact our understanding of self and identity. The theme of wholeness in Hayavadana is a central aspect of the play's exploration of identity and self-discovery and highlights the idea that the search for wholeness is a lifelong journey.

Karnad uses the characters to challenge traditional notions of identity and to suggest that there is no singular or absolute definition of a person's identity. For example, Padmini, the female lead, is depicted as a strong and independent woman, but her identity is also shaped by her cultural background and societal expectations. Similarly, Devadatta's identity is shaped by his desire to be recognized as a great warrior, while Hayavadana's identity is shaped by his belief that he is half-man and half-horse.

The central characters in Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana are Hayavadana, Kapila, and Devadatta. Each character represents a different aspect of the themes explored in the play and serves to highlight the central conflict between appearance and reality, tradition and modernity, and the search for identity and wholeness.

The character of Hayavadana is a man with the head of a horse. He represents the idea of external appearance versus internal reality. Hayavadana is torn between his physical appearance and his inner self, and he is forced to grapple with the question of what it means to be truly human. Kapila is a dancer and represents the idea of tradition and the cultural values of India. She is Hayavadana's lover and represents the idea of love and desire. Kapila is torn between her love for Hayavadana and her cultural beliefs about what is considered appropriate behavior for a woman. Devadatta is a scholar and represents the idea of modernity and the cultural values of the West. He is Hayavadana's closest friend and represents the idea of friendship and loyalty. Devadatta is torn between his love for Hayavadana and his desire to be considered a great scholar. Padmini is a minor but significant character in Girish Karnad's play Hayavadana. She is the wife of Devadatta and is

introduced into the play as a symbol of the limitations of the human experience. Padmini represents the idea of beauty and desire and is portrayed as powerless and trapped in her role as a wife. The character of Padmini serves to highlight the idea that external appearances can be deceiving and that the true nature of an individual lies within.

Each of the central characters in *Hayavadana* represents different aspects of the central conflict of the play, and their interactions and relationships serve to highlight the complex and often conflicting desires that drive individuals to seek a sense of self-definition and fulfillment. Through the experiences of these characters, Karnad explores the themes of identity, self-discovery, and the search for wholeness.

*Hayavadana*, the central character is a man with the head of a horse and represents the theme of external appearance versus internal reality. *Hayavadana* is torn between his physical appearance and his inner self, and he is forced to grapple with the question of what it means to be truly human. *Hayavadana*'s unusual appearance sets him apart from other characters in the play, and he is often portrayed as being isolated and misunderstood. Despite his physical differences, *Hayavadana* is still a human being with thoughts, feelings, and desires, and he is searching for a sense of identity and fulfillment. Through the character of *Hayavadana*, Karnad explores the themes of identity, self-discovery, and the search for wholeness. *Hayavadana* is a complex and multi-faceted character who represents the struggle of the individual to define themselves and find meaning in a world that often places a premium on external appearances.

*Hayavadana* is a significant character in the play because he serves as a symbol of the central conflict between appearance and reality, and represents the struggle of the individual to find meaning and fulfillment in life. Through *Hayavadana*, Karnad explores the human experience in all its complexity and challenges the audience to question their ideas about what it means to be truly human.

Identity, self-discovery, and wholeness are central themes in Girish Karnad's play ***Hayavadana***. The play explores the idea that appearance and reality are often at odds with one another, and that the struggle to reconcile the two can be a challenging journey. The theme of identity is explored through the character of *Hayavadana*, who is a man with the head of a horse. Despite his unusual appearance, *Hayavadana* is still a human being with thoughts, feelings, and desires, and he is searching for a sense of identity and fulfillment. Through *Hayavadana*'s experiences, Karnad explores the idea that the search for self-discovery can be a complex and challenging journey that requires individuals to question their ideas about what it means to be truly human.

The theme of self-discovery is explored through the experiences of all the central characters in the play. Each character is searching for a sense of meaning and fulfillment in life, and they are all grappling with the question of what it means to be truly human. Through the experiences of these characters, Karnad explores the idea that self-discovery can be a difficult and often painful process, but that it is also essential for growth and personal fulfillment.

The theme of wholeness is explored through the idea that the search for identity and self-discovery is an ongoing process, and that individuals must continue to question and challenge their own beliefs to achieve a sense of wholeness and fulfillment. Throughout the play, Karnad explores the idea that external appearances can be deceiving, and that the true nature of an individual lies within. Through the experiences of the central characters, he challenges the audience to question their ideas about what it means to be truly human and to seek a sense of wholeness and fulfillment through self-discovery and the reconciliation of appearance and reality.

The themes of identity, self-discovery, and wholeness are central to the play ***Hayavadana***, and they serve to highlight the complex and often challenging journey of the individual to find meaning and fulfillment in life. Identity is a central theme in Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana*. The play explores the idea of identity as a complex and fluid concept that is shaped by a variety of factors, including cultural background, societal expectations, personal experiences, and individual choices. Throughout the play, the central characters are in search of their own identities as they struggle to reconcile their internal and external realities. Padmini is torn between her cultural identity and societal expectations, while Devadatta is striving to establish himself as a great warrior. *Hayavadana*, who is half man and half horse, is searching for his own identity as he tries to understand what it means to be human.

***Hayavadana*** e play is structured as a series of interconnected scenes and interactions between the central characters which serve to highlight the complex and often challenging journey of the individual to find meaning and fulfillment in life. The plot revolves around the journey of the central character, *Hayavadana*, as he searches for a sense of identity and fulfillment. The plot and structure of ***Hayavadana*** are designed to explore the central themes of identity, self-discovery, and wholeness, and to challenge the audience to question their own beliefs and assumptions about what it means to be truly human. The play is structured as a series of interconnected scenes and interactions between the central characters,

***Hayavadana*** is a thought-provoking play that explores the complex and often challenging journey of the individual to find meaning and fulfillment in life. Through its themes of identity, self-discovery, and wholeness, it challenges the audience to question their own beliefs and assumptions about what it means to be

truly human and to seek a sense of wholeness and fulfillment through self-discovery and the reconciliation of appearance and reality.

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