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Chandra Shekhar Dubey

Abstract- This paper attempts to interrogate Girish Karnad's 'Hayavadana' from the perspective of existentialism relating the protagonist to main concerns of existential paradigm such as freedom, choice, responsibility, finitude and death. Individual's variety of responses to fear and anxieties forge a paradoxical identity which tries to avert the inevitability through human efforts and subverts the symbolic identity, to seek meaning in interpersonal relationship and life. Hayavadana engages with this dual reality of human being which Becker refers to "existential paradox''. The way an individual conflates this paradox, has been analysed from the existential human paradigms which involves inner experiences, desires, memories and the sense of alienation. It further investigates the societal myth of an individual used by Karnad to locate a man in the larger human context. It further argues that Karnad poses a problem of identity in a world of tangled relationship. The dichotomy of mind and body has been analyzed from the existential paradigm of alienation, human consciousness, freedom, choice, and sufferings. This paper concludes that Hayavadana is condemned to live with his physical form, which further suggests incompleteness, and liberation from it suggests futility as reflected in existential philosophy of Jean Sartre, Albert Camus, and Frank Kafka.

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I. Introduction

Existential humanistic, perspective is a philosophical engagement with human conditions and choices in life which seeks to explore human existence, its meaning, and relevance about human sufferings, desires, sense of alienation, freedom, and freedom of choice. This paper further raises some questions concerning the method and conceptual structure of the existential paradigms in the philosophical postulates of Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Kafka. Heidegger is primarily concerned with the questions of humanistic existence about freedom and temporality. To Sartre, our adventures with the being and with our fellow beings are aspects of our body consciousness. Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness*, writes "My ultimate and initial project –for these are but one –is, as we shall see, always outline of a solution of the problem of being'' (Sartre, 29). Commenting on the problem of being, which remained initial and ultimate purpose of Sartre to solve the riddles of being. Joseph S. Catalano says "In most general sense, the problem of being is nothing less than understanding the relation of all existence to human existence''. (Joseph S. Catalano, 1985, p17). Camus and Kafka conceptualized the human conditions of existence in terms of stark reality, destiny and absurdity of human conditions.

Michelle Horan in his psychoanalytic study deliberates on essential factors constituting existential-humanistic paradigms, which correspond to the general tenets of existential philosophy, and these are further relevant to theoretical postulates of this paper. To quote him "The existential humanistic paradigm pays particular attention to the essential factors of human existence, such as the facts (and often concerns) of death, freedom, choice, responsibility, finitude, and meaning (Yalom, 1980). As per the humanistic tradition there is great focus upon the here-and-now, or the actual of what is being experienced by an individual in a given moment (Bugental, 1999). There is emphasis on the subjective realm of experience, the inner experience of an individual that is impacted by grappling with issues of life, death, meaning, and finitude, and on how these issues are affecting the individual's life in the present moment'' (Michelle Horan, www.easewellbeing.co.uk>Horan-2007). The present paper strives to analyze Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* in the perspective of the above existential paradigms. Sartre's existential psychoanalysis of comprehension applies to Karnad in understanding the human condition and dichotomy of body and mind. Karnad presents two models of existence first, natural and harmonious and second, transformed and disharmonious and subsequently reinforces the theory of duality of being. However, Karnad like Sartre lends his characters freedom of choice, but they are caught into the eventuality of destiny. In the first existential proposition both of Karnad's protagonists had freedom of choice and they chose death but their second existential conditions were externally governed in which their will had no role to play but accept the will of the Providence or human error with a sense of duality looming large on body and head (mind). Like Camus and Kafka, Girish Karnad used the motifs of myths and legends to make these a vehicle of a new vision. To Karnad these myths and legends assume a new form showing the absurdity of life with all existential concerns and conflicts, man's eternal struggle for getting perfection in life and subsequent frustrations, sufferings and sense of alienation. Veena

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Noble Dass rightly pointed out that Karnad was deeply influenced by the form of western playwrights, as she writes "…He has been in the west and has been influenced by the drama of Giraudoux, Anouilh, Camus and Sartre in his search for new forms of drama. Yet he is essentially in Karnataka tradition as he works the myths- Puranic, historical and literary.'' (Veena Noble Dass, 1988, 131).

