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Postcolonial Theatre and the Question of Identity: The Parable of *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad

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Abstract

The search for identity marks a recurrent quest of postcolonial discourses, but the problem has always been how to define that identity in the light of the syncretism that characterizes postcolonial creative output. This paper revisits the debate on decolonization, using *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad as a theatrical representation of the condition of postcolonial identity. New identities are being constructed in response to the growing need for globalization and intercultural understanding and this, the paper suggests, should be the focus of writers and critics, at this point in time.

**Introduction**

In the early 1980s, there was a wave of debate about the identity of the African literature. The issue of identity became necessary when African literature was criticized, by European critics who interpreted African writing as inferior and African writers as incompetent. James Ngugi (Ngugi wa Thiong'o) was a victim of this as Peter Nazareth (1978) recalls. Ngugi's first play, and in fact the first major East African play, *The Black Hermit*, was badly criticized by an European critic, Gerald Moore, after its premiere performance in 1962, because it did not meet the standard of Chekhov, Pirandello, Beckett, and so did not merit staging in the National Theatre. Nazareth declares that "This type of criticism used European writers as sledgehammer to beat down any attempt by East Africans to be innovative, creative and relevant to East Africa" (1978: 93). Coming from one of the few sympathetic European critics at that time, Moore's critical comment was a great setback for the budding playwright, who had to stop writing plays and took to novels. Again, the fact that the play was published six years after its first performance may not be unconnected with this incident. All this was because of marked difference in content and form of African literary expression. It has since been accepted that being different does not necessarily mean being inferior. In the way African writing was castigated, African theatre was not accepted as theatre but theatrical and the debate raged between predominantly two schools of thought on that matter known as the Relativist and the Evolutionist schools of thought. The Evolutionists agree with the European critics that African ritual performances do not constitute theatre/drama, but religious rituals (Ogunbiyi: 1984). According to them, such ritual performances will be proper drama when they have shed their religious elements and emanate from literary texts written in Aristotelian dramatic structure. The Relativists, on the other hand, argued that the performances are designed to entertain and so qualify to be called theatre. This group argues that drama does not need a written text and that there are three elements that qualify an event as a theatre and these include a performer, a space and an audience. Every other thing is secondary and so should not be used to define theatre.

Today, the Relativists are vindicated by recent developments in world theatre of the postmodern dispensation, especially the postdramatic concept that lays emphasis on performance rather than text. In Postmodern theatre, the playwright as well as the playtext have become almost irrelevant. Postmodern theatre companies have no need for pre-existing playtexts unless the playwright allows the group to experiment with his play including making drastic changes in the story to suit their purpose. For example, Arthur Miller is one of the playwrights who would not give such permission. He took legal action against Wooster Group – a postmodern theatre company that specializes in the radical reworking of classical works – who planned to stage a deconstructed version of his play, *The Crucible* (Zarrilli et al 2006: 462). But other playwrights do not bother with that, for example, Thornton Wilder whose play, *Our Town* was reworked, by the Group about the same time as Miller's, did not protest. The content of a performance can emanate from any source including the life experiences of one or all members of the cast, and the staging technique need not follow any laid down rules.

Another important development in world theatre is the recognition that theatre exists in other nations and among other races of the world other than Europe, especially Africa and Asia whose theatre and performance do not necessarily emanate from playtexts and performances are composite of various performance genres such as dance, songs, acrobatics, and music, in addition to dialogue. Consequently, new anthologies and theatre texts have begun to emerge that recognized there is no one form of theatre but many different forms and there is no one function of theatre but many functions, and these differences do not indicate inferiority. So today, instead of *History of Theatre* (as if theatre has one historical source), we now have *Theatre Histories*<sup>1</sup>, and we no longer have African theatre and performance but *African Theatres and Performances*.

The debate spilled over to African literature where Chinweizu, et al (1980) observe that the tendency of African literature to ape European literary style while representing African experience has given European critics the authority to judge African writing with European critical standards. But frankly speaking, it might be the absence of written African literary and critical standards that forced European critics to resort to using European critical yardstick in judging African writing. However, Chinweizu insists that, for African literature to worth its name, it must be stripped of Western marks. Their concept of “decolonization” is, therefore, geared towards evolving genuine and authentic African literature which is African both in content and in style, particularly that African literature should of necessity be written in an African language. The proposition itself poses another dilemma when we consider the fact that Africa is a continent with thousands of languages and dialects. If language were to define identity of a national literature, which of the numerous languages of the nation must it be? Should Nigerian literature be written in Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, or pigeon English? what about Nupe, Idoma, Itshekiri and Fulfude? Should African Literature be written in Kiswahili, Xhosa, Kikuyu or Yoruba?

