



Reconfiguring The Male Self: Exploring Hybrid Masculinity In Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

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Abstract: This research article examines the notion of hybrid masculinity in Girish Karnad's renowned play *Hayavadana*. Utilizing frameworks from gender theory and postcolonial studies, the analysis reveals how Karnad constructs male identities that challenge dominant norms by merging traditional ideals with fragmented and incomplete selves. A detailed exploration of characters such as Devadatta, Kapila, and Hayavadana illustrates how the play complicates the notion of coherent masculinity through themes of bodily fragmentation, emotional vulnerability, and performative inconsistencies. This study adds to the expanding scholarship on Indian drama, masculinity studies, and hybridity by highlighting Karnad's critique of the myth of male wholeness within a culturally syncretic context.

Keywords: Hybrid masculinity, Girish Karnad, *Hayavadana*, gender studies, postcolonial drama, fragmented identity, Indian theatre

1. Introduction: Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1971) stands out as a groundbreaking work in Indian theatre, skillfully blending elements of myth, folklore, and existential thought. As contemporary Indian society navigates the complexities of modernity, tradition, and identity, the characters in Karnad's play vividly illustrate these conflicts, particularly in their portrayals of masculinity. The notion of hybrid masculinity—where masculine identity emerges from the interplay of diverse cultural and emotional influences—provides a compelling framework for analyzing this text. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad disrupts the conventional ideal of masculinity by dispersing physical and psychological traits among different characters, thereby questioning rigid gender binaries and traditional heroic ideals.

2. Objectives:

- To examine the portrayal of hybrid masculinity in Karnad's *Hayavadana*.
- To investigate how Karnad employs bodily fragmentation and emotional dissonance to illustrate a crisis of masculinity.
- To assess the relevance of hybrid masculinity within the context of contemporary gender discussions in Indian postcolonial theatre.

3. Review of Literature

- **Table 1: Key Scholarly Contributions on Masculinity in *Hayavadana***

Author & Year	Contribution Summary
Dharwadker (2005)	Explores Karnad's mythopoetic structure and symbolic dualities.
Nayar (2008)	Discusses masculinity in Indian theatre through performative and bodily dimensions.
Singh (2012)	Argues that <i>Hayavadana</i> critiques patriarchal norms via allegory.
Banerjee (2016)	Examines fragmentation and postcolonial identity through psychoanalytic lens.
Mukherjee (2019)	Highlights gender hybridity as a narrative strategy in Karnad's plays.

These studies lay a solid groundwork for examining hybrid masculinity; however, they often fall short in their analysis of how gender identity is shaped through interactions between characters and the disjunctions between physical and emotional experiences. This paper aims to expand on these existing frameworks by providing a more comprehensive analysis.

4. Materials and Methods: This qualitative research employs a textual analysis approach grounded in gender studies and postcolonial theory. The primary text analyzed is the English adaptation of *Hayavadana* (Karnad, 1975), alongside interpretations and theoretical insights from Judith Butler (1990), R.W. Connell (1995), and Homi K. Bhabha (1994). The focus of the analysis is on character dialogues, symbolic motifs, and structural components of the play, aiming to explore the representation of masculinity as hybrid, unstable, and contested.

5. Theoretical Framework: Hybrid Masculinity

Developed by scholars like Bridges and Pascoe (2014), hybrid masculinity describes the phenomenon where men in dominant social roles adopt traits associated with marginalized or subordinate genders. This appropriation allows these men to project a more progressive or inclusive image while still preserving their patriarchal advantages. Elements such as emotional openness, aesthetic sensitivity, and connections to marginalized racial and class identities are often incorporated, yet they typically do not challenge the underlying structures of hegemonic masculinity.

“Hybrid masculinities involve the strategic borrowing of elements from marginalized gender performances while maintaining gendered power.”

— Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 246

Bridges and Pascoe (2014) define hybrid masculinity as a means through which men integrate aspects of femininity or marginalized masculinities (e.g., emotional expressiveness, LGBTQ+ solidarity) to distance themselves from toxic norms while retaining dominance.

“These performances allow men to symbolically align themselves with equality, while structurally benefitting from patriarchy.”

— Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 253

In a postcolonial framework, Homi K. Bhabha's idea of hybridity offers a valuable perspective on identity formation as a dynamic interplay between colonizer and colonized narratives. When applied to masculinity, this concept complicates the traditional dichotomy of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, emphasizing that male identities are constructed in culturally blended, performative, and fluid manners.

Hybrid masculinity, in the context of Connell's (1995) framework—which includes hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities—represents more than a mere compromise; it is a deliberate reconfiguration of male identity that aligns with societal expectations while simultaneously challenging rigid norms. This concept does not imply a form of feminist masculinity or genuine egalitarianism; instead, it reflects a nuanced negotiation of change that ultimately preserves existing patriarchal frameworks.

In the play *Hayavadana*, this theoretical lens is particularly effective in analyzing the male characters, such as Devadatta and Kapila, who embody traits that both align with and diverge from conventional masculinity. The themes of body-mind fragmentation, emotional conflict, and symbolic hybridization—exemplified by the character Hayavadana—illustrate a precarious masculine identity influenced by social performance, psychological discord, and mythic irony.

6. Subtopic Title: Fragmentation and the Crisis of Male Identity:

In the play, Karnad creates a central conflict by swapping Devadatta's head with Kapila's body, and vice versa. This dismemberment challenges the traditional separation of mind and body, prompting a reconsideration of masculine identity. Devadatta, representing the intellectual Brahmin, and Kapila, embodying the athletic Kshatriya, illustrate two contrasting male archetypes. The merging and confusion of their identities lead to psychological disorientation and emotional instability for both characters. This hybrid state exemplifies what Connell refers to as "marginal masculinities," which challenge dominant ideals by showcasing conflicting characteristics.

Hayavadana, the horse-headed figure in search of completeness, further illustrates the fragmented nature of masculine identity. His inability to achieve full humanity and his eventual transformation into a complete horse serve as a parody of the masculine pursuit of wholeness. Through these characters, Karnad undermines the concept of a singular, ideal masculinity, revealing that their identities are inherently divided and complex.

6.1 Masculinity and the Body-Mind Duality

Devadatta and Kapila represent two distinct expressions of masculinity: the intellectual and the physical. Devadatta, as the learned poet, contrasts sharply with Kapila, who exemplifies strength and athletic prowess. Their dynamic of friendship and rivalry highlights the inherent tensions within the concept of masculinity. When Padmini, Devadatta's wife, comments,

"What a body Kapila has! And Devadatta's face is so fine" (Karnad, 1994, p. 12),

She, inadvertently exposes the fragmented nature of societal desires when she remarks on Kapila's impressive physique and Devadatta's refined features, underscoring the limitations of any singular definition of masculinity.

The pivotal moment when Devadatta's head is placed on Kapila's body raises a fundamental philosophical inquiry: is identity determined by the mind or the body? The wise woman's assertion that "the head is the sign of the man" aligns masculinity with intellect, reinforcing traditional Brahmanical and patriarchal views that prioritize the mind over the body. Yet, Karnad complicates this notion by illustrating how Devadatta's new physical form influences his psyche and actions, thereby blurring the clear-cut distinctions of identity.

6.2 Crisis of Masculinity and Identity

Karnad constructs the male protagonists as deeply insecure. Devadatta's initial self-harm in response to Padmini's attraction to Kapila signals his fragile masculinity:

"If Kapila touches her again, I'll cut off my head" (Karnad, 1994, p. 22).

His statement embodies toxic possessiveness and fear of inadequacy, traits that become even more pronounced after the head-body transposition.

Kapila, too, experiences disorientation after the transformation. As he retreats into the forest, he laments:

"What am I now? Not body, not soul—nothing that she wants" (Karnad, 1994, p. 45).

Karnad highlights the futility of attaining a cohesive masculine identity. The pressure to balance intellect and physical strength becomes overwhelming, leading to the psychological breakdown of both men as they struggle to conform to the rigid masculine standards placed upon them.

6.3 Hayavadana: The Grotesque and the Masculine Ideal

The subplot of *Hayavadana*—a man with a horse's head—functions as a grotesque metaphor for male incompleteness. Hayavadana's desire is to become a complete man, *"whole in body and mind"* (Karnad, 1994, p. 5), but in a tragic irony, he transforms into a complete horse instead. Karnad uses this absurdity to satirize the myth of masculine wholeness. The transformation suggests that the pursuit of a fixed, perfect masculine identity is doomed to fail.

According to Dharwadker (2005), Hayavadana's transformation reflects *"a symbolic resistance to the homogenizing masculinity of the nationalist imagination."* He resists integration, choosing instead a grotesque completeness that challenges normative aesthetics of manhood.

6.4 Masculinity Through the Female Gaze

Padmini's character adds complexity to the masculine crisis within the narrative. Rather than being a mere object of desire, she expresses her own needs and challenges the expectations imposed by patriarchy. Her desire for a partner who embodies both Devadatta's intellect and Kapila's physicality subverts traditional notions of masculinity. She poignantly observes the irony of wanting the mind of one man and the body of another, wishing they could be unified in a single individual. Her longing for a man with Devadatta's intellect and Kapila's body challenges essentialist constructions of masculinity. She remarks:

"Isn't it strange? The head of one and the body of another... if only they could be one man!" (Karnad, 1994, p. 28).

Despite her assertiveness, Padmini's agency is portrayed as a threat to the patriarchal order of the play. She becomes a scapegoat for the failures of the men around her, reflecting a broader societal tendency to blame women during male crises. However, Karnad offers a nuanced critique of this perspective by allowing Padmini's voice to resonate beyond her death, as her legacy continues through her child's narrative.

6.5 Fragmentation as Masculine Truth

Hayavadana ultimately illustrates fragmentation rather than wholeness as the essence of masculine identity. The male characters, Devadatta and Kapila, fail to attain the completeness they desire, meeting their demise in battle, ultimately undone by the very ideals they aspired to embody. Hayavadana's transformation into a braying horse symbolizes the absurdity of a fixed identity, reinforcing the notion that life culminates in laughter and song, as noted in the Bhagavata. As the Bhagavata comments,

“Everything ends in laughter and song. That is the logic of life.” (Karnad, 1994, p. 63).

Karnad's conclusion highlights the acceptance of plurality and incompleteness as fundamental aspects of the human experience. Masculinity is depicted not as a static ideal but as a complex performance characterized by contradictions, insecurities, and continual transformation.

7. Results and Discussion The analysis reveals that hybrid masculinity in *Hayavadana* is depicted through three major elements:

Physical Hybridization: The concept of fragmented masculinity is vividly illustrated through the head-body swap, which raises the question of identity regarding Padmini's true husband. This unresolved dilemma reflects the inherent instability of masculine identity, suggesting that a coherent sense of self is elusive.

Emotional Complexity: The emotional intricacies of Devadatta's jealousy and Kapila's passion reveal the often-overlooked affective aspects of traditional male roles. Both characters display vulnerability and emotional complexity, challenging the expectations of stoicism and heroism typically associated with masculinity.

Myth and Irony: By intertwining myth with Brechtian alienation techniques, Karnad encourages a critical examination of gender norms. The blend of comic and tragic elements highlights the fluidity of male identity, presenting it as both a social construct and a narrative device subject to change.

This hybrid masculinity challenges traditional binaries such as strong/weak, rational/emotional, and sacred/profane, illustrating that masculinity is complex and not solely defined by biological factors. In the context of postcolonial Indian theatre, these portrayals signify a broader cultural dialogue that navigates the tensions between colonial influences and indigenous practices.

8. Conclusion: Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* serves as a significant critique of essentialist views on masculinity by showcasing characters with hybrid and unstable identities. Through the use of fragmentation, myth, and emotional complexity, Karnad dismantles the notion of the ideal man, highlighting the performative and relational dimensions of gender. This analysis enhances the field of masculinity studies by positioning *Hayavadana* as a pivotal work that emphasizes the fluidity of male identity within a culturally diverse framework. Future research could further explore comparative analyses of Indian and Western portrayals of masculinity.

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