# Hayavadana Character List

## Bhagavata

A Bhagavata in Hinduism is a worshiper; in this case he is also the play's narrator and he gives the audience a synopsis of the characters' lives before the start of the play. He is able to talk to the characters during the play and he also reacts to what is happening, especially when he does not approve of one particular course of action or another. He is often more of an observer than the narrator because he is also surprised and taken aback by much of what happens. His symbolic role in the play is to show the audience how unpredictable life can sometimes be.

## Devadatta

One of the play's two main protagonists, Devadatta is a fair and slender man who is smart as a whip. His father is a Brahmin and he is both poet and political observer. He is close friends with Kapila at the start and the end of the play but feels a great deal of jealousy when he sees that there is a mutual attraction between Kapila and Padmini. Ironically, he becomes more jealous after he is married to Padmini and still sees his erstwhile friend as a rival.When his head is put back on Kapila's body he feels that he has the best of both worlds, because he has combined his wit with Kapila's strength, and he has Padmini. However, eventually he body starts to become what it used to be and he is swiftly returned to his soft, flabby form again, which leaves him feeling dissatisfied and grumpy. He and Kapila kill themselves in solidarity at the end.

## Kapila

A muscular, dark man, Kapila is the son of an ironsmith, and he is the brawn to Devaratta's brains. He is a man of courage and he has great daring and a sense of adventure. He is a far better friend than Devadatta gives him credit for; he talks to Padmini on his friend's behalf even though it is clear to him that they are a mismatch. He also cuts off his own head in solidarity with Devadatta when he finds his decapitated body. When Padmini chooses to remain with Devadatta's head on Kapila's body, Kapila goes into the forest and withdraws from society. He gradually regains his former fitness and physique but he realizes that this is a hollow, half-existence. He and Devadatta kill themselves in solidarity at the end.

## Padmini

Padmini is a beautiful young woman who is the object of desire of both Devadatta and Kapila. She chooses Devadatta because she is attracted by his intelligence but she comes to realize that her sharp tongue is too much for his sensitive nature. She is also very attracted to the physicality of Kapila. Although it is a complete accident when she puts the wrong heads back on the wrong bodies, it does seem that Padmini is now able to have her cake and eat it too, because she gets the mind that she adores atop the body she craves. This is only fleeting, though, because when the bodies of the men start to readjust back to the way they used to be, she is quickly dissatisfied with her lot again.

Padmini is left alone twice by the men, as they kill themselves and leave her twice. The second time she kills herself too, having been dissuaded from doing so the first time around by the goddess Kali.

## Hayavadana

Oddly, while the eponymous character in the play, Hayavadana does not appear that much and is not the protagonist. He is a man with the head of a horse—or a horse with the body of a man, depending on your perspective, born from a woman who married a horse and bore his son. He wants desperately to be made complete, which he defines as being a full man. At the narrator's suggestion, he asks Kali to bless him with this but we find out that although she acceded to his request to be made whole, she elected to make him all horse rather than all man. He is joyful when his human voice, the last vestige of his humanity, fades away at the end.

## Kali

Kali is the Hindu goddess of death and she appears to most of the characters during the play. Devadatta sacrifices his head to her, and she does receive both men in the end but only because Padmini has put the wrong heads on the wrong bodies and intense suffering ensued. Padmini also addresses her when she burns herself on the funeral pyre. Kali makes Hayavadana a "complete" horse but in doing so demonstrates the perception that the Hindu gods don't really pay attention and can create as much havoc as good.

## Dolls 1 and 2

The dolls are snarky, mischievous, rude, selfish, and prideful creatures. They narrate what is happening to Devadatta and Padmini through the birth of their son, Padmini's dreams of Kapila, and more.

## Actor

This actor is the first to be shocked by the horse-man Hayavadana. He is tasked by Bhagavata to take Hayavadana to Kali's temple. He also ends up with the child when he passes through a hunters' village and they give him the boy, saying he no longer belongs there.Actor

This actor is frightened by Hayavadana singing the National Anthem.

## Child

The child is the son of Padmini and Devadatta, given to be raised by hunters until he is five, and then Devadatta's father, the Revered Brahmin. He is silent and surly, and only begins to use his voice when he laughs at Hayavadana.

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| **Hayavadana: Act 1Summary**  | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/act-2)**[Act 2](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/act-2) |

At the beginning of the performance, a [**mask**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/masks) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/terms/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)**. Devadatta, who is fair and handsome, is the son of a [**Brahmin**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/terms/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.”