The search for identity for African creative and literary output has led some African writers to take far reaching decisions, some of which can be considered drastic,

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<sup>1</sup> I am here referring to the book, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* (2006) written by Phillip B. Zarrilli et al. The book takes a global look at drama, theatre and performance, drawing case studies from around the world, including the hitherto marginalized cultures.

for instance the decision of an icon of African literature, Ngugi wa Thiong'o to produce his work in his native Kenyan language, Kikuyu. This shift in language also has brought shift in his readership as only people who are proficient in Kikuyu language can access his writings now. Prior to writing in his mother-tongue, Ngugi had earlier dropped his English name, James. In as much as one commends Ngugi's courage to save a language from extinction, it is difficult to understand why a work written in Kikuyu language can be called African literature when the rest of Africa do not understand the language. While the proposal for an indigenous African language literature is cogent as it is geared towards protecting indigenous languages, it has to be borne in mind that such works can only cater for readers who are proficient in those languages. As they qualify as African literature, so are works written by other Africans who write in foreign languages such as English, French, among others, that cater for African readers who are literate in those foreign languages. It seems right to suggest then, that to evolve an African literature, therefore, an African language needs to be developed – a Pan-African language, perhaps. Until that happens, the question remains “what language should African literature be written in?”

Some scholars, in agreement with the Hindu Shastra doctrine, have also come up with the idea that the language for a piece of work should be determined by the language in which the writer thinks. Again, this idea appears to have its own limitations. To begin with, literature needs to be produced to be appreciated. It can be produced orally or in written form. If one is proficient in reading and writing the language he thinks in, this idea would hold. Ironically, it is obvious that educated Africans think in the language of their colonial masters, the language they are proficient in writing and reading since they have lost the ability to speak effectively in their mother-tongues. Language proficiency, then, is what determines the language a writer writes in. Majority of African writers are not literate in their indigenous languages which disallows them from writing or reading their mother-tongue.

Another determinant of a writer's choice of language is the target audience to whom the work may be most relevant. If the subject of the work is directed at the indigenous people who are largely unversed in the foreign but official language, indigenous language of the target audience will serve the purpose.

It has been argued that the language one thinks in determines the cultural base of his writing. The language we speak does not explain our cultural background because national languages are often imposed on the people for easy governance, but may not necessarily be the language they are comfortable in. For instance, Nigeria is a multilingual nation but only about six indigenous Nigerian languages are being offered in school certificate examination, as at 2013, these include Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Edo Efik and Ibibio; while English is the official language. Also, India is believed to have more than one hundred languages and more than two hundred dialects, (Oldenburg, 2008) but only twenty-two of these are official languages used in schools and in official settings. In what language should Indian literature be written then. Hindi is the most popular language in India, but it is spoken by only 40% of the country's population.

On the other side of the argument are those who are not comfortable with the divide and rule approach of Chinweizu. Of special reference is Chidi Amuta [1986] whose *Sociology of African Literature* reminds us that colonialism is part of African historical legacy denying which will amount to denying history. African people have imbibed these foreign languages and can write better in them than they can do in their indigenous languages. Consequently, these foreign languages enjoyed wider readership

than any single African language and a writer who writes in them is assured of large readership. In any case, writing in English, for instance, does not make an African an Englishman. An African is an African no matter the language he chooses to express himself.

Perhaps in response to both sides of the argument, Chinua Achebe adopted transliteration to represent the true situation of operating two cultural systems. Transliteration involves using English words and an African expression. Being an Igboman from Eastern Nigeria, it will not be strange to write “I heard your throat” when he means “I heard your voice” or “twenty and one” instead of twenty-one.” These represent Igbo sentence structure in English words.

It is in line with this argument and the consideration of the continuous shift in meaning that mark globalization with its characteristic interculturalism that we look to *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad for further insight into and complexity of identity. The play *Hayavadana* focuses attention not only on Indian identity problem as a former colony of Britain, a condition that has caused a fracture Indian identity, described by Ranbir Sinh (2005: 343),

The British wanted to transform Indian society through English education and thus it demanded the adaptation of McCauley’s education policy by which was aimed to “form a class of person, Indian in blood and in colour, but English in tastes, in opinion and in morals and intellect”.

This conflicting identity has been the greatest concern of Indian drama in English Radha Ramaswamy (2005: 332) explains this as follows,

Thus, the contemporary urban Indian has to struggle with conflicting loyalties – modernity with tradition and orthodoxy, respect for authority and a deep seated anarchic impulse, self interest against the desire to appear socially responsible. He has to confront, everyday, the tensions created by his/her several fragmented identities of class, caste, gender and religion. These are themes that appear and reappear in contemporary Indian drama in English.

*Hayavadana* is seen here as questioning all forms of discrimination based on perceived differences whether they are based on gender, religion, culture, class or status. It explores situations of mind/body dichotomy within an individual as well as within a social group, and opens up a wide range of possibilities for dialogue conducive for meaningful coexistence based on complementarities. The play is so philosophically concentrated that one will not boast of capturing all levels of meaning embedded in it. The play is as deep as the subjects it treats.

### **Composite creature as a Metaphor for postcolonial identity**

It has to be pointed out that the image and symbol of composite beings have been used through all ages. There have been attempts to represent the complex nature of man, to externalize the inner state of an individual which is often different from and sometimes even opposed to the exterior self. The exterior appearance being perceived as a sort of mask hiding the true identity of the wearer, which makes it risky to judge people based on appearances. Thus, ancient peoples used composite creatures to express the dynamic nature of man. It is the quality that makes the individual, hence the saying that “manner maketh a man”. In mythologies we see curious images of these composite creatures, for example, the sphinx. In ancient Egypt the upper part was sometimes portrayed as a man, a falcon or a ram. But a sphinx is basically a lion. Since the head controls the body, the

different heads that is given to each sphinx describes its attributes such strength, wisdom, destructive, all-seeing, etc. The classical Greek version of sphinx is a monster with the head and breast of a woman, and the wings of a bird, destructive and cunning. Here we see cultural dimensions at play. An Egyptian goddess, Sekhmet (powerful one) is represented as a woman with a lion's body. Such images abound in arts of ancient civilizations and they were graphic descriptions of the nature and attribute of individuals, who though they appear physically humans, exhibit behaviours and traits associated with some creatures. The central story in *Hayavadana* is also drawn from classical Indian folktale, though in the treatment the playwright incorporates aspects of Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads* an adaptation of the Classical Indian tale.

This paper explores the aspect of the play that demonstrates that every human being is endowed with a number of attributes, therefore, to define a person based on one of his attributes is to deny his other attributes, and this creates a problem, the type of problem portrayed in the play, *Hayavadana*

### *Hayavadana* (2005)<sup>2</sup>

Girish Karnad's play, *Hayavadana* is selected for study because of the endless levels of meaning woven into it which has made it one of the most fascinating work of drama ever written. Consequently, the play can be studied from philosophical, political, sociological, religious, as well as from traditional and modern perspectives or combination of these. However, it does not matter the angle of vision, identity crisis remains the subject of the play. The play is a product of Homi Bhabha Fellowship Council awarded to the playwright.

In this writing, the play considered a graphic representation of and a holistic approach to identity crisis, wherever it may occur. This means that the play can be used as a metaphor for understanding and interpreting identity crisis situation in postcolonial India, but it can apply in any other postcolonial state or any situation where identity debate erupts to breach peace and meaningful coexistence. The play is very relevant in the discussion of identity problem of any kind, at any time and in any place as it raises pertinent questions about truth and identity.

*Hayavadana*<sup>3</sup> opens with a prayer to the god, Ganesha, himself a composite being with an elephant head and worshipped for his ability to ensure the successful completion of all endeavours. Story has it that the god was, inadvertently, beheaded by his father, Shiva, who in an effort to repair the damage, had to substitute his son's head with that of an elephant, since the original head was not found. The play is therefore dedicated to the one god who understands the dilemma of fractured self.

As the play progresses from there, we see a group of performers getting ready to begin their performance when they are interrupted by the arrival of a character named Hayavadana, a curious being with human body and the head of a horse. The word,

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<sup>2</sup> *Hayavadana* was first performed in English in 1972, but was first published in 1975. It was however published in *Collected Plays volume one*, along with *Tughlaq*, *Bali: The Sacrifice* and *Naga-Mandala*, in 2005. References in this paper are based on the 2005 edition.