Girish Karnad's brilliance as a playwright lies in his craftsmanship of weaving several narratives in his plays to evoke human and cultural thoughts of a rich tradition. His plays namely *Hayavadana, Yayati, The Fire and the Rain, Bali and Naga-Mandala* employ the narratives of myth, folktales to evoke an ancient or premodern text in the modern context by lending those socio-religious and cultural relevance in the present. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker in her introductory note to *Collected Plays, Girish Karnad* writes "Folktales from different periods and sources provide the basis of *Hayavadana (*Horse Head, 1971), *Nag-Mandala* (Play with a Cobra, 1988) ….each successive play by Karnad marks a departure in a vital new direction, and invention of new form appropriate to his content –ancient myth in *Yayati,* fourteenth-century north Indian history in *Tughlaq*, a twentieth-century folktale accentuated with Thomas Mann's retelling of it in *Hayavadana.….'' (*Karnad, *Introductory note, Collected Plays*, 2005, ix).

Karnad's engagement with myth in *Yayati and Hayavadana* shows the reception of myths in the cultural and national life of India in the contemporary contexts. *Hayavadana* is Karnad's restatement of intransigent faith in human intellect and it is also a psychoanalytical study of friendship and love with existential perspective. It is also an ironic commentary on the contemporary state of society and people's greed and uncontrolled lust for sex and power. To quote Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker "The majority of his plays employ the narratives of myth, history, and folklore to evoke an ancient or postmodern world that resonates in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present'' (Karnad, *Collected Plays*, *Introductory note* by Aparna Bhargava, 2005, ix). *Hayavadana* originally written in Kannada by Girish Karnad was later translated into English by him. The play is based on a story from Somdatta's *Kathasaritsagara* but Karnad borrowed from Thomas Mann's retelling of the original Sanskrit story in *The Transposed Heads: A legend of India.* The original version poses an ethical question while Mann presents the mechanistic conception of life, bringing it down to existential musings and duality of body and mind whereas, he upholds the supremacy of mind over body. Karnad while addressing these questions extends the play to the existential problem of identity, which is individual but blurred, mechanical and devoid of meanings of life, therefore, absurd. This problem of identity is further intensified in a world of tangled relationship. Karnad in his note to this play admits "The central episode in the play – the story of Devadatta and Kapila -is based on a tale of *Kathasaritsagara,* but I have drawn heavily from on Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in *The Transposed Heads ...''* (Karnad, *Collected Plays*, V, I 2005, 103). In the opening scenes, Bhagavata describes Devdatta and Kapila the closest friends – 'one mind, one heart'. Devadatta is a man of intellect and Kapila is the 'man of the body'. The former is known for his intellectual brilliance, scholarship and wisdom, later is known for his physical prowess and bodily charm. A dramatic shift comes when Devadatta marries Padmini. Kapila falls in love with Padmini and she is also infatuated by the charm of his body. These words of Bhagvata give graphic description of both these friends and heroes "One is Devadatta. Comely in appearance, fair in colour, unrivalled in intelligence, Devadatta is the only son of the revered Brahmin, Vidyasagara. Having felled the mightiest pundits of the kingdom in debates on logic and love, having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit, Devadatta is as it were the apple of every eye in Dharmapura''. (Karnad, *Hayavadana,* 2005, 106*).* On the other, Kapila has been described as the son of an ironsmith, Lohita, who is to the king's armoury " as an axle to the chariot wheel … He is dark and plain to look at, yet in deeds which require drive and daring, in dancing , in strength and physical skills, he has no equals'' (Karnad*, Hayavadana* , 2005,106). " The world wonders at their friendship'' but caught into a tangled relationship, with Padmini both of them loose their serenity of mind. In a sequel of events that ensues out of this tangled relationship they kill themselves. Padmini seeks the blessings of Kali and in fits of passions and nervousness willingly or mistakenly transposes their heads, giving Devdatta Kapila's body, and Kapila that of Devadatta. This results in confusion of identities and the ambiguous nature of personality. Both Devadatta and Kapila discovered themselves alone, in a void, and as individuals began to think about how to overcome this absurd position and give meaning to their existence. To their horror, they discovered the pity and sufferings of human condition. This shock unveiled their solitude and alienation which further explains the absurdity of their existence. It is this meaninglessness of their existence, which triggers their impulse to get freedom from this chaotic situation.

One of the humanistic existential paradigms discussed by Karnad in *Hayavadana,* is the freedom which he imbibes from Sartre's existential philosophy. Sartre was a great champion of freedom and he went to the extent of saying that man is not only free but he is freedom. Nabnita Roy rightly puts it "In fact, as an ardent propagator of human freedom, Sartre experimented with different ways and means of achieving freedom, that is, by writing philosophical and literary works, or by participating in direct political activities he was always in search of the roads to human freedom''. (Nabnita Roy, 1997, 12). Karnad in this play

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acknowledges the barriers to freedom both man-made and natural. In case of Devadatta and Kapila their obstacles are both man -made and natural. Seen in terms of complicated tangled relationship and triangular love of Padmini, Devdatta and Kapila, it appears to be man-made. Because Padmini was infatuated with Devadatta's intellect and Kapila's body represented by the dichotomy of mind versus body and intellect vs. physical prowess respectively in the play. However, Karnad uses this existential contradiction well expounded and debated in Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads,* to underline the existential duality and socio-psychological implications of the existential absurdity arising out of it. Padmini tries, inflamed with her lust and worldly pleasures to bargain the best of the two but loses both at a point of time therefore, resorts to seeking divine intervention for getting them back. It serves two purposes for Karnad first, helping him in exploring mythic-existential paradigms in the play and secondly, lending relativistic theatrical advantage in erstwhile contemporary Indian theatre, which proved to be a great success later. This point of view could be further corroborated with these words of Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker in introductory note to *Collected Plays* , " However, refracted through Thomas Mann's philosophical novella *The Transposed Heads*, Karnad's distinctive view of femininity, and a reflective double frame , the conventions underwent a process of defamiliarization in *Hayavadana* that produced a genuinely original work for the urban Indian stage, and created a unique intellectual and theatrical excitement throughout the decade of the 1970s". (Aparna Bhargava, *Introductory note,* Karnad*, Collected Plays,* 2005, *xxiv).* The story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini poses philosophical questions about the riddles of identity and reality. The philosophical elaboration of conjugality, "proscribed desire', and 'accidental' disruption of identity can be resolved through death only. Devadatta and Kapila to get rid of their existential absurdity choose death, which can be seen in a larger perspective of existential paradigms of freedom and choice expounded in Sartre and Camus. To Sartre and Camus the desire for freedom is central to human existence and absurdity, which is born out of failures to get free from an unfree world. Devadatta and Kapila find it difficult to cope up with the stress of their complicated new positions in tangled relationship with Padmini. Inspired by their own internal logic of love and sacrifice in the face of utter helplessness both of them kill themselves. Devadatta's these words "You are two pieces of my heart- Live happily together. I shall find my eternal happiness in that thought'' (Karnad, *Hayavadana*, Act I, 2005, 136-7). Devadatta in his act of killing, redeems his unfulfilled vow to Kali but his interior motive is to get rid of tangled relationship by choosing death. Kapila subscribes to the same logic after lamentations: '' No, Devadatta, I cannot live without you. Devadatta, my brother, my guru, my friend…You spurned me in this world. Accept me as your brother at least in the next. Here, friend, here I come. As always, I follow in your footsteps.'' (*Hayavadana,* Act I, 2005, 139). Kapila kills himself to get rid of the same absurdity.

Albert Camus wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* "What is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying'' (Camus, *The Myths of Sisyphus*, 1975,12). The phenomenon of death in *Hayavadana* can be explained with Camus' words "Men are never really willing to die except for the sake of freedom: therefore they do not believe in dying completely''. Death is not liberation for Devadatta and Kapila as with their transposed heads with the blessings of goddess Kali they come back to life. Devadatta's body with Kapila's head and Kapila's body with Devadatta's head. However, this poses moral and psychological problems often bordering on emotional realms of all three characters namely Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. Seeking liberation from the complicated webs of relationship they forge a bond of servitude with the destiny and Providence. An attempt to escape from this servitude, is falling into more dangerous existential trap characterized by sufferings, pity, alienation and psychological problems. Faced with hard truths of life and incongruities of existential absurdity these characters break, get tormented and engaged in the debate of the futility of their existence. The situation gets perpetuated as there is a rejection of society; its value system and moral code of conducts arising out of the ambiguous identities and troubled existential complexities of the characters. Caught into the trap of existential and moral dilemma, Devadatta and Kapila question the propriety of their relationship and they try to locate their identities in this complicated web of relationship. The questions loom large casting their dark and long shadows on their souls as to who is Devadatta, who is Kapila and finally, who is real husband of Padmini? Tormented by their own existential dilemma and obliteration of real identities they intrigue and debate their existential positions. The person with the head of Devadatta is identified as Devadatta and the person with the head of Kapila is identified as Kapila. However, such markers of identification carry their own inner contradictions in terms of body and mind dichotomy. They feel an apparent change on the levels of their bodies and consciousness. With their exchanged heads they laugh at their absurdity. Their blurred identities are expressed in these words as they sing "What a good mix! No more tricks! Is this one that or that one that? Ho! Ho!" (*Hayavadana*, Act I, 2005, 141). Devadatta explains this existential crisis attributing to *Shastras* "... the head is the sign of a man…'' *(Hayavadana,* Act I, 2005, 146). Kapila's dilemma poses a realistic and moralistic question, which not only unveils the ambiguities of their identities but also expresses the existential crisis. It also poses a moral

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question to Padmini's identity as wife of Devadatta. To quote Kapila "But the question now is simply this: whose wife is she? (*Raising his right hand*.) This is the hand that accepted her at the wedding. This the body she's lived with all these months. And the child she's carrying is the seed of this body'' (Karnad, *Hayavadana*, 2005, Act I, 146). While Devadatta and Kapila are engaged in a debate regarding whose wife is Padmini, assigning importance to head and body, Bhagavata finding no solution to the problem attributes it to fate or destiny. "Must their fate remain a mystery ?'' (Karnad, 2005, 149). Mixing of two heads by Padmini is either driven by her secret desire to have the best of the two, as argued by Kapila and Devadatta and justified by Devadatta "There is nothing wrong in it. It's natural for a woman to feel attracted to a fine figure of a man'' (Karnad, *Hayavadana,* 2005, 148). Veena Noble Dass rightly observes "If Mann's aim was to stress the ironic impossibility of combining perfectly the spirit and the flesh in human life, Karnad tries to pose existential ideas like problem of being and the metaphysical anguish of the human condition''(Veena Dass, 1988, 154).

Padmini epitomizes unworldly desire of a person for perfection, and seems to rejoice at the mix up "Fabulous – body -fabulous brain - fabulous Devadatta.'' (Karnad, 2005, Act II, 153}. Human constraints and imperfection occupy a significant polemical space in existential philosophy. Karnad unlike Mann without entering into the polemics of duality of mind and body, uses the myth of Kali to unravel the vulnerability and helplessness of the unfortunate human beings. The helplessness of Devadatta and Kapila could be compared with Kafka's protagonist in *The Metamorphosis*. *The Metamorphosis* tells the story of a salesman, Gregor Samsa who awakened one morning, to find himself transformed into a big insect, and subsequently, struggles to adjust to this new condition. Like Gregor, Devadatta and Kapila are also quintessentially alienated men. Devadatta and Kapila are conscious of the inferiority of their respective bodies to manoeuver the situations and subsequently they are filled with a sense of self-negation, feelings of absurdity and dehumanization. Hayavadana, a Gandharva who is condemned to live like a horse with head of a horse, is another example of this existential absurdity, a situation which has been superimposed by external forces: divinity or destiny. Hayavadana with the blessings of Kali, a divine intervention gets transformed into a horse with the human voice, which impinges upon the theme of imperfection.

The theme of incompleteness and the absurdity of human condition form the contours and colors of humanistic, existential paradigms in Karnad's *Hayavadana.* Karnad considers the existential positions of Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini and Hayavadana completely humiliated and dehumanized to the extent of a self- declaration that it is not worth living. Caught into the perplexed chains of their beings all characters are haunted by anxiety. Karnad handles the desire for perfection so artistically to find a solution to the riddles posed by the main and sub plot of the play. The ironic impossibility of perfectness , problem of ambiguous identities , their sense of alienation , acceptance of each other the way they are, and inescapable forces of reality and destiny have been amicably resolved by choice of death. Camus in his essays "Absurdity and Suicide'', "Absurd Creation '' and "Absurd Freedom'' argues that absurdity is condition of non-living, unable to grapple with the reality and acceptance of the absurd. To Camus human existence is an utter absurdity, and in depression a person invents the reasoning of 'logical suicide' (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1975, 96). All these characters are tormented by the idea of incompleteness and sense of their beings and nothingness. Kapila resonates this sense of nothingness, utter absurdity in his lamentations with Padmini where he stresses another death or suicide. They have lost the meanings of their life Padmini who is initially enthused by the idea of perfection, 'Fabulous body 'and 'Fabulous mind'' gets tormented by Devadatta and Kapila and finally by Kapila who says, how she has made their lives miserable. Karnad evokes pity, anger, and turbulent emotional upsurge resulting in alienation. Padmini is overpowered by the feelings of absurdity as she confesses: "Yes, you won, Kapila. Devadatta won too. But I the better half of two bodies – I neither win nor lose. No, don't say anything. I know what you'll say and I've told myself that a thousand times. It's my fault. I mixed the heads up. I must suffer the consequences, I am sorry. I came. I didn't think before I started. Couldn't." (Karnad, *Hayavadana*, 2005, 170). Karnad doesn't endorse Padmini's desire to have perfect in life for Karnad believed that a man cannot be perfect. The mad dance of incompleteness engulfs Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini establishing Karnad's conviction that desire for completeness is impossible in the cultural and moral context of the society. The subplot of *Hayavadana* is a sequel to the main plot where all free characters are caught into their existential problems. Devadatta and Kapila engage in fierce physical combat which culminates in death. They choose death to escape from their ambiguity and absurdity. Padmini performs the absurd by negating on the one hand, and magnifying, on the other, what she had negated earlier. "If I'd said, 'Yes, I'll live with you both, perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I couldn't say it. I couldn't say. 'Yes'. No Kapila, no, Devadatta. I knew it's in my blood you couldn't have lived together. You would have to share not only me but your bodies as well. Because you knew death you died in each other's arms" (Karnad, *Hayavadana,* 2005, Act ii, 176). Deceived by her own destiny and tormented by the jibes of Kapila, she feels alienated. Therefore, she is the creator of her own illusory existence: "They burned, lived, embraced and

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died. I stood silent" (Karnad, *Hayavadana,* 2005, 176). Padmini becomes *sati,* as she finds that in pursuit of perfection she lost the best of the two. Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness,* one cannot choose to be free, but one is condemned to be free. All these three characters are condemned to choose death to be free. Hayavadana's transformation into a horse with the human voice explains his incompleteness, agony, and sense of alienation "I have become a complete horse – but not complete being! This human voice – this cursed human voice – it's still there! How can I call myself complete! …How can I get rid of human voice?" (Karnad, 2005, *Hayavadana*,181). The plight of Devadatta and Kapila is as much divine as that of human. Hayavadana's yearning for complete horse is granted by the divine intervention i.e. blessings of Kali. Veena Dass thinks that the play essentially shows the threads of integrity of being "the integration of the self and the wholeness of personality" (Veena Dass, 1988, 156). Padmini's conflict of choice, her sense of freedom, her absurdity of being, and finally suicide by becoming *sati,* are some of the existential paradigms which loom large on the existential plane in this play.

The humanistic existential paradigms in *Hayavadana* have been artistically woven into the plot, in theme, form, characterization, which collectively produce theatrical effect. Sartre's existential contention that consciousness reveals being and nothingness, has been successfully executed by Karnad in *Hayavadana.* Sartre further argues that "Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being – like a worm''. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 56). Devadatta and Kapila carry these worms in the heart of their beings as reflected in their pathetic human condition, alienation and absurdity. The existential notions of freedom, choice and death have been developed on thematic lines marking a sharp departure from Mann's *The Transposed Heads.* The theme of futility, nothingness, fractured identities, conflicts have been explained in terms of existential paradigms in Sartre, Camus, and Kafka. Sartre in his ontological interpretation of body and consciousness considers body as part of consciousness, a reality which can be discerned in Devadatta's and Kapila's painful realizations in *Hayavadana.* It is this consciousness which makes their beings miserable, inescapable, forcing them to court death. The feelings of nothingness, anguish, alienation, and absurdity have been artistically executed in the individualities of Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini and Hayavadana. The arguments of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini illustrate the existential undertones perception, imagination, desire, love and hatred which have been mainly governed by the consciousness of being. Karnad successfully molds the theory of duality of mind and body to the existential realms. Both Devadatta and Kapil find themselves as individuals unable to fit into their new social role, a phenomenon which can be explained in terms of Sartrean existential philosophy. Sartre in his work *Existentialism is Humanism,* holds that a man is an ensemble of his actions and plans, he is solely responsible for his choices and decisions. He further argues that our responsibility is blessings and a curse. It leads us to feel things like anguish, forlorn and despair. Kapila's these words echo the anguish and despair of their decision: "With what confidence we chopped off our heads in the temple'' (Karnad, *Hayavadana*, 2005, Act II, 175). The existential paradigm of acceptance of the consequences of an action by an individual has been reflected in these words of Kapila: "Our cut heads roll to the very hands which cut them in the temple of Kali.'' (Karnad, *Hayavadana*, 2005, 175). Karnad's construction of plot and representations of feminity, desire and identity address the existential questions. The problem of duality and imperfections have been resolved by Karnad to death, divine, and animal. The ideological framework of the play focuses on the existential paradigms of ambivalent within its constraints, choice, negation, and death. Padmini's desire for the best of the two men (brain and brawn) violates the feminine behavior and dismantles the notions of propriety in a society which Karnad hardly endorses.

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