At that moment, an [**actor**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) screams in terror, running onstage. [**The Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) does not believe the [**actor**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) 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 Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) once again tries to return to his story, but the [**actor**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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 Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) remains in disbelief and chides **[Hayavadana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/hayavadana)** for trying to scare people with a [**mask**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/masks). 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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters). Eventually, however, he concedes that it must be Hayavadana’s real head.

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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) suggests that **[Hayavadana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) set off for the temple.

[**The Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)**, who are of “one mind, one heart,” met a girl (**[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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 [**female chorus**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) 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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta) and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** then enter the stage. Devadatta is described as a “slender, delicate-looking person” and he wears a pale colored [**mask**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/masks). Kapila, for his part, is “powerfully built” and wears a dark mask.

[**Kapila**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila) asks his friend why he didn’t come to the gymnasium the night before. **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

[**Devadatta**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

[**Kapila**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila) offers to try to find the girl for him. **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.”

[**Kapila**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

[**Kapila**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila) eventually asks **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** if she knows of **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) explains that a match between **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** continues to be strong.

The plot skips forwards six months. **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** is pregnant and she, **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)**, and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

As they talk, Devadatta reveals his jealousy of **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** and of the attention **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

[**Padmini**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini) tries to appease **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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 three of them set out in the cart, and **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** remarks how smoothly **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** drives the cart. She relates an anecdote about how, soon after they were married, **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini) spots a tree with beautiful flowers, called the [**Fortunate Lady’s flower**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/the-fortunate-lady-s-flower), and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

[**Kapila**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila) returns with the [**Fortunate Lady’s flowers**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/the-fortunate-lady-s-flower). **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kali).

[**Kapila**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila) and **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** decide to visit the temple of Rudra, but **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta) says goodbye to **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/masks)), 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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini) and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** return from the temple of Rudra. They begin to worry about **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** when they cannot find him, and so Kapila follows his footprints to **[Kali’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kali)** 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** and **[Kapila’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** heads (in the play, this is accomplished with the [**masks**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kali) revives **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)**, they (along with **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** pushes **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** aside to take **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) interjects, wondering what the solution is to this problem, and the curtain falls on the end of act one.

**Hayavadana: Act 2 : Summary**

Act two opens with the Bhagavata repeating his question about the solution to the problem of the mixed-up heads. He describes how **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)**, **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

Back at **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and **[Devadatta’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** 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.

The [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) (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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** hands are, and say that he doesn’t deserve the dolls.

Time passes and **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** and **[Padmini’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** baby is born. Devadatta addresses [**the Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy) being born.

The [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) note how they are ignored while the baby gets all the attention. They confess that they should have been wary of **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)**.

Another six months pass, and **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** are fighting over how to treat their [**son**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy). 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.

[**Padmini**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini) sings a lullaby to her [**son**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy) about a rider on a white stallion, and falls asleep. The [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)**.

More time has passed, and **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/masks)/role. The [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) imply that **[Padmini’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** 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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy)’s [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) have become tattered. She asks Devadatta to travel to buy new ones.

While **[Devadatta](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** travels to get new [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters), **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** goes into the forest with her [**son**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy). 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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/symbols/the-fortunate-lady-s-flower).

In another part of the forest, Kapila enters, and the **[Bhagavata](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata)** is surprised to see him living in the jungle. The Bhagavata tells Kapila that **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** has given birth to her [**son**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy), and notices how angry Kapila looks by the way he stands and moves. Kapila says that the Bhagavata’s comments are merely poetry.

[**Padmini**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini) finds **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta)** 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.

[**Devadatta**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta), who has returned with new [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters), searches for **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and runs into [**the Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata). The Bhagavata is surprised to see him, and reluctantly reveals that Padmini has now spent four nights in **[Kapila’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/kapila)** hut.

[**Devadatta**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta) finds **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

[**Devadatta**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/devadatta) finds **[Padmini](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** and **[Kapila](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

As the story seemingly concludes, [**the Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) is interrupted once again, this time by a [**second actor**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters) who screams that he has seen a horse (who turns out to be **[Hayavadana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/hayavadana)**) singing the national anthem.