<sup>3</sup> *Hayavadana* doubles both as the title of the play as well as the name of the main character in the supporting story. In this work the word when in italics, represents the title of the play.

Hayavadana, actually means “the one with horse’s head”. His appearance before the play serves as an exposition into the content and subject matter of the performance that is about to begin. His composite feature is as a result of a union between a mother, princess of Karnataka, and a white stallion belonging to a prince of Araby. It happens that when the princess is of age to marry, her father permits her to choose a husband by herself. She rejects all the princes who have come to woo her until the last one that arrives on a white stallion from Araby. The princess chooses the horse to the consternation of all present, including her father. It is important to note that it is a big favour to allow a girl to choose her own husband, in a society where women are not given such rights. The reason for choosing the horse instead of the human rider is open to diverse interpretations. But the present paper concentrates on the problem of identity in postcolonial literary output. Fifteen years into the marriage, the princess wakes one morning to find her husband transformed from a horse into a beautiful celestial being.

Hayavadana tells the performers the story of how his father, a celestial being, was turned into a horse in the first place; “Apparently this celestial being had been cursed by the god Kubera to be born a horse for some act of misbehaviour. After fifteen years of human love he had become his original self again” [114]. Consequently, Hayavadana becomes half horse, half human because his father was a horse and his mother a human, and also half Indian and half Araby. As the story unfolds, his mother is cursed by his father and she also becomes a horse when she refuses to follow him to his heavenly abode unless he turns back to the horse she married. Hayavadana is like a big river with many tributaries linked by identity question – identity formation, identity crisis and identity search. There is a gender argument inherent in the composite nature of this union. The question will be asked in a union between a horse and a human resulting in the birth of a half human half horse, what determines which part will be horse and which part human? In this play, the offspring inherits his father’s head and his mother’s body apparently establishing the male (head) dominance over female (body).

All his life, Hayavadana has searched for cure that will make him complete human. It is important to note that his desire is to become wholly human and not a complete horse. Since identity is in the head, he should seek to be a complete horse. Apparently social pressure is the reason he wants to be human in order to be able to coexist with humans without being discriminated against. He is, therefore seeking legitimacy by discarding his other self, his real self. His choice, we must reiterate, is manipulated and directed by the society he lives in. So he wants to be like them in order to be accepted. However, if he gets his desire and becomes wholly human, he could be human only in appearance and all his life would have been a big lie.

He was finally advised to take his complaint to the temple of Kali, the Goddess that makes people’s desires come true. There he becomes a complete horse instead of complete human. That is, complete except for his voice which remains human. Has the Goddess made a mistake? Not likely. The gods know better. It is the head that controls the body. The head, therefore is where a person’s identity truly is (Karnad, 2005: 313). But why did Hayavadana want to be a human? The answer, as I have already pointed out is that he is under pressure. The society in which he is born and serves discriminates against him because of the horse part of him. This is notwithstanding his patriotism and dedication to India which he calls his country, patriotism which is represented in his songs, “May our flag fly high!” and “Our India is better than the whole world” [179]. But even as he wishes to be human he says, “You know, I hate this head, but I can’t just help being fond of this lovely long mane” [115]. Clearly he is in a dilemma. He knows he is a

horse and deep down in his heart he loves that. But he needs to be human, an Indian, to survive in India.

While Hayavadana struggles with his own identity problem, he meets a five years old boy who is rejected by his own forest folks on the ground that he does not belong to them since his parents are city people, though the boy was born in the forest. The boy turns out to be Padmini's son. The boy does not talk, laugh or cry, but is quick to attack anyone who attempts to take his dolls. When Hayavadana talks and laughs, everybody laughs including the boy. He finds it amusing that a horse can laugh. The dolls fall from his hands as he claps and laughs, "The horse is laughing! The horse is laughing!" The horse goes to him and asks, "Why, my little friend, you may laugh and I may not?" [182]. When the horse cries the boy consoles him saying he looks better when he laughs. The boy sings for him and he allows the boy to ride him. They have become friends.

*Hayavadana* is a play within a play. The main play is a story of Devadatta and Kapila, two childhood friends and very close allies. The closeness of the two is captured and repeated in Bhagavata's song, "Two friends there were – one mind, one heart – ." [109, 116]. So close are these two friends that Kapila has to woo Padmini for Devadatta. Padmini falls in love with Devadatta because of his intellectualism and so she marries him. But she discovers that she is in love with Kapila's athletic body. In that relationship, Devadatta represents the head and Kapila the body hence their inseparability. They compliment each other and each will be useless without the other, indicating the theme of complementarity. Each recognizes the importance of the other in his life. Kapila states this awareness of the importance of Devadatta in his life and often gives expression to it. He tells Devadatta, "If it wasn't for you I would have been no better than the ox in our yard. You showed me that there were such things as poetry and literature. You taught me..." [118]. In gratitude, therefore, he pledges his undying loyalty to Devadatta. On his own part, Devadatta has always relied on Kapila to do some physical actions he lacks the physical ability to do, including to woo Padmini, the woman he has fallen deeply in love with.

One day, after Devadatta and Padmini are married and Padmini is pregnant, the couple set off on a trip to Ujjain with Kapila driving the cart. After driving for some hours, with Padmini admiring Kapila all the way, she requests that they should stop for her to rest her stiff legs. Devadatta is not blind to the connection developing between his wife and his best friend and is so afraid of it that he tries, a number of times, to put off the trip unsuccessfully. This trip confirms his worst fears. When they stop, Kapila goes to pluck the Fortunate Lady's flower for Padmini. While he was gone, Padmini, who has prattled like a parrot throughout the journey, remains quiet now that she is alone with Devadatta. For Devadatta that is a further proof that he means nothing to her while Kapila means everything to her. He has never felt so lonely in his life. When Kapila returns, he and Padmini resume their chattering as Kapila narrates the story behind the name of the flower and other things. In all this time, nobody seems to remember Devadatta. When he suggests that they should resume their journey, Padmini prefers to sit and listen to Kapila's stories some more. Then they wander off to see the temple of Kudra but Devadatta refuses to join, rather he sets off to the temple of Kali where he cuts off his head in sacrifice to the goddess of desires.

When Kapila and Padmini return, Kapila goes in search of his friend and finds him dead in the temple of goddess Kali. Knowing that he is the reason Devadatta has taken his life, he picks up the same knife and cuts off his own head. Padmini arrives in

search of the two men, sees what has happened, decides that without these men life is nothing. Besides, she has no idea how to relay the story if she goes back to the city or what to tell her child when he grows up to ask about his father. She decides to end her own life and the life of her unborn child.

Before she does that, the goddess herself appears and stops her for the sake of the unborn child. Instead, she empowers Padmini to bring the men back to life by simply picking each head and fixing it back on the owner's neck. She does this and the men come back to life. Here the parable unfolds because Padmini makes a mistake when she fixes Kapila's head on Devadatta's body and vice versa. Now who is Padmini's husband, the one with the right head or the one with the right body? According to Shastra doctrine, the head represents the person. It follows then that the one with Devadatta's head should be the husband. Head cannot be separated from the body, but this head is on another's body. The puzzle is left for the audience to solve. But the narrator, Bhagavata, thinks it is not a puzzle for one individual to solve in the following speech; What? What indeed is the solution to this problem which holds the entire future of these three unfortunate beings in a balance? Must their fate remain a mystery? And if so shall we not be insulting our audience by tying a question mark round its neck and bidding it goodbye? We have to face the problem. But it is a deep one and the answer must be sought with the greatest caution. [149].

Devadatta enjoys his new muscles and Padmini is happy to have the best of two worlds. But it only lasts for a few days before Devadatta reverts back to his habit of reading, writing and less physical activities and outdoor life. The moment he stops his muscle activities and devotes his time on intellectual work, his body begins to revert to being soft. He explains to Padmini when she makes the observation;

I'm a Brahmin, Padmini...It was fun the first few days because it was new. All that muscle and strength. But how long can one go on like that? I have a family tradition to maintain – the daily reading, writing and studies... [157].

Indeed, for how long can one pretend to be what he is not, and for how long can one deny his true identity? It is uncountable the number of individuals that have spent eternity searching for their identity and perhaps not knowing what that identity really is. Katharine Brisbane tells us about yet one of such identity seekers, whose musical drama titled *Bran nue Dae* [1989], embodies this ultimate but elusive search for identity. The playwright Jimmy Chi, whose case is worse than that of Hayavadana because he does not have just double cultural roots but multiple, including Aboriginal, Chinese and Japanese, feels free to blame the white colonizers for his predicaments. When people are caught up in this identity search they often so desperately choose one of their composite identity for one reason or the other thereby denying the other side of reality. Thus Jimmy Chi seem to choose his Aboriginal origin at the expense of his Chinese and Japanese ones when he wrote in one of the songs in his play, There's nothing I would rather be Than to be an Aborigine and watch you take my precious land away.

This song resonates with James Brown's "Am black and proud" and numerous affirmatives that represent the choice of identity which, unfortunately, people are often faced to make at one time or the other in their lives. The question is why do people engage in this desperate elusive search for identity? The answer is legitimization.



### Identity Issues in the Play

The transposed creature represented by the character, Hayavadana is a pointer to the composite nature of man. It is used to illustrate the fact that no single definition or categorization can wholly capture the entire essence of man. An individual embodies generations of associations beginning with his immediate family back to the homo sapiens. All humans are, therefore, related at some point and in some ways.

Differences do occur in humans, be it physiological, sociological or ideological. Differences are not aberrations. The problem is not with differences, but in the decision to view them as boundaries instead of complementary to human relations. In the play complementarity is illustrated with the inseparable friendship between Devadatta and Kapila in which Devadatta represents the head and Kapila the body. They need to stick together to be whole for the head cannot exist without the body. Applied in real world, people complement each other because no one individual is complete in himself.

The play also demonstrates that a person does not need to change his identity to be accepted and should not be put in a situation where he would wish he was someone else. What should determine acceptability or legitimacy is ones commitment to the general course, his sense of patriotism. Hayavadana is an Indian patriot and his love and commitment to that country should earn him the legitimacy he deserves, not rejection and discrimination.

Love breaks boundaries and barriers in relationships and love can only blossom in a heart that is open to love. When the princess gets attracted to the white horse instead of the prince, it is a shock to everyone including her father, the king. But it turns out that the physical appearance was only a mask used to hide the true identity of the wearer, who is actually a very beautiful angelic being. We find out that the white stallion never accepted his condition as a horse and apparently have been longing for his true being. That is why he feels so bad when his wife who is used to the physical horse form finds it difficult to accept the celestial form, and says she will follow him to his heavenly abode only if he reverts back to being a horse. He curses her and she turns into a horse. This demonstrates how difficult it is to change from something people are used to and accept new, and perhaps better, options.

The five year old son of Padmini who never talks, cries or laughs regains himself through the laughter and friendship he received from the horse, Hayavadana. Two people who suffer the predicament of fractured identity have gotten together to give each other sense of belonging. It is also noteworthy that the doll which the boy clutches as if his life depends on it, falls from his hands while he enjoys his new found love. This shows that, often the reason people cling to old and useless habit or heritage is because they feel insecure in their new environment. The old is tied to their identity. The doll, though lifeless is all he has and is ready to fight for it.

One may wish to switch his identity to gain legitimacy and when he succeeds he is happy, but such happiness does not last because the truth is that one cannot really be happy pretending to be who he is not. Living a lie does not make anybody genuinely happy. It plays out in the play when Hayavadana is able to admit that inspite of his wish to be a complete human, he cannot help but love his mane. Again when the all-knowing deity, Kali, restores him to complete horse except for his voice he still feels incomplete until when his own voice returns. And when that happens, at the end of the play, "*he leaps around with great joy*" [186].

## Conclusion

Though many countries who were once ruled by colonial imperialists have gained independence which means that they are now free to reclaim and rule themselves, identity remains a lingering issue among these former colonies. This is because, though they have won independence from the colonialists, they have discovered that their cultural identity has been fractured. Consequently, postcolonial nations saw the need to embark on the quest to recover their true identity. This paper captures a bit of the yet unresolved question about the identity of African literature. The reason is not to continue the argument but rather to use it as a point of departure in an effort to chart a new course of argument using *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad.

The play, *Hayavadana* represents a parable of fractured identities. Of all the endless layers of meaning embedded in the play, the present study leans on the aspect that bothers on the need to view differences in gender, class, race, culture and religion as a stepping stone to achieving social cohesion and integration rather than a stumbling block to meaningful coexistence. Everyone is different and human beings must learn to live with that fact by practicing love and respect for one another on the understanding that every living individual has something good to offer, irrespective of differences. Even within the seeming differences, there is a thread that links us together. The imperative of globalization persuades us to review our approach to matters of difference for global peace, stability and sustainable development.

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