

Tradition and Innovation in *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 2

Month: March

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

V, Karthik, and Pankayar Chelvi S. "Tradition and Innovation in *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 13, no. S2, 2026, pp. 20–22.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS2-Mar.10224>

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Abstract

The outstanding drama Hayavadana demonstrates how innovation and tradition may coexist in theater and literature. Girish Karnad employs traditional theater traditions, tales, and stories from ancient India, but he portrays them in a way that is relevant to today's audiences. The drama simultaneously becomes conventional and modern as a result of this imaginative combination. At the same time, Karnad introduces modern ideas and themes that make the play innovative. The character of Padmini also represents innovation because she expresses her desires openly and challenges conventional expectations of women. In conclusion, Hayavadana is a powerful example of how tradition and innovation can work together in literature. Girish Karnad respects cultural roots while introducing new interpretations and ideas. The play demonstrates that tradition is not fixed but can evolve through creative imagination. By combining myth, folk theatre, and modern thought, Karnad creates a timeless work that remains relevant in contemporary society. Hayavadana thus stands as a bridge between the past and the present, showing the enduring value of storytelling.

Keywords: Synthesis, Mythology, Folk Theatre, Identity, Modernity.

Hayavadana is one of the most important plays in modern Indian literature because it beautifully combines tradition and innovation. Girish Karnad takes an ancient story from Indian mythology and folklore and presents it in a modern dramatic form. The play is based on a tale from the Kathasaritsagara, but Karnad reshapes it to explore contemporary issues such as identity, incompleteness, desire, and self-acceptance. By doing this, he proves that traditional stories can still be meaningful in modern society.

The play reflects strong traditional elements through its use of folk theatre techniques. Karnad was inspired by Yakshagana, a traditional theatre form from Karnataka that includes music, narration, masks, and colorful costumes. The character of the Bhagavata, who acts as a narrator, connects the play to classical storytelling methods. At the same time, Karnad introduces innovative ideas by presenting complex human emotions and psychological conflicts. Thus, the play becomes a perfect example of how tradition and innovation can work together in literature.

The traditional aspect of the play is mainly seen in its use of mythology, folklore, and folk theatre. Indian myths often

include unusual events such as transformations, divine interventions, and symbolic characters. In *Hayavadana*, the story of the exchange of heads between Devadatta and Kapila reflects this mythic tradition. Similarly, the character of Hayavadana, the horse-headed man, comes from folk tales where humans and animals are combined. Another traditional feature is the use of religious elements. The characters pray to Goddess Kali, and divine power influences the events of the story. Such references show the importance of faith and destiny in traditional Indian narratives. The use of songs, storytelling, and dramatic narration also connects the play to ancient performance styles.

While the play is rooted in tradition, it is also highly innovative. Karnad uses the traditional story to explore modern themes such as identity crisis and psychological conflict. The question of whether a person is defined by the head (mind) or the body is a modern philosophical issue. By presenting this dilemma through the exchange of heads, Karnad transforms a simple myth into a deep exploration of human nature. The character of Padmini represents innovation because she challenges traditional gender roles. She openly expresses her desires and dissatisfaction, which was uncommon in classical literature. Karnad also blends humor with tragedy and fantasy with reality, creating a unique dramatic style that appeals to contemporary audiences.

One of the central themes of the play is the search for identity. All the characters feel incomplete in some way. Devadatta lacks physical strength, Kapila lacks intellectual refinement, and Padmini desires a perfect partner who combines both qualities. Hayavadana himself longs to become fully human. This theme reflects modern concerns about self-understanding and personal fulfillment. The play suggests that completeness is impossible for human beings. Instead, true peace comes from accepting one's limitations. This message combines traditional philosophical ideas with modern psychological insight.

The conflict between mind and body is another important theme. Devadatta represents intellect, while Kapila represents physical strength. Padmini's attraction to both men shows the human desire for perfection. The exchange of heads creates confusion about identity and raises questions about the relationship between physical appearance and inner qualities. Love and desire play a major role in the play. Padmini's feelings for both Devadatta and Kapila create tension and tragedy. Her character represents the complexity of human emotions and the difficulty of balancing personal desires with social expectations. Karnad presents love not as a simple or ideal emotion but as something that can lead to conflict and suffering.

The subplot of *Hayavadana* highlights the importance of self-acceptance. Although he wishes to become fully human, he finally becomes a complete horse and feels happy. This ironic ending suggests that happiness comes from accepting one's true nature rather than trying to change it completely. This theme connects traditional moral lessons with modern ideas about individuality.

In conclusion, *Hayavadana* is a powerful example of the blending of tradition and innovation in Indian drama. Girish Karnad uses ancient myths, folk theatre techniques, and cultural symbols while introducing modern themes and psychological depth. The play shows that tradition is not fixed but can evolve through creative reinterpretation. By combining the past and the present, Karnad creates a timeless work that continues to be relevant today.

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