The first actor also returns to the stage, this time with a young [**boy**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy) clutching a pair of [**dolls**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters). The boy does not smile, laugh, or talk. He only reacts violently when someone tries to touch his dolls. [**The Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) realizes that it is **[Padmini’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** son.

At that moment, **[Hayavadana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/hayavadana)** returns, this time with a horse body as well as a horse head. He explains that he asked [**Kali**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.

The young [**boy**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy) starts laughing at **[Hayavadana,](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/hayavadana)** startling [**the Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini)** had sung to him about the rider on the white stallion.

[**The Bhagavata**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/the-bhagavata) remarks how beautiful the [**child’s**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/boy) laughter is, though **[Hayavadana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/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.”

# Hayavadana Themes

## Hybridity

One of the main themes of the play is that of creatures that are hybrids of different things; the title character, [Hayavadana](https://www.gradesaver.com/hayavadana/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22hayavadana), is a hybrid of a man and a horse, and even [Kapila](https://www.gradesaver.com/hayavadana/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22kapila) and [Devadatta](https://www.gradesaver.com/hayavadana/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22devadatta) end up being hybrids of each other. At the start of the play, being a hybrid is something godly and special; the opening prayer is to Ganesha, a god who is a boy with the head of an elephant. He is the lord and master of perfection which is paradoxical given his appearance. However, as the play continues, the hybrid characters seem less and less perfect to themselves and all ultimately feel that they are incomplete because they are not fully one creature or another.

## Incompleteness

The theme of being incomplete is personified by all of the characters. Devadatta and Kapila are brain and brawn respectively, but neither feels truly complete. This is mirrored by [Padmini](https://www.gradesaver.com/hayavadana/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22padmini); she chooses to take Devadatta as her husband but she still finds herself longing for the physicality of Kapila. She feels incomplete because she has been abandoned twice by the same two men, which emphasizes her own incompleteness to her.

Devadatta and Kapila feel a sense of incompletenes after they have each other's bodies joined to their own heads. At first it seems that Devadatta gets the best deal because he gets to keep his own sharp mind, and also has the muscular physique of Kapila. Kapila has his own strength of mind but has Devadatta's soft, unathletic body. He begins to feel incomplete as soon as the switch has occurred; however, when both men start to find that their bodies are returning to their prior state, they still both feel incomplete because they realize that they are living half existences.

The most obvious example of incompleteness is Hayavadana, who wants nothing more than to be made complete. He wants to be made fully a man but [Kali](https://www.gradesaver.com/hayavadana/study-guide/character-list#kali) makes him fully a horse instead. Even when she does so he feels incomplete because he still has the voice of a man. When he is able to change this and achieve the "neigh" of a horse instead he finally feels that he is complete.

## Conflict Between Body and Mind

The play engages with the question of which is more powerful, the body or the mind. By all accounts it is the mind, as shown in Hayavadana, Devadatta, and Kapila's experiences, but Karnad also suggests the body has more power than one might initially assume. The body has memory, memory that stubbornly resists the mind's desire to sublimate it. The body's physical engagement with the world leaves a residue within, and when considering this as well as the putative supremacy of the mind, one must consider the two parts as near equals and both important to the formation of a complete identity.

## Women's Subversiveness

Padmini might be a wife and mother, as traditional Indian society would dictate, but she is not complacent, quiet, or docile. She is a desiring, sensual women who pursues what—or who—she wants. She is openly selfish and independent-minded, something that the goddess Kali admires. Karnad allows her subversiveness to come through both her own words and those of the Female Chorus, which articulates her discontent with her conjugal life. Her sharp tongue and subtle subversiveness make her much more than a subaltern; rather, she is the closest to "complete" of all the characters.

## City vs. Nature

Devadatta represents the city, a place dedicated to commerce and to the pursuits of the mind, not the body. The woods are associated woth Kapila in that they are a place where the physical body feels most at home, most complete. Nature is not opposed to the intellect, but it values strength, perseverance, and resilience; there the currency is not money but physical power. Padmini is a woman of the city but increasingly drawn to the woods, which represents her desire for both Devadatta and Kapila. Her son is naturally of both places, though, being raised in one and then the other, which suggests his identity will be more complete.

## Theatre and Its Conventions

Karnad plays with the different levels of reality and drama throughout the piece. [Bhagavata](https://www.gradesaver.com/hayavadana/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22bhagavata) asks Ganesha for a blessing and speaks of the play's beginning, which is then interrupted by an Actor and Hