Hayavadana

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GIRISH KARNAD

Girish Karnad was born to a Brahmin family and from an early age took an interest in travelling theatre troupes. He majored in mathematics and statistics at Karnatak Arts College, graduating in 1958. After graduating he travelled to England and studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, where he wrote his first play, *Yayati*. After working for the Oxford University Press for seven years, he began to write full time for both theatre and film. For four decades he has continued to write plays, often using history and mythology to address contemporary themes. For his contributions to theatre, he was awarded the Padma Shri, one of India's top civilian honors, in 1974. In 1992 the Indian government awarded him the Padma Bhushan, another of its highest honors, for his contributions to the arts. He also received the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary honor, in 1999.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1947, when Karnad was a young boy, India gained independence from colonial rule under Britain. Under colonial British rule, theater in India had largely consisted of performances of Shakespeare. In an attempt to decolonize the theater, many Indian playwrights and directors turned to religious rituals, classical dance and song, martial arts, and Sanskrit aesthetics in order to create a modern Indian theatre. This was later dubbed the "theatre of roots" movement. Karnad's work shares in this movement's goal, but also draws from some western styles like Greek theater (through the use of choruses and masks). The theatre of roots movement became strongest in the 1960s and 1970s, just as Karnad began to write plays.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hayavadana draws inspiration from a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann called *The Transposed Heads*. The Devadatta-Kapila-Padmini storyline is drawn from this work, but Karnad puts much more focus on the psychological struggles of the three characters than Mann did. Mann, for his part, drew inspiration for *The Transposed Heads* from an eleventh century Sanskrit text called the *Kathasaritsagara*. Karnad's other early works that focus on similar philosophical and psychological themes include *Yayati* and *Tughlaq*. In *Yayati*, Karnad reinterprets an ancient Hindu myth about responsibility, in which a son and father exchange ages. *Tughlaq* is a history play about the life of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tuglaq of fourteenth century India and concerns the loneliness of leadership. Both plays explore the psychology of their characters, whether in myths or in history, to expose something fundamental about the human condition.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Hayavadana
- **When Written:** 1971
- **Where Written:** Madras (now known as Chennai), India
- **When Published:** 1972
- **Literary Period:** "Theatre of roots" movement
- **Genre:** Play, tragicomedy
- **Setting:** City of Dharmapura, mythical past
- **Climax:** Unable to reconcile their swapped heads and bodies, Devadatta and Kapila kill each other
- **Antagonist:** Human imperfection and incompleteness; the mind/body conflict

EXTRA CREDIT

Plot in translation. Though Girish Karnad's first language is Konkani, *Hayavadana* and most of his other works are written in what he considers his adopted language, Kannada. Karnad also translated the play into English himself.

First production. *Hayavadana* was originally performed by The Madras Players, Karnad's local theatre company.

PLOT SUMMARY

The play opens with a puja to Ganesha, as the Bhagavata asks that Ganesha bless the performance that he and the company are about to put on. Then he places the audience in the setting of the play, Dharmapura, and begins to introduce the central characters. The first is Devadatta, the son of a Brahmin who outshines the other pundits and poets of the kingdom. The second is Kapila, the son of the iron-smith who is skilled at physical feats of strength. The two are the closest of friends.

As the Bhagavata sets up the story, there is a scream of terror offstage. An actor runs onstage screaming that he has seen a creature with a horse's head, a man's body, and the voice of a human. The Bhagavata doesn't believe him, and even when the creature (Hayavadana) enters, the Bhagavata thinks it is a mask and attempts to pull off Hayavadana's head. Upon realizing it's his real head, the Bhagavata listens as Hayavadana explains his origin: he is the son of a princess and a celestial being in horse form, and he is desperate to become a full man. The Bhagavata

suggests he go to the temple of Kali, as she grants anything anyone asks for. Hayavadana sets out for the temple, hopeful that Kali will be able to change his head to a human head.

Recovering from the interruption, the Bhagavata returns to the play. He begins to sing, explaining that the two heroes fell in love with a girl and forgot themselves. Meanwhile, a female chorus sings in the background about the nature of love. Devadatta and Kapila enter. Devadatta explains his love for Padmini, explaining that he would sacrifice his arms and his head if he could marry her. Kapila at first makes fun of Devadatta but then sees how much his friend is affected by Padmini. He agrees to find out her name and where she lives.

Kapila goes to the street where Padmini lives and begins to knock on the doors. When Padmini opens the door to her home, Kapila is immediately love-struck. Padmini asks him what he wants, outwitting him as he tries to come up with reasons why he is there. He eventually explains that he is there to woo her for Devadatta. Kapila says to himself that Padmini really needs a man of steel, and that Devadatta is too sensitive for someone as quick as Padmini.

The Bhagavata reveals that Devadatta and Padmini were quickly married, and that all three remained friends. The story then jumps forward six months, when Padmini is pregnant with a son, and the three friends are meant to go on a trip to Ujjain together. Devadatta expresses jealousy that Padmini seems to have some affection for Kapila, which Padmini denies. She says that she will cancel the trip so that the two of them can spend more time together, but when Kapila arrives, ready to leave, Padmini changes her mind and decides to go, much to Devadatta's dismay.

As the three of them travel together, Padmini remarks how well Kapila drives the cart. She points out a tree with the **Fortunate Lady's flower**, and Kapila rushes off to grab flowers for her. Padmini remarks to herself how muscular Kapila is, and Devadatta sees Padmini watching him with desire. When they pass the temple of Rudra and Kali, Devadatta is reminded of his old promise and sneaks away to cut off his head. Kapila goes to look for him, and upon discovering Devadatta's headless body is struck with grief. He decides to cut off his head as well.

Padmini begins to get worried about the two men and goes after them. She sees their two headless bodies on the ground and attempts to commit suicide as well. The goddess Kali stops her and tells her she will revive the men if Padmini replaces their heads on their bodies. Padmini, in her excitement, accidentally switches the two heads when she replaces them. The two men are revived: one with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body, and the other with Kapila's head and Devadatta's body.

At first, the three of them are amused by the mix-up, but when they try to return home, they discover issues. Each man believes that Padmini is his wife. Devadatta's head claims that the head rules the body, and so she is his wife. Kapila's head argues that his hand accepted hers at the wedding ceremony, and that the child she is carrying came from his body. Padmini is aghast, but decides to go with Devadatta's head. Kapila does not return with them.

As the second act opens, Padmini and Devadatta are happier than they've ever been. She loves his newfound strength, and the two of them prepare for their child. They buy two dolls for their son. The dolls speak to the audience and reveal that over time, Devadatta's new, strong body begins to revert to its old form. He and Padmini fight over how to treat their son, as she believes that Devadatta coddles him. The dolls tell the audience that Padmini begins to dream of Kapila. When the dolls begin to show signs of wear, Padmini asks Devadatta to get new ones and goes to show her son the forest.

As Padmini travels through the woods, she discovers Kapila living there. He has regained his strength, just as Devadatta has lost his. He explains how he had to war against his body, and how he has come to accept that he is, in fact, Kapila. Padmini implies that she is attracted to him, and spends several nights with him.

Devadatta returns with the dolls and tries to find Padmini in the woods. He discovers her with Kapila, and the two decide to kill each other to put an end to the struggle between their heads and their bodies. After they have killed each other, Padmini decides to perform sati, throwing herself on their funeral pyre. The Bhagavata explains that Padmini was, in her own way, a devoted wife.

Just as the audience believes the play has ended, a second actor comes onstage saying that there was a horse walking down the street singing the national anthem. The first actor also enters, with a young boy in tow. The boy is very serious, and does not speak, laugh, or cry. It is revealed the child is Padmini's son.

At that point, Hayavadana returns. He explains that he had asked Kali to make him complete, but instead of making him a complete human, she has made him a complete horse. Padmini's son begins to laugh at Hayavadana, and the two sing together. Hayavadana still wishes to rid himself of his human voice, and the boy encourages him to laugh. As Hayavadana laughs more and more, his laughter turns into a horse's neigh, and he thus becomes a complete horse.

The Bhagavata concludes the story by marveling at the mercy of Ganesha, who has fulfilled the desires of Hayavadana and the young boy. He says that it is time to pray, and Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila join in thanking the Lord for ensuring the completion and success of the play.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Bhagavata – In Hinduism a Bhagavata is a worshipper or devotee. In this play, the Bhagavata serves as the narrator. He presents and interprets the action of the play's main storyline, the story of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini. Although the Bhagavata is the play's narrator, it is revealed over the course of the play that he is not in control of the story. First, Hayavadana interrupts the Bhagavata's story. The Bhagavata is surprised to encounter this creature, and attempts to council Hayavadana on how to rid himself of his horse's head before resuming his narration. In the second act of the play, after Devadatta and Kapila's heads have switched and time has passed, the Bhagavata starts to speak directly to the characters. He is surprised to find Kapila living in the jungle and startled when Devadatta arrives at Kapila's home to find Padmini. When Padmini decides to perform sati, the Bhagavata speaks to her directly and tries to dissuade her. Thus the Bhagavata's arc reflects how the play's plot developments become unexpected even to its narrator, and that the play itself demonstrates the chaos and unpredictability of life.

Devadatta – Devadatta is one of the two heroes of the play's main storyline. His name means "god-given," and the Bhagavata describes him as "fair in colour" (the actor who portrays him wears a white **mask**) and "unrivalled in intelligence." He is the son of a Brahmin (i.e., a religious teacher) and he is unrivaled in his skill as a poet and pundit. He and Kapila start the play as close friends, but when he falls in love with Padmini, a rivalry starts between the two men. After he and Padmini marry, he grows jealous of the affection she shows toward Kapila, which drives him to cut off his head. When his head is swapped with Kapila's, he is happy to have his mind, Kapila's strength, and Padmini by his side. But when his body begins to revert to its old form (i.e., soft and weak), he once again feels dissatisfied and worried that Padmini feels that something is lacking in their relationship. Ultimately, he realizes that he will always be incomplete, and he attempts to end his cycle of frustration by ending both his and Kapila's lives. The two of them kill each other with swords as an act of mercy, forgiving each other for their rivalry in the process.

Kapila – Kapila is one of the two heroes of the play's main storyline. His name means "reddish brown," as his skin is dark and he is the son of an iron-smith. As a counterpart to Devadatta, Kapila wears a black **mask**, and the Bhagavata describes how "in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing, in strength and in physical skills, he has no equal." Kapila is a devoted friend to Devadatta, and goes to find out Padmini's name on his behalf. However, Kapila quickly realizes that Devadatta is no match for Padmini, and that instead she needs a "man of steel" like himself. His feats of physical strength continue to impress Padmini even after she and Devadatta are married. Even though he clearly has feelings for Padmini, he is also a loyal friend, and when Devadatta cuts off his own head out of jealousy, Kapila follows suit. Yet once their heads are switched, Kapila wastes no time in arguing that Padmini is actually his wife because he now has Devadatta's body. When his arguments are unsuccessful, he abandons society to live in the jungle. He works himself back into shape physically, but is haunted by the memories that Devadatta's body possesses. He agrees, along with Devadatta, to end his hollow existence by killing and being killed.

Padmini – Padmini is the spark that ignites the rivalry between Devadatta and Kapila. She marries Devadatta because she loves his mind, but she quickly realizes how sensitive Devadatta is when she makes harsh, teasing comments (a fact that Kapila understood when he met her for the first time). Even while she is pregnant with Devadatta's child, she begins to pine for Kapila's muscular body, and it is her split desire which causes Devadatta to kill himself, followed quickly by Kapila. When Padmini switches the men's heads accidentally, she appears to get the best of both worlds now that Devadatta's head is attached to Kapila's body, but as the men's bodies slowly return to their former states, she begins to yearn again for a different life. When the two men kill each other at the end of the play, she laments that they have once again left her all alone. She tells the Bhagavata to take care of her son and performs sati, throwing herself on the funeral pyre. Her storyline dramatizes the ways in which the mind—and tools of rationality more generally—can be irreconcilably at odds with the desires of the body.

Hayavadana – Hayavadana's name is apt, as it literally means "horse face." Hayavadana interrupts the main action of the play to explain his origin story to the Bhagavata. He is the product of a marriage between a princess and a Celestial Being in horse form. He is desperate to try and get rid of his horse's head and become a whole man. He travels to the goddess Kali's temple to ask to become a complete man, but instead she turns him into a complete horse. He is happy to be a complete being, but laments that he retains his human voice. When a young boy enters the scene and begins to laugh at him and sing with him, he is able to lose his human voice, and thereby becomes a complete horse.

Boy – Padmini's son, who appears onstage as a young boy at the very end of the play (where as an infant the character is represented onstage by a wooden doll). The first actor explains that his whole life the boy has been silent, as he grew up in the forest. He also inherits a sense of incompleteness, as he is technically has two fathers, one of whom has the body of his father, Devadatta, and one of whom has the head. When he is introduced he can only clutch his dolls, and does not laugh or cry until he sees Hayavadana. He begins to laugh and sing with the horse, and Hayavadana in turn is able to lose his human voice and become a whole being. Thus, through laughter and joy, these two characters find the completeness for which the rest of the characters had been searching.

Kali – A Hindu goddess of death, Kali appears as various

characters go to her temple throughout the play. Devadatta sacrifices his head to her, and Kali interrupts Padmini as she tries to kill herself as well. Kali revives Devadatta and Kapila, but only after Padmini has accidentally swapped their heads. When Hayavadana travels to her temple to ask her to make him a complete man, she instead makes him a complete horse. She demonstrates the indifference of the gods as well as their ability to sow chaos just as easily as they create order.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dolls – In the second act, Padmini and Devadatta buy two dolls for their infant son. The dolls are played by young children onstage. They note that Devadatta's strength fades over time, and they narrate Padmini's dreams to the audience as she longs for Kapila.

Female chorus – Along with the Bhagavata, the chorus helps to narrate some of the inner action of the play, particularly describing Padmini's feelings about love and being torn between two men.

Actor I – An actor in the company that puts on the play. He discovers Hayavadana at the beginning of the play and is terrified by the half-horse, half-man. At the end of the play, he returns with a young boy, who is revealed to be Padmini's son.

Actor II – Another actor in the company. He discovers Hayavadana after his body has transformed into a horse's body.

TERMS

Puja – A puja is a prayer ritual performed by Hindus to one or more deities. It honors or celebrates the presence of special guests. *Hayavadana* opens with a puja to Ganesha, a god with the head of an elephant and the body of a boy. He is the god of wisdom and learning, as well as the remover of obstacles. In the play, the **Bhagavata** asks him to ensure that the play is completed successfully, and the play ends with another prayer to Ganesha.

Brahmin – The highest ranking of the four castes (or classes) in Hinduism, due to the belief that they are inherently of greater ritual purity than members of other castes. They often specialize as religious leaders and teachers, and the study and scholarship of sacred scriptures was traditionally reserved for them. In *Hayavadana*, **Devadatta** belongs to this caste, reinforcing his connection to the mind and intellectualism.

Sati – Sati is an obsolete Hindu funeral custom by which widows throw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. This custom was banned in India in 1861. The practice is somewhat subverted in *Hayavadana* because **Padmini** performs sati not for one man, but two, reinforcing the abnormality and incompleteness of the characters' relationships.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IDENTITY, HYBRIDITY, AND INCOMPLETENESS

One of the common threads throughout *Hayavadana* is the recurrence of beings that are hybrids, with minds and bodies that are not ordinarily compatible. The play contains three "layers": first, a ritual prayer; second, the plot concerning Hayavadana; and third, the actual "story" being presented about two men whose heads are accidentally swapped. Karnad uses these beings to demonstrate that incompleteness is an integral aspect of the human condition, and that although it is human nature to strive toward completeness, it is inevitably unattainable.

At the very outset of the play, hybridity is presented as an ideal. The play begins with a puja (i.e., a prayer ritual) for the mask of Ganesha, one of the main deities in Hinduism. Ganesha is a god with the body of a boy and the head of an elephant. The Bhagavata points out that Ganesha's appearance makes him seem imperfect, and yet he is thought of as "the Lord and Master of Success and Perfection." This leads the Bhagavata to suggest that Ganesha really signifies that "the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend." Thus, although Ganesha appears to be made of fragments of different beings, he is nevertheless associated with completion. At the end of the play, the Bhagavata once again thanks Ganesha for ensuring the completion and success of their play. However, by the play's end, none of the human characters have achieved the same sense of completeness.

In the second framing device of the play, which contains the plot of Hayavadana himself, Hayavadana longs for completeness. Hayavadana is a creature with a man's body and a horse's head, the offspring of a deity in horse form and a woman. He explains that all his life he has been trying to remove his horse's head so that he can become a complete man. He goes to Kali's temple to try to change his head into a man's head, but she interrupts him in the middle of his request and instead turns him into a complete horse. When he finds that his voice remains, he is disappointed that he is still a hybrid creature. At the very end of the play, Hayavadana is magically able to achieve completeness with the help of the young boy. As they sing and laugh together, he loses his human voice in exchange for a horse neigh. Even though he is able to find unity, it is not in human form but rather as an animal being, reinforcing the idea that humans are incapable of true

completeness.

The play's primary story line concerns two friends: Devadatta, a poet, and Kapila, a wrestler, as they vie for Padmini's affection. Although Padmini marries Devadatta at the beginning of the story, she also has feelings for Kapila. In despair over seeing Padmini gaze longingly at Kapila, Devadatta decides to cut off his own head. Kapila discovers Devadatta's body and also cuts off his head, mourning the loss of his best friend. Padmini calls on the goddess Kali to revive them, but she accidentally swaps their heads, so that each has the body of one man and the head of another. The incompleteness of the two men becomes the main conflict between all three characters. Their inability to find a sense of wholeness drives them to kill each other/themselves at the end of the play. After their heads are swapped, the men's bodies begin to change as they assimilate with their new heads. The body of Kapila becomes soft and weak now that it is attached to Devadatta's head, while the body of Devadatta becomes more muscular with Kapila's head. However, Devadatta no longer writes poetry now that he is attached to Kapila's body, and Kapila mentions that his new body has memories of feelings that he does not know how to name because he did not experience them. The situation leaves a hollowness in both of their lives. Ultimately, neither is satisfied with this new half-existence, so they resolve kill each other.

Padmini exemplifies her own kind of incompleteness. She marries Devadatta for his mind, but even in their marriage she acknowledges her physical attraction to Kapila. When the two men switch heads, she initially seems to have gotten the best of both worlds, but as the men's bodies change, she recognizes that none of them can go on living, as her own desire is split in between the minds and bodies of the men. After the two men kill each other, abandoning her, she realizes her own incompleteness and performs sati (a practice in which a widow throws herself onto her husband's funeral pyre).

Although all of the characters attempt to find unity within themselves, all the human characters are ultimately unable to do so. As each loses a part of his or her identity—whether it is a head, a body, or a lover—they work to return to a sort of equilibrium, but the fates of Karnad's various human characters suggest that humans always suffer from a sense of incompletion. The only character that achieves unity is Hayavadana, but he becomes complete only as a horse, not as a man. Karnad thus suggests that completeness is left to beings that are divine, while humans work at—and ultimately fail to achieve—a true sense of completion in their identities.

THE MIND VS. THE BODY

The most central plot of *Hayavadana* is the love triangle between Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila. Devadatta and Kapila, who are best friends, both fall in love with Padmini, who in turn is attracted to attributes in each of them. The dynamics between the three characters dramatize the conflict between the mind and the body. The play shows that while the head may be more in control of the body and may follow more logical instincts, the body and its desires can prove just as strong in swaying the course of human life.

At the beginning of the play, before Padmini is introduced, Devadatta and Kapila's friendship reflects the mind having more control over the body. Devadatta, a poet, represents the mind and intellect. He has a lot of sway over the actions and emotions of Kapila, a wrestler (who represents the body and its desires). For example, Kapila tells Devadatta that he would walk into fire for Devadatta, and that he is closer to Devadatta than he is to his own parents. Kapila agrees to woo Padmini on behalf of Devadatta, even though he himself has feelings for Padmini and remarks that she needs a "man of steel" like himself.

When Padmini becomes more integrated into the story, she follows her head and marries Devadatta. But she quickly realizes that she also has feelings and desire for Kapila. She is particularly desirous of his body. Karnad does not write any interactions between Devadatta and Padmini before they are married. Instead, the Bhagavata provides the most insight on why she decides to marry him, explaining that because her family was wealthy, and his family was intellectual, nothing could have stood in the way of their marriage. But when the storyline resumes, after the two are married and Padmini is pregnant, Devadatta quickly becomes jealous of Padmini's affection towards Kapila. Padmini watches Kapila when he does anything physically demanding because Kapila is much more fit, demonstrating her own transition from desire for the mind to desire for the body. When the two men switch bodies, the conflict becomes even more explicit, as there is confusion over who is Padmini's husband: the man with Devadatta's head and Kapila's body, or the man with Kapila's head and Devadatta's body? Padmini, for her own part, shows her desires quite plainly as she goes immediately with Devadatta's head/Kapila's body, a being that speaks to her two desires.

The dolls that Devadatta buys for his and Padmini's child eventually become symbols of Padmini's bodily desire, expressing her inner thoughts to the audience. They establish their connection to desire by describing how the other children and mothers look at them with glowing eyes. As the story progresses, the dolls describe how Devadatta's hands have softened, signaling Padmini's waning desire for the new version of Devadatta because his body is reverting to its old form. The dolls eventually narrate Padmini's dreams, describing how she is dreaming of a man with a "rough" face and a "nice body," demonstrating how she continues to feel conflicted between her mind and body as the men return to their original states.

The story of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini thus dramatizes the conflict between the mind and the body, or between logic and lust. Although initially the head (personified by Devadatta)

wins, eventually the body (personified by Kapila) demonstrates its equal power over human emotions and actions. Ultimately, because they are unable to reconcile this contrast, the two men kill each other and Padmini kills herself, proving that when these two sides of human beings are not in agreement, the consequences can be tragic.

METATHEATRE AND STORYTELLING

Metatheatre describes aspects of a play that draw attention to its nature as a play. Though the "play within a play" is a common conceit, *Hayavadana* is unusual in that it has several layers: first, the play opens with a ritual to Ganesha, as the Bhagavata (a narrator-like character) asks Ganesha to bless the play that the company is about to perform. In the middle of this ritual, Hayavadana is introduced and he explains his origin as a half-horse, half-man. As he goes off to attempt to change his head into a human head, the Bhagavata begins the real play, which concerns the love triangle of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini. Eventually, the storylines begin to interrupt and weave in and out of one another, and the Bhagavata appears not to know what happens as the story continues. Although this unique use of three separate storylines may seem at first to distract from the main storyline, the play's metatheatrical elements and the eventual surprise return of Padmini's child ultimately invite the audience to believe in the power of stories, and in the power of the joy that can be found in stories.

Throughout the play, various characters wear **masks**. Thus, rather than attempting realism, Karnad draws attention to the fact that the audience is watching a play and plays many dramatic moments for comedic effect. First, the puja to Ganesha introduces the symbol of the masks. The mask of Ganesha is the mask of an elephant, establishing masks as a theatrical device. Hayavadana's mask is that of a horse's head, and draws attention to the theatrical conceit of an actor playing a man with a horse's head, and this incongruity elicits a lot of comedy as he tries to hide his head and as the Bhagavata attempts to pull it off. Devadatta and Kapila also are played by actors wearing masks because their heads eventually must be "cut off" and switched. This allows Karnad to use what might in another play be a serious moment to comic effect, as the two struggle to cut off their "heads."

As the story continues into the second act, it seems to spin more and more out of the Bhagavata's control, and the storylines begin to intersect with one another. The Bhagavata starts to interact with the characters directly, speaking to Kapila when he discovers him in the woods and startled by finding Devadatta there as well. He also speaks to Padmini before she performs sati, and she tells him to take care of her infant son. At these moments, the line between the world of the storyteller and the world of the story is blurred, thereby also disrupting the distinction between fiction and reality, or the stage and the world at large. This is also true of Hayavadana's storyline; because he "interrupts" the play, it is as if he exists on the same level of reality as the audience rather than remaining inside the play with the other characters. In this way, the play repeatedly calls attention to the fact that it is a play, and makes use of such moments to create humor, as well as to comment on the importance of telling stories more generally.

The joy found in this kind of storytelling becomes most thematically resonant at the end of the play, when a young child appears onstage. The Bhagavata quickly realizes that it is Padmini's child by the mole on his shoulder and the dolls he carries, which Padmini had given to him. An actor explains that the child has never laughed, cried, or spoken in his life, but he begins to laugh at Hayavadana because of his human voice and horse body. The child's joy causes Hayavadana to laugh as well, and as his laughter turns into a horse's neigh, he loses his human voice and becomes a complete horse. This gives closure to the two main storylines of the play (Padmini's story and Hayavadana's). The fact that Padmini's child returns at the end as an older boy within the Hayavadana storyline pulls the two stories—which were previously presented as separate—into the same reality. When the boy and Hayavadana find happiness with each other, each storyline finds its end. The metatheatrical elements of the play are repeatedly played for comedic effect, but the end of the play goes further, reinforcing the power of storytelling to bring people together.

INDIAN CULTURE AND NATIONALISM

Hayavadana is the most successful example of the "theatre of roots" movement in India. This movement began after India gained independence from Britain in 1947, and playwrights began to move away from Western dramatic conventions in favor of using regional languages and theatrical forms in their plays. *Hayavadana* itself is written in the regional Indian language Kannada and uses elements of Indian *yakshagana* and *natak* theater. Karnad uses these various theatrical forms within his play to argue that the idea of India as a unified nation is a construction, and that modern Indian culture is in fact made up of many diverse traditions.

Even the play and its source material are filtered through several distinct cultural lenses. The source material for the story of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini is based on a Sanskrit myth from the *Kathasaritasagara*. However, Karnad's more direct source for the text was a play by Thomas Mann called *The Transposed Heads*, which had been adapted from the *Kathasaritasagara*. Thus, the stories retold in Karnad's play had already been filtered through a different (Western) cultural lens by the time Karnad wrote his own version in Kannada (a regional dialect of India). Putting his own spin on the original myth and the Mann adaptation, Karnad emphasizes the symbolic nature of each character by characterizing Devadatta

primarily by his mind and Kapila by his body, and frames the story by nesting it inside two other plot lines.

Hayavadana is also written and performed with the aid of many different forms of Indian theatre, which are referenced throughout. However, these traditions are updated, making it a distinctly modern adaptation despite its references to traditional styles of theater. The play borrows elements from different kinds of traditional Indian theatre, such as *yakshagana*. One example of this borrowing occurs when Hayavadana is introduced through the use of a half-curtain. Traditionally this technique is used to prolong the introduction of a character, revealing them little by little to make their entrance more exciting, but in this play it is used for comedic effect as his horse's head keeps popping out and he continues to duck behind the curtain.

The scene in which Kapila goes to woo Padmini for Devadatta is a scene that is borrowed from older stories told in Indian theater, but a modern spin is put on it by having the woman outwit the man instead of the other way around. The use of **masks** is also a convention borrowed tradition from Indian as well as Greek theatre, amplifying various characters' characteristics and helping audience members distinguish between them. One of the ways that the play may appear to be slightly more unified culturally is through its treatment of religion, but Karnad makes it clear that nationalism is not an ideal within the play through his characters' commentary on the subject. Deities are certainly an integral part of *Hayavadana* as they ask Ganesha to remove all obstacles from the play, and as the goddess Kali grants the desires of various characters, but Karnad makes it clear that these cultural pillars are not the same thing as the state of the nation, as the Bhagavata asks Ganesha at the end to "Give the rulers of our country success in all endeavours, and along with it, a little bit of sense."

Hayavadana himself recounts his efforts to be more unified as an individual being as he tries to reconcile his horse head and human body. He describes how in order to do this he took an interest in "the social life of the Nation," but cannot seem to find his society. Hayavadana makes an explicitly anti-nationalistic comment at the end of the play—ironically, just after he enters singing the Indian national anthem. Wishing to get rid of the only part of himself that remains human—his voice—Hayavadana tells the Bhagavata, "That's why I sing all these patriotic songs—and the National Anthem! That particularly! I have noticed that the people singing the National Anthem always seemed to have ruined their voices." Thus, Karnad's use of a variety of theatrical styles, along with his own commentary on the notion of India as a unified nation, show that India is not characterized by a singular or unified culture, but rather is made up of a rich array of cultural traditions.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MASKS

While masks are used in theatre for many different purposes, in *Hayavadana* masks represent a character's incompleteness. For each character that has a mask, the mask represents the incompatibility between the character's head and body. In the puja to Ganesha, a mask is brought out that represents the god, who has the head of an elephant and the body of a boy. The actors portraying Devadatta, Kapila, and Hayavadana also have masks, because their heads are (or become) incongruous with their bodies. Though the masks also make the audience members aware that they are watching a play because they go against a more realistic presentational style, they also remind the audience that the characters wearing them strive for a more complete human existence.

THE FORTUNATE LADY'S FLOWER

The fortunate lady's flower appears several times throughout the play, and symbolizes the limitations of Padmini's happiness in her marriage. When Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila are traveling in their cart, Padmini spots a beautiful tree and asks Kapila what it is. He explains that the flower gets its name because "it has all the marks of marriage a woman puts on" (yellow like the color of her dress, a red spot like on her forehead, black marks resembling a necklace). Padmini is entranced by Kapila's explanation, and also by his body as he climbs to retrieve the flowers for her. Thus the use of the flower is a duplicitous symbol. Although Kapila explains that it signifies marriage, for Padmini, it also represents her thoughts of infidelity, and how she is dissatisfied in her marriage to a single man. The tree appears later, when Padmini visits Kapila in the forest (after he and Devadatta have switched bodies) and she expresses that she is unhappy and that she misses Kapila. Finally, the Bhagavata explains that the tree grows where Padmini performs sati, thus defining both her life and her death by the limitations of her marriage.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford edition of *Hayavadana* published in 1976.

Act 1 Quotes

O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, we pay homage to you and start our play.

Related Characters: The Bhagavata (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

At the very beginning of the play, the Bhagavata prays to Ganesha (the "single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness," who has the body of a boy and the head of an elephant) to ensure the success of the play. In this way, the play sets up its unique structure, beginning with a scene that falls somewhere between theater and religious ritual, and calls attention to the fact that the audience is watching a play. It also establishes the pattern of using masks to represent hybrid creatures, as the Bhagavata prays to the mask of an elephant onstage. Finally, the opening scene situates the play firmly within Indian culture and religion by invoking a Hindu prayer ritual and god.

Could it be that this Image of purity and Holiness, this Mangala-moorty, intends to signify by his very appearance that the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend?

Related Characters: The Bhagavata (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, the Bhagavata introduces one of the larger themes of the play: the theme of incompleteness and human striving for a sense of self. As he is offering his prayers to the holy Ganesha, the Bhagavata sets up a distinction between the completeness of a god and the incompleteness of humans—a distinction with which many of the characters within the play will struggle. Although Ganesha is a hybrid creature, the Bhagavata argues that his completeness is simply beyond what any mortal may understand. The hybrid nature of characters like Hayavadana, Devadatta, and Kapila, by contrast, leads to their primary inner conflicts and their unending search for a more unified sense of self.

BHAGAVATA: Hayavadana, what's written on our foreheads cannot be altered.

HAYAVADANA: [*slapping himself on the forehead*] But what a forehead! What a forehead! If it was a forehead like yours, I would have accepted anything. But this! I have tried to accept my fate. My personal life has naturally been blameless. So I took interest in the social life of the Nation—Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist Pattern of Society. . . I have tried everything! But where's my society? Where? You must help me to become a complete man, Bhagavata Sir. But how? What can I do?

Related Characters: Hayavadana, The Bhagavata (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

As Hayavadana explains the methods he has used to try to rid himself of his horse head, the Bhagavata comments that it is difficult to alter "what's written on [one's] forehead." Figuratively, he seems to mean that one cannot escape one's fate, but in a more literal sense in this play, the head is a force that is hard to reckon with. Many of the characters, including Devadatta and Padmini, echo these sentiments later when they argue that the head rules the body. In the case of Kapila and Devadatta, their heads even transform their bodies, such as when Devadatta and Kapila's bodies gradually change to suit their swapped heads. For Hayavadana, his head literally becomes the source of his identity, as his name actually means "horse face."

Two friends there were—one mind, one heart. They saw a girl and forgot themselves. But they could not understand the song she sang.

Related Characters: The Bhagavata (speaker), Padmini, Kapila, Devadatta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

After Hayavadana goes off to try to get rid of his horse's head, the Bhagavata launches into the story he had been meaning to tell. He introduces the two main characters and summarizes their conflict. His repetition of the phrase "one mind, one heart," which he had also used before Hayavadana's interruption, is thematically important, and has two meanings. The two friends initially share a very close friendship, and thus they are said to be of one mind and one heart. They know each other's mind and care for each other. But in their rivalry, one of them (Devadatta) comes to represent the mind, while the other (Kapila), comes to represent the heart and the body.

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?

Related Characters: Female chorus (speaker), Padmini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

As the Bhagavata sets up the main conflict of the play, the female chorus expresses Padmini's feelings and desires. They question through nature-related metaphor why someone should be limited to loving only one other person. Padmini's main conflict will be her inability to find completeness in loving only one man. This style of poetic metaphor expressed through song, and the use of natural imagery as euphemisms for physical romance and intimacy, are both traditions borrowed from Sanskrit theater. This is unlikely to be accidental, as the play itself began as a Sanskrit drama that was then adapted into a play by Thomas Mann, which Karnad in turn drew on. The use of this language, then, is a nod to the play's origins. In this way, Karnad continues to build on Indian theatrical heritage in crafting his modern production.

[*Devadatta enters and sits on the chair. He is a slender, delicate-looking person and is wearing a pale-coloured mask. He is lost in thought. Kapila enters. He is powerfully built and wears a dark mask.*]

Related Characters: Kapila, Devadatta

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Even though the Bhagavata introduces the men with short descriptions that distill their characters, this stage direction gives an even more simplistic and direct view of the two men. They are immediately placed in opposition to one another: Devadatta is thin, delicate and intellectual; Kapila is powerful and muscular. In defining the two exclusively by these attributes Karnad renders them as symbolic figures, representing the mind and body. Their symbolic nature is made even more apparent through the use of the masks, as the colors of the masks (light versus dark) put the two characters in opposition to one another.

DEVADATTA: Kapila, with you as my witness I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali. I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra…

KAPILA: Ts! Ts! [*Aside.*] This is a serious situation.

Related Characters: Kapila, Devadatta (speaker), Padmini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

When Devadatta explains to Kapila how much he is in love with Padmini and how much he would sacrifice if he could marry her, Kapila is skeptical. It is at this point, however, that Kapila realizes that Devadatta may care more about Padmini than he has about other women in the past. The vow that Devadatta makes is a serious one, and foreshadows how he will eventually cut off his head. This will become a particularly appropriate way for Devadatta to sacrifice himself, because it eliminates the part of him that comprised his whole identity – his head and his intelligence.

Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightning—and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel.

Related Characters: Kapila (speaker), Padmini, Devadatta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

After Kapila goes to knock on Padmini's door and she outwits him several times—not letting him enter her house until she gets a satisfactory answer as to why he is there—Kapila wonders how Devadatta will fare in a relationship with Padmini. Up until this point, the scene between him and Devadatta underscored their difference in intelligence, but here Kapila focuses on the difference in their constitutions. Kapila predicts correctly that Devadatta is too sensitive for Padmini and believes that she instead needs someone stronger and sturdier, like him. As Kapila has also fallen in love with Padmini at first sight, he sets up the conflict that will ensue between the two men as they vie for her affection throughout the play.

Why do you tremble, heart? Why do you cringe like a touch-me-not bush through which a snake has passed?
The sun rests his head on the Fortunate Lady's flower.
And the head is bidding good-bye to the heart.

Related Characters: The Bhagavata (speaker), Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24-25

Explanation and Analysis

When Padmini changes her mind again and decides to travel to the fair so as not to disappoint Kapila, both men are confused and Devadatta is especially hurt. In the transition between packing the cart and setting off for the fair, the Bhagavata recites these poetic lines in the style of traditional Sanskrit verse. The Bhagavata hints at what's to come through his reference to the Fortunate Lady's flower, which represents Padmini's thoughts of infidelity and her unhappiness in her own marriage. The fact that the "sun rests his head" on this flower implies this shift in Padmini's affections from Devadatta to Kapila. The last line also elucidates the nature of this change: Padmini's heart is losing affection for Devadatta (who symbolizes the head).

What a good mix!
No more tricks!
Is this one that
or that one this?

Related Characters: Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

After Padmini has switched Devadatta and Kapila's heads, all three of them become amused at their unlikely situation. They sing this rhyme over and over again, holding hands and spinning in circles as they go. Though their relationships will quickly turn sour, here they share a brief moment of unbridled joy and laughter. This moment comes just before the end of the first act, and in a way it mirrors the laughter that Padmini's son will find in Hayavadana at the very end of the play. The difference between the two moments, however, is that Devadatta and Kapila are locked in hybrid bodies and conflicting desires, whereas laughter is used to achieve completeness at the end of the play.

KAPILA. [*Raising his right hand.*] This is the hand that accepted her at the wedding. This is the body she's lived with all these months. And the child she's carrying is the seed of this body.

Related Characters: Kapila (speaker), Devadatta, Padmini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36-37

Explanation and Analysis

When Padmini starts to refer to the person with Devadatta's head as Devadatta, the man with Kapila's head starts to argue that he is in fact Devadatta because he has Devadatta's body. This argument establishes the newfound conflict between the three of them, after the men's heads have been switched. Between the two of them, Kapila's hybridity is seemingly more upsetting because he has lost the thing that defined him: his body. He tries to argue that he is Devadatta in order to latch onto the only other thing that really gave him an identity: his love for Padmini. This sets up the incompleteness that the characters will feel as a result of their odd state of hybridity.

Of all the human limbs the topmost—in position as well as in importance—is the head. I have Devadatta's head, and it follows that I am Devadatta.

Related Characters: Devadatta (speaker), Padmini, Kapila

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

When Kapila begins to argue that he is Devadatta because he has Devadatta's body, Devadatta naturally starts to make the opposite argument. Unlike with Kapila's argument, however, Devadatta's argument has a lot of prior textual merit. The Bhagavata says something similar when he tells Hayavadana that one cannot alter what is written on one's forehead, and even Kapila acknowledges this later in the play after their bodies slowly begin to change to reflect the personalities of the heads now attached to them. But even in light of this argument, the body also has its effect on personality, as much of the second act will come to show. Although Devadatta's argument is (appropriately) more logical and thus the argument that wins out at first, Kapila's physical and emotional appeal will once again sway Padmini when she returns to him later, proving that the body and the heart hold equal sway over people.

Act 2 Quotes

You know, I'd always thought one had to use one's brains while wrestling or fencing or swimming. But this body just doesn't wait for thoughts—it acts!

Related Characters: Devadatta (speaker), Kapila

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the second act, as Devadatta is getting used to his new, strong body, he tells Padmini how on his way to the fair he saw a wrestler and was immediately prompted to challenge him, and remarks that the body's impulses can be just as strong as any logical intention. Though much of the play's text seems to argue that the head is the primary part of a being, throughout the second act the play demonstrates that the body can be just as important in determining selfhood and the course of one's actions. The fact that the body and head are not in sync in these two men, then, proves detrimental to their happiness, leading to a split in their personalities that they can't resolve.

Kapila? What could he be doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still, and his face dark? [*Long pause.*] Devadatta changes. Kapila changes. And me?

Related Characters: Padmini (speaker), Kapila, Devadatta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

As the second act goes on and Devadatta's body begins to return to its original state, Padmini begins to dream of Kapila. One day after a long overdue workout, Devadatta becomes angry that he is losing his muscles. Padmini says he shouldn't care and that Kapila is out of her life, but no sooner has she said this than she begins to wonder where Kapila is. As Devadatta reverts to his original self, Padmini becomes unhappy and wonders whether *she* has changed at all from the time she felt so split in her love for the two men. With this question, the audience can see that Padmini has been the most constant character throughout the play in her love for both of these men, but her love and identity are both equally limited by the societal expectation of marriage.

DOLL II: Especially last night—I mean—that dream...

DOLL I: Tut-tut—One shouldn't talk about such things!

DOLL II: It was so shameless...

DOLL I: I said be quiet...

DOLL II: Honestly! The way they...

DOLL I: Look, if we must talk about it, let me.

DOLL II: You didn't want to talk about it. So...

Related Characters: Dolls (speaker), Kapila, Padmini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

As Devadatta's body returns to its original form, Padmini continues to dream of Kapila. Here the dolls imply that her dreams have become more and more sexually explicit as

they fight over who gets to tell the audience about her "shameless" dream. The dolls here reinforce their connection to Padmini's desire by narrating some of her dreams, but in previous dialogues they also revealed some of her insecurities about her own body and her relationship to these two men. Here and elsewhere, the dolls also express some of her worries about how her relationships are perceived by society, just as she previously feared that she would be called a whore. This exchange demonstrates how she feels unsatisfied and incomplete in her marriage to one man, but has no means of remedying that problem without incurring judgment.

KAPILA: The moment it came to me, a war started between us.

PADMINI: And who won?

KAPILA: I did.

PADMINI: The head always wins, doesn't it?

Related Characters: Kapila, Padmini (speaker), Devadatta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

When Padmini goes to find Kapila in the forest, she discovers that he, like Kapila, has largely reverted to his original self. He describes how his body rebelled when he tried to work back into shape, but that ultimately, he won the battle between his head and Devadatta's body. With this development, Kapila seems to realize that the head does in fact rule the body and that he is, undeniably, Kapila—something that he had argued against when their heads were switched initially. But as Devadatta had illustrated earlier, and as Kapila explains shortly after this quote occurs, the body that he inherited from Devadatta comes with its own experiences as well. Thus, the rule of the head over the body is far from complete.

Isn't that surprising? That the body should have its own ghosts—its own memories?

Related Characters: Kapila (speaker), Devadatta, Padmini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

After describing how he conquered Devadatta's body and, in doing so, returned himself to his original form, Kapila admits to Padmini that his body still has experiences and senses of which he has no conscious knowledge—sensations leftover from Devadatta's body. Devadatta feels this earlier as well when he impulsively challenges the wrestler, but Kapila's situation is more difficult as he describes how his body remembers the intimacy that Devadatta and Padmini had shared without having the memories to match. It is this incongruity which haunts him most of all as he tries to sort through his own identity, and which causes Padmini to pity him and remain with him for several nights in the forest.

I know it in my blood you couldn't have lived together. Because you knew death you died in each other's arms. You could only have lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you to death. You forgave each other, but again—left me out.

Related Characters: Padmini (speaker), Devadatta, Kapila

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

After Kapila and Devadatta have killed each other at the end of the play, Padmini wonders whether they would still be alive if she had said that all three of them could live together. It is unclear whether Padmini would have found fulfilment in such an arrangement, but she makes it clear that she doesn't think it would have worked for Devadatta and Kapila. She acknowledges that the conflict between the two men's warring heads and bodies, there was no room for her, and she echoes earlier sentiments that she feels alone and unchanged by the events that have transpired. She never had a complete sense of identity because her love was always split and unfulfilled.

That's why I sing all these patriotic songs—and the National Anthem! That particularly! I have noticed that the people singing the National Anthem always seem to have ruined their voices—So I try.

Related Characters: Hayavadana (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

When Hayavadana returns after visiting Kali's temple, he has traded his human body for a horse body, but laments that he still has a human voice. He explains to the Bhagavata that he sings the National Anthem because he thinks that that will ruin his voice. Once again, Karnad reintroduces his commentary that Indian nationalism is not an adequate means of establishing a collective identity. This statement, when read alongside Hayavadana's earlier statement that he was unable to find a society to make him feel unified (as well as the fact that Karnad uses a wide variety of regional Indian theatrical techniques), the play argues for a vision of India that is made up of a large and diverse array of cultural traditions.

> What's there in a song, Hayavadana? The real beauty lies in the child's laughter—in the innocent joy of that laughter. No tragedy can touch it.

Related Characters: The Bhagavata (speaker), Boy, Hayavadana

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

When Hayavadana returns as a talking horse, Padmini's child, who is also onstage at the time and has been thought not to be able to smile or speak, begins to laugh at Hayavadana, and the two sing together. Eventually the child's laughter causes Hayavadana to lose his human voice as his own laughter transforms into a horse's neigh. Through this crossing of storylines, the two are able to find their own sense of completeness. The laughter found through this theatrical storytelling, both by the characters within it and also for the audience, is shown to be a powerful means of finding a sense of closure, release, and even completion.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

At the beginning of the performance, a **mask** of Ganesha (a Hindu god with the head of an elephant and the body of a boy) is brought onstage and placed onto a chair in front of the audience, and a puja is done.

Right away, it is established that the play will be unique in several ways. Because Karnad wrote the play partly as a reaction against Western theatrical conventions, he begins by placing the audience directly within the Indian culture and religion that permeate the play. By beginning the play with an actual religious ritual (the puja), Karnad establishes that there will be different "layers" to the play, not just a single, fictional plot line.


The Bhagavata asks that Ganesha, who is the "destroyer of obstacles," bless the performance and give it success. He comments that Ganesha may seem to be an imperfect being because of his hybrid state, but that his completeness is simply unknowable to mortal beings.

The Bhagavata introduces a main theme within the play: hybridity. Ganesha is the first of many beings with a mismatched head and body to appear in the play. In the case of the play's human characters, hybridity is associated with a state of incompleteness, but the Bhagavata argues here that divine beings do not have that same deficiency; their perfection is incomprehensible to mortals.

The Bhagavata then sets up the action of the play. He first introduces the setting, the kingdom of Dharmapura. He then introduces the two heroes, Devadatta and Kapila. Devadatta, who is fair and handsome, is the son of a Brahmin and is a highly intellectual poet. The Bhagavata describes how he outdoes the best poets and pundits in the kingdom "in debates on logic and love." Kapila, on the other hand, is the son of an iron smith and is darker and "plain to look at." Kapila excels in "deeds which require drive and daring," including dancing and feats of strength. The Bhagavata describes how the world is in awe of their friendship, and sings that they are two friends of "one mind, one heart."

As the Bhagavata introduces the two primary characters of the story, his descriptions set up what will be their primary conflict. Devadatta's descriptions center almost exclusively on his intellect, whereas Kapila's descriptions center almost exclusively on his physical strength and attributes. Therefore, from the very outset, the characters become symbolic of "the head" (associated with the intellect and logic) and "the body" (associated with emotion and sexuality).


At that moment, an actor screams in terror, running onstage. The Bhagavata tries to calm him, saying that there's nothing to be afraid of on the stage. Only the musicians and audience are there. The actor explains that he was hurrying on his way to perform when he had to go to the bathroom. With nowhere to go, he sat by the side of the road, when a voice told him not to do that. He looked around and didn't see anybody. He attempted to go again, but the voice once again chastised him. He looked up to find a talking horse in front of him.

When the actor interrupts the Bhagavata's story, it is implied that Hayavadana's storyline is on the same plane of reality as the audience (i.e., the audience is supposed to believe that what is happening is real, even though it is of course still within the play that Karnad has written). This interruption adds to the play's humor. The story of the actor trying to go to the bathroom on the side of the road removes the audience from the seriousness of the religious ritual and the Bhagavata's speech, and demonstrates how the play calls attention to the fact that it is a play for comedic effect.

The Bhagavata does not believe the actor and tells him to get into costume and makeup. The actor shows the Bhagavata his shaking hands, saying that he is too terrified to perform or fight with a sword. The Bhagavata has no choice but to send him back to make sure that there was no talking horse. The actor reluctantly goes.

The fear that the actor feels toward the talking horse reinforces the idea that the Bhagavata had introduced with the ritual: that hybrid beings are beyond the comprehension of mere mortals. Thus, the Bhagavata sends the actor back to make sure that no such hybrid being actually exists.

The Bhagavata once again tries to return to his story, but the actor rushes back on, crying that the creature is coming. The Bhagavata reasons that if the actor is so frightened, they should try to hide the creature from the audience. Accordingly, two stage hands hold up a curtain. At that moment, the creature (Hayavadana) enters and stands behind the curtain. The audience hears the sound of someone sobbing. The Bhagavata orders the stage hands to lower the curtain. Each time the curtain is lowered just enough to show Hayavadana's head, he ducks behind it. Eventually, Hayavadana is revealed in his full form: half-horse, half-man.

The entrance of Hayavadana makes use of a technique traditionally used in Indian yakshagana *theater. The curtain is usually employed in this way to build anticipation and excitement about a new character's entrance before they are revealed in all their glory. Here, however, the technique is used for comedic effect, as Hayavadana does not wish to be seen and his head keeps popping out of the curtain. This is a prime example of Karnad using regional theatrical traditions but giving them a modern update.*

The Bhagavata remains in disbelief and chides Hayavadana for trying to scare people with a **mask**. He asks Hayavadana to take off his mask, but when Hayavadana does not reply, he tries to pull off Hayavadana's head with the help of the actor. Eventually, however, he concedes that it must be Hayavadana's real head.

With Hayavadana's entrance, the play's use of masks is introduced. The masks not only signal hybrid creatures, but call the audience's attention to the artifice of theater, thus also highlighting storytelling as one of the play's main themes.


The Bhagavata asks Hayavadana who he is, and what brought him to this place. Hayavadana answers that all his life he has been trying to get rid of his horse's head, and he thought the Bhagavata might be able to help him. He explains that his mother was a princess, and when she came of age she was meant to choose her own husband. Many princes came for her hand in marriage, but she didn't like any of them. When the prince of Araby arrived on his great white stallion, she fainted. Her father decided that this was the man to marry her, but when the princess woke up, she insisted she would only marry the horse.

Hayavadana's origin story introduces the play's theme of searching for fulfilment and completion. Rather than accept his horse's head as a part of who he is, Hayavadana works to rid himself of the feeling of incompleteness, building on the Bhagavata's earlier remark that humans do not understand the divine completeness that can be found in hybrid beings.


Hayavadana continues his story, saying that no one could dissuade his mother from her decision, and so she and the horse had fifteen years of happy marriage. One morning, the horse turned into a Celestial Being. He had been cursed to be born a horse by another god, on the condition that after fifteen years of human love he could regain his divine form. He asked the princess to join him in his "Heavenly Abode," but the princess would only go with him if he returned to horse form. Thus, he cursed her to become a horse herself. She ran away happily, and Hayavadana was left behind as a product of their marriage.

The story of the princess keeps with the play's theme of mind vs. body, as the princess allowed her desire for the horse overcome any sense of logic or reason. The conflict between her mind and body finds parallel in the conflict between Hayavadana's head and body. The story also brings in religious elements of Indian culture, but as Hayavadana will explain shortly, culture does not always equate with finding one's society.


Hayavadana asks the Bhagavata how he can get rid of his head, but the Bhagavata replies that "what's written on our foreheads cannot be altered." Hayavadana says that he had tried to become a complete man by taking an interest in "the social life of the Nation," but that he was unable to find his society. He wonders how he can become a complete man without a complete society.

The Bhagavata here foreshadows that in each of the plot lines, the head wins out over the body, though not always with satisfactory results. Additionally, Hayavadana's search for a unified society serves as a metaphor for India's status as a nation, as it is also made up of a variety of diverse traditions.

The Bhagavata suggests that Hayavadana go to various temples and try to make a vow to a god. Hayavadana says that he has tried everything, but the Bhagavata thinks of one more temple he might try: that of the goddess Kali. He says that thousands of people used to flock to her temple, but people stopped going because they discovered that she granted anything anyone asked. Hayavadana and the actor set off for the temple.

Kali's temple becomes one of the ways in which the various plot lines of the play intersect and eventually become tied together, as Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila also go to Kali's temple. The Bhagavata's comment that people stopped going to her because she granted anything anyone asked also foreshadows that simply asking the gods does not necessarily lead to a sense of completeness in one's identity, as will be the case with all the characters who visit Kali's temple.

The Bhagavata returns to the story he had been trying to tell, providing a short summary of the plot that is about to unfold: the two friends, Devadatta and Kapila, who are of "one mind, one heart," met a girl (Padmini) and "forgot themselves" as a result, but ultimately neither of them could "understand the song she sang." He then describes a scene in which the woman holds the decapitated heads of the two men, covering herself in their blood as she dances and sings.

The Bhagavata returns to his introduction concerning the mind and the heart as he describes what is about to unfold for the audience. The Bhagavata only describes the first half of the story that he is about to tell, suggesting that he is not in complete control of the story even as he is its narrator. This is corroborated later, when he seems surprised by the actions of various characters.

The female chorus then begins to sing, asking through various metaphors why someone's love should be limited to one other person.

The chorus is a tradition borrowed from ancient Greek theatre that Karnad is integrating with other theatrical conventions from other cultures. The chorus helps convey Padmini's desire to the audience. Because the men have been said to be of "one mind, one heart," the chorus foreshadows that Padmini will love one man's mind and another man's heart (or body).

Devadatta and Kapila then enter the stage. Devadatta is described as a "slender, delicate-looking person" and he wears a pale colored **mask**. Kapila, for his part, is "powerfully built" and wears a dark mask.

Karnad continues to set up the opposition between the mind and the heart with masks of opposing colors and essentially opposite descriptions. The masks also remind the audience that they are watching a play, and will become an important device later when the men exchange their masks.

Kapila asks his friend why he didn't come to the gymnasium the night before. Devadatta is distracted and responds that he was working. As Kapila describes a wrestling match that he had won, he notices that Devadatta isn't paying much attention and assumes that he has fallen in love again. Devadatta tries to convince him that this girl is especially important to him and rattles off poetry about her, but Kapila interrupts and finishes his thought for him, demonstrating how many times Devadatta has repeated these sentiments. Devadatta becomes angry with Kapila for not taking his feelings seriously, and questions his friendship. Kapila affirms that he would die for Devadatta, jumping into a well or walking into fire.

The initial exchange between Devadatta and Kapila hints at their eventual conflict and rivalry over Padmini, but it also continues to set up their character dichotomy: Kapila goes to the gymnasium to wrestle, while Devadatta works on his studies. Devadatta also rattles off classical poetry while Kapila makes fun of him. Kapila instead prefers to put his own language about his loyalty in terms of the physical suffering he would endure.

Devadatta, convinced that his friend actually does understand him, tries to explain his love further. When he begins to reveal his feelings more fully through new poetry, Kapila eventually realizes that this girl must be particularly special. Devadatta is upset because he believes she is beyond his reach, and vows that if he were to marry her, he would sacrifice his arms and his head to the gods.

Again, Devadatta's poetry becomes the hallmark of his character, and establishes for the audience why Padmini eventually marries him. Devadatta's promise to cut off his arms and his head if he is able to marry her will come back to haunt him, as he will eventually fulfill part of his promise, leading to both a literal and metaphorical state of incompleteness.

Kapila offers to try to find the girl for him. Devadatta tells him that he had followed her home from the market the previous evening, so he knows that she lives somewhere in Pavana Veethi. The only thing Devadatta remembers about the house is that it had an engraving of a two-headed bird at the top of the door frame. Kapila goes off immediately to find her house and discover her name. Devadatta remarks to himself how good a friend Kapila is, but after a moment he wonders if it is actually a good idea to send Kapila in his place, as he is "too rough, too indelicate."

The actions of each character further associate them with the body and mind, respectively. Kapila departs instantly, acting before thinking. Devadatta doesn't stop him, but immediately questions his decision, demonstrating how different the two are. The two-headed bird on the knocker signifies the love that Padmini will eventually feel for both men simultaneously.

Kapila goes to Pavana Veethi, the street of merchants. He passes many enormous houses, searching for the one that has the two-headed bird. When he finds the right house, he knocks on the door to try and find out who lives there. When the girl (named Padmini) answers the door, he is immediately love-struck. Padmini asks him what he wants, outwitting him as he tries to come up with reasons why he is there. She asks him if his eyes work, and then asks why, if he knew which house he wanted, he was peering at all the doors. She refuses to get the master of the house for him, or her father or brother, and Kapila is left in a desperate state as he tries to avoid revealing why he has knocked on the door.

This scene is a modern take on a common trope in Indian theater and storytelling in which a man goes to woo a woman. This adds to the assemblage of different elements from Indian culture that Karnad infuses into this play. However, Karnad puts a twist on this conventional device by having the woman outwit the man, instead of the other way around. As Kapila falls in love with Padmini, the love triangle (and with it the main conflict of the play) is established.

Kapila eventually asks Padmini if she knows of Devadatta. She asks what Devadatta is to Kapila, to which Kapila replies that he is the greatest friend in the world, and adds, "but the main question now: what's he going to be to you?" Padmini blushes at this and goes off to find her mother. When he leaves, Kapila says to himself that Padmini really needs a man of steel, and that Devadatta is too sensitive for someone as quick and sharp as she is.

The struggle between the head and the body really begins from this moment. Kapila doesn't use any poetry to woo Padmini, instead using more direct language and flirtation. He gets a strong response from Padmini, foreshadowing the trouble that will arise from her attraction to him. Kapila, for his own part, seems to grasp Padmini's nature better than Devadatta does.

The Bhagavata explains that a match between Padmini and Devadatta had no obstacles because both families were of high status: her family was very wealthy, while his family was very intellectual. They are married quickly and the Bhagavata explains that the friendship between the two of them and Kapila continues to be strong.

Karnad does not give the audience a scene between Padmini and Devadatta before they are married, and builds on the theme he has set up by providing a very logical explanation for the reason that the two get married. Thus, in the conflict of head vs. body, the head initially wins out.

The plot skips forwards six months. Padmini is pregnant and she, Devadatta, and Kapila are taking a trip to Ujjain. Devadatta reveals that he is he is nervous about her traveling while pregnant, and she in turn teases him that he is so protective of her that one might think she was the first woman to ever become pregnant. She comments that she only has to stumble for Devadatta to act like she has lost their child. Devadatta becomes very upset at this kind of teasing.

Not long into their marriage, Padmini starts to fulfill Kapila's earlier prediction that she is too quick and too sharp for Devadatta. Having been introduced as a soft, sensitive character in opposition with the tough, steely Kapila, Devadatta is very vulnerable to Padmini's language.

As they talk, Devadatta reveals his jealousy of Kapila and of the attention Padmini gives him. He thinks that she drools over him, and was unhappy when she invited him to the house when Devadatta wanted to read a play to her, because when Kapila arrived there was no chance of reading the play. Padmini asks if Devadatta is jealous of Kapila, which Devadatta adamantly denies. Devadatta has also noticed that Kapila, too, seems to light up every time he sees Padmini, describing how he "begins to wag his tail" and "sits up on his hind legs." Devadatta wonders to himself how she could not have noticed this.

The rivalry between the two men becomes explicit for the first time as Padmini suspects that Devadatta is jealous of Kapila. Karnad continues to frame this rivalry in terms of mind and body, as Devadatta's affection for Padmini is expressed by reading plays to her, while Kapila's is expressed through his physically visible happiness when he sees her. Comparing Kapila to a dog also removes him from the intelligence associated with humans and connects him instead to animal instinct.

Padmini tries to appease Devadatta and suggests that they cancel the trip and spend the day together instead, assuring Devadatta that she will not be too disappointed. When Kapila arrives, Devadatta tells him that Padmini is not well. Kapila privately expresses his disappointment that he won't be able to spend time with Padmini. However, when Padmini sees Kapila she changes her mind again so as not to disappoint him, and tells Kapila to pack the cart. Devadatta is hurt by this change of heart.

The audience begins to see that even though Padmini is married to Devadatta, she struggles with her own sense of incompleteness. She clearly loves her husband, but does not want to disappoint Kapila and has affection for him. Her seemingly insignificant change of heart ends up hurting both Devadatta and Kapila, eventually snowballing into the larger conflict that leads to the two men swapping heads.

The three of them set out in the cart, and Padmini remarks how smoothly Kapila drives the cart. She relates an anecdote about how, soon after they were married, Devadatta tried to drive her to a lake outside the city, but failed to steer the oxen beyond the city gates and so Devadatta had to bring them back home, angry and embarrassed.

Padmini's story stokes Devadatta's jealousy as she subtly begins to reveal her attraction to Kapila and his physical prowess. This sequence builds on the tension that was established between the characters before they left on their trip, which only grows as Padmini's affection becomes more and more apparent.

Padmini spots a tree with beautiful flowers, called the **Fortunate Lady's flower**, and Kapila immediately dashes off to climb the tree and retrieve some of the flowers for her. She remarks to herself how muscular Kapila's body is, and Devadatta notices Padmini staring at Kapila. He burns with jealousy as he observes her, but doesn't say anything, and instead simply forces himself to watch her watching Kapila. Meanwhile, Padmini worries that Devadatta is watching her and sees her love for Kapila. She asks herself how much longer she can go on like this.

Here the conflict between the two men becomes much more evident as Padmini and Devadatta narrate their feelings to themselves (and the audience). Padmini's physical desire for Kapila begins to overshadow her feelings for her husband. This exchange spurs Devadatta, for his part, to realize that he has lost much of Padmini's affection, and is what eventually causes him to sacrifice his head.

Kapila returns with the **Fortunate Lady's flowers**. Padmini asks why the flowers are called that, and he explains that the flowers have all the markings of a married woman, such as the marks on her forehead, the parting of her hair, and dots that look like a necklace. Padmini turns to Devadatta and says that he should use those descriptions in his poetry. Devadatta tries to shift the dynamic by asking them to keep traveling, but Padmini remarks that she'd like to spend the night where they have stopped because of the various sites around them, including the temple of Rudra and the temple of Kali.

The metaphor of the Fortunate Lady's flowers not only represents Padmini (a married woman) but also shows Kapila making an attempt at poetry. As he explains the connections between the flower and married women, Padmini is impressed—a reminder that a beautiful mind is as attractive to her as a beautiful body.

Kapila and Padmini decide to visit the temple of Rudra, but Devadatta, still upset, says that he doesn't want to go and will watch the cart. Kapila senses the tension and offers to stay instead, but Devadatta insists that the two of them go ahead. Padmini is frustrated at this tantrum and decides she will go without Devadatta. At an impasse, Kapila goes with Padmini to the temple.

At this point, Devadatta believes that he has lost Padmini, who continues to complain that he is too sensitive. The fact that she goes with Kapila demonstrates that although the head may initially win out, the body and its desires can prove just as powerful.

Devadatta says goodbye to Padmini and Kapila, and says to himself that he hopes they live happily together. Remembering his vow to sacrifice his arms and head, Devadatta goes off to temple of Kali. He shouts a short, anguished prayer in which he says that his head will be an offering to the goddess, and then fulfills his promise by cutting off his head (the actor's **mask**), which involves some struggle.

As Devadatta believes he has lost Padmini, his decision to cut off his head also demonstrates that when he loses Padmini, he loses the best part of himself. Cutting off his head is an appropriate symbolic act to demonstrate that he has lost a sense of his own identity as well.

Padmini and Kapila return from the temple of Rudra. They begin to worry about Devadatta when they cannot find him, and so Kapila follows his footprints to Kali's temple. When he discovers Devadatta's body, he is filled with anguish at his friend's death, and asks the dead Devadatta whether he forgot that Kapila would have done anything for him. He admits that he knows he did wrong, but confesses that he didn't have the intelligence to do anything else. Kapila says he cannot go on living without his friend, and decides to join him in the next life. He then cuts off his own head. After a while, it begins to get dark, and Padmini gets worried, noticing that Kapila has disappeared, too. She goes to look for them both at the temple, where she stumbles upon the bodies of the two men and screams in horror.

The monologue Kapila gives after he discovers his friend echoes the beginning of the play, in which he assured Devadatta of his friendship. This time, however, it shows the audience how much has changed since the beginning of the play. Although the two men were initially of "one mind, one heart," their love for Padmini has split them into two very distinct—even opposed—beings. Even in this monologue, Kapila reaffirms the differences between them: Devadatta was always smarter than he was.

In despair, Padmini asks how the two of them could have left her alone. She worries that if she goes home, society will say that the two men fought and died for a "whore." She resolves to join the men in the afterlife as well and picks up a sword to kill herself, but Kali stops her. Kali reveals her annoyance that the men didn't care about sacrificing their heads to her at all, but simply wanted to escape their situations. Kali tells Padmini that she will revive the two men if Padmini places their heads back on their bodies. Padmini, in her excitement, accidentally switches Devadatta's and Kapila's heads (in the play, this is accomplished with the **masks**).

Padmini's own monologue reveals her fears and insecurities about her own identity and sense of self. She truly loves both men, but as the female chorus sang at the beginning of the story, society does not believe love can function in this way. When Padmini switches the heads, the men's masks take on a symbolic connection to hybridity, signifying that each now exists in a state of duality and incompleteness.

When Kali revives Devadatta and Kapila, they (along with Padmini) quickly realize that something is wrong. Padmini explains what has happened. At first they are amused at the mix-up, singing a childish song and falling on the ground with laughter. When they try to leave, however, conflict ensues as each man tries to argue that Padmini is his wife and should come with him. Devadatta (that is, the man with Devadatta's head) argues that the head rules the body and that one marries a personality, not a body. Kapila argues that his hand accepted hers at the wedding, that his body is the body she has lived with for months, and that his body gave Padmini her child—and therefore he is now her husband.

Although initially the three are entertained by the course of events, friendship once again quickly turns to rivalry. Their argument here speaks to a more philosophical exploration of what composes a sense of identity and personality. This is particularly interesting to consider in the context of a performance, because the actor who initially played Devadatta now voices Kapila's thoughts and vice versa—an effective device to create a sense of incongruity.

The argument between the two men begins to heat up. When Devadatta pushes Kapila aside to take Padmini home, Kapila asks Padmini if Devadatta would ever have been so violent. Padmini begins to go with Devadatta, and Kapila taunts Padmini by saying that she only wants his body and Devadatta's mind. The Bhagavata interjects, wondering what the solution is to this problem, and the curtain falls on the end of act one.

At the end of this exchange, Kapila's taunt becomes particularly resonant. While the two men have each lost half of their identities, Padmini has gained a single being that represents the seamless combination of her previously conflicting desires. The Bhagavata's interjection makes it clear that this is not the resolution of the story, however, foreshadowing that they cannot all be satisfied by the events that have occurred.

ACT 2

Act two opens with the Bhagavata repeating his question about the solution to the problem of the mixed-up heads. He describes how Padmini, Devadatta, and Kapila consult a *rishi* (i.e., a sage) about their problem. The rishi tells them that the head does in fact rule the body, and thus the man with Devadatta's head is Padmini's husband. The couple celebrates, and Padmini is particularly joyful about Devadatta's new body. She tries to console Kapila, reminding him that she is going with his body. Devadatta and Padmini return to their home, while Kapila returns to the forest and disappears.

With the rishi's resolution regarding which of the men is Devadatta, once again the head proves dominant over the body. But Padmini's joy makes it clear that she prizes Kapila's body equally, if not more, than Devadatta's head. On the other hand, Kapila has now lost the part of himself that defined him (his body). As a result, he no longer understands how he fits into society and so he decides to leave it behind entirely.

Back at Padmini and Devadatta's house, the two are happier than ever. Devadatta buys dolls for their unborn child at a fair, which pleases Padmini. He recounts to her that on the way to the fair he passed by a wrestler and was moved immediately to challenge him, pinning him to the ground within minutes, even though he had never wrestled before. Padmini marvels at his fabulous strength.

Even though the head is the center of personality, Devadatta's new body's impulses reveal that the body can prove just as powerful in defining one's identity, an idea that Kapila will echo later on. It is this mixed nature of identity that haunts both of the men, and which will later become such a conundrum.

The dolls (who are played by children) address the audience, remarking on the beauty of the house and saying that they deserve the best. The dolls describe how the mothers and children stared at them at the fair with desire. They also comment on how rough Devadatta's hands are, and say that he doesn't deserve the dolls.

The dolls serve as another theatrical device, in addition to the female chorus, to convey Padmini's thoughts and desires to the audience. Their comment about Devadatta's hands parallels Padmini as she registers the changes in Devadatta's body.

Time passes and Devadatta and Padmini's baby is born. Devadatta addresses the Bhagavata directly for the first time, inviting him to the feast they are having. The Bhagavata notes that he hadn't heard about the feast, or of their son being born.

Through this exchange, the audience can begin to track how the Bhagavata seems to be more and more surprised by the play's developments as it progresses. This conveys some of the chaos and unpredictability of the play—and of life more generally—as the stories eventually weave in and out of each other in unexpected ways.

The dolls note how they are ignored while the baby gets all the attention. They confess that they should have been wary of Padmini when she was pregnant, swelling up with the baby. They comment on how ugly she looked, though they remark that she is not ugly to Devadatta.

The dolls continue to comment on the state of Padmini's mind and body, her desires, and the way she interacts with others. Though they often seem to be negative towards her, in many ways they also represent her own insecurities.

Another six months pass, and Padmini and Devadatta are fighting over how to treat their son. Padmini wants to take him to the lake, but Devadatta thinks that it would be too cold to swim. Padmini believes that Devadatta is too protective of him. When Devadatta touches Padmini, she shudders and get goose bumps. Shortly after, Devadatta grabs one of the dolls, who also shudders. The dolls explain that his body is returning to its soft, weak state.

In this exchange, old issues begin to resurface. Padmini once again believes Devadatta is too sensitive. The dolls' connection to Padmini is highlighted again as they explain why she shudders: Devadatta's body is losing its power and muscle. This reinforces the idea that the head rules the body and is what defines a person's identity.

Padmini sings a lullaby to her son about a rider on a white stallion, and falls asleep. The dolls narrate her dreams, describing the appearance of a man whose face is rough but whose body is soft. They say it is someone who is "not her husband," revealing that she is dreaming of Kapila.

The song that Padmini sings to her son about the white stallion is a subtle foreshadowing of the connection that her son will eventually have to Hayavadana. As the dolls once again narrate Padmini's desires, it is easy to see the parallel structure with the first part of the story: initially Devadatta's head wins out, but Padmini ultimately longs again for Kapila's body.

More time has passed, and Devadatta has returned to his original form: soft-bodied and lacking muscle. A stage direction notes that the actor who originally portrayed Devadatta now returns to that **mask**/role. The dolls imply that Padmini's dreams have become particularly sexually explicit, and they fight over who gets to tell the audience, tearing each other's clothes and scratching each other. This leads Padmini to remark that their son's dolls have become tattered. She asks Devadatta to travel to buy new ones.

The actors switch masks again—a theatrical device which helps the audience track that the characters have returned to their original form. This change directly impacts Padmini's dreams, and even drives her to send Devadatta away so that she can go to find Kapila in the forest.

While Devadatta travels to get new dolls, Padmini goes into the forest with her son. She imagines the "witching fair," making up stories about the activities of the forest. Before leaving, she reveals that she must do one other thing: say hello to the tree of the **Fortunate Lady**.

As Padmini travels through the forest, the return of the symbol of the Fortunate Lady's flower is ironic, as the flower represents marriage but appears again, for Padmini, in a moment of infidelity.

In another part of the forest, Kapila enters, and the Bhagavata is surprised to see him living in the jungle. The Bhagavata tells Kapila that Padmini has given birth to her son, and notices how angry Kapila looks by the way he stands and moves. Kapila says that the Bhagavata's comments are merely poetry.

That the Bhagavata is surprised at Kapila's appearance is in keeping with earlier hints that he is "in the dark" and no longer in control as the play's plot twists and turns. As the play approaches its climax, it becomes less and less predictable.

Padmini finds Kapila in the forest. He confesses that he has worked hard to get his body back into shape, almost torturing himself. He is also haunted by memories that belonged to Devadatta's body—memories of things he never experienced, like being intimate with Padmini. He is distressed that she is bringing all these memories back. She says that he should be able to experience the things in those memories, too, and caresses his face. The two of them go into Kapila's hut together.

Just as Devadatta experienced impulses that belonged to Kapila's body, Kapila experiences memories that belonged to Devadatta's body. This is in keeping with the play's suggestion that even though the head may make up the personality, the body can be just as crucial in composing the identity of a person. It also establishes that when the head and the body are not in sync, it is difficult to determine one's identity or feel complete.

Devadatta, who has returned with new dolls, searches for Padmini and runs into the Bhagavata. The Bhagavata is surprised to see him, and reluctantly reveals that Padmini has now spent four nights in Kapila's hut.

The Bhagavata is also shocked to find Devadatta in the forest, showing that the plot is getting more and more out of the Bhagavata's hands even as he is the narrator.

Devadatta finds Padmini and Kapila, and the three are forced to confront their situation together. Kapila asks if they could live together as three, but the men quickly reject this idea. Devadatta and Kapila realize that the only way to end their incomplete existence is to kill each other. They agree to fight to the death. Their fight is stylized, almost like a dance, as the Bhagavata sings. Kapila wounds Devadatta, who falls to his knees and stabs Kapila. They continue to fight on their knees before they succumb to their wounds and die.

The inner conflict that springs from hybrid beings comes to a head here. Devadatta and Kapila, spurred by their feeling that they are hollow, and lacking a sense of a complete identity, resolve to kill each other. This indicates that when the mind and the body are not in sync, there can be fatal consequences, and also shows how human beings often strive and fail to find a sense of completeness.

Padmini is once again left behind. She wonders whether she should have said she would live with Devadatta and Kapila both, but acknowledges that they could not have lived together. She decides to perform sati and burn herself on their funeral pyre. She tells the Bhagavata to take her son to the hunters who live in the forest, and then once he reaches five years old to return him to his grandfather in the city. She performs sati as the stage hands lift a curtain with flames on it higher and higher, and the female chorus repeats its opening song asking why one cannot love more than one person. They refer to Padmini as **the Fortunate Lady**, and the Bhagavata reveals that that tree now stands on the spot where it is believed that Padmini died.

Padmini has her own sense of incompleteness, and realizes that she, like the men, will not find satisfaction. As the female chorus sings again, they highlight Padmini's struggle with having love for more than one person, and the final reference to the Fortunate Lady's flower is once again ironic, as Padmini in her marriage was anything but a "fortunate lady."

As the story seemingly concludes, the Bhagavata is interrupted once again, this time by a second actor who screams that he has seen a horse (who turns out to be Hayavadana) singing the national anthem.

The innermost story of the play comes to an end, but the play is not over. Instead, the action is once again interrupted by Hayavadana, who again calls attention to the fact that the audience is watching a play.

The first actor also returns to the stage, this time with a young boy clutching a pair of dolls. The boy does not smile, laugh, or talk. He only reacts violently when someone tries to touch his dolls. The Bhagavata realizes that it is Padmini's son.

When Padmini's son returns as a boy of six, the audience sees that he seems to have his own sense of incompleteness, as he does not appear to have a voice or the emotions of a normal child.

At that moment, Hayavadana returns, this time with a horse body as well as a horse head. He explains that he asked Kali to make him complete, but she cut off his request and made him a complete horse instead of a complete man. He is upset that he still has a human voice, however.

Hayavadana's storyline connects to Devadatta, Padmini, and Kapila's through the reappearance of Kali. Even after Hayavadana's body has been turned into a horse's, he still feels that he is not complete, as he retains his human voice.

The young boy starts laughing at Hayavadana, startling the Bhagavata and the actors. Hayavadana remarks that he was trying to sing the national anthem because the national anthem ruins people's voices. Instead he and the boy sing together the lullaby that Padmini had sung to him about the rider on the white stallion.

When Hayavadana mentions that he sings the national anthem to get rid of his voice, Karnad seems to be making a commentary disparaging Indian nationalism—suggesting that he sees Indian culture as being composed of many varied and distinct traditions, like a hybrid.

The Bhagavata remarks how beautiful the child's laughter is, though Hayavadana is skeptical of that kind of sentimentality. As the boy and Hayavadana continue to laugh, Hayavadana's laugh changes into a horse's neigh. Thus, he finally becomes complete.

The Bhagavata's comment drives home the idea that the laughter and joy which can be found in stories are extremely powerful in bringing people together. Although Hayavadana is skeptical at first, both he and the boy find a sense of completeness in their laughter; the boy finds his voice, while Hayavadana loses his.

The Bhagavata concludes the story by praying once again to Ganesha, and all the other characters and actors join him in prayer. They thank the god for the successful completion of the play and, as a final request, ask him to give the rulers of the country success and "a little bit of sense."

The final action of the play brings it full circle, ending with a prayer, just as it began. The characters ask Ganesha, who ensured their success, to also ensure the success of the rulers of a country, providing a measure of optimism that someday the country might also have more of a sense of strength in its own complex identity.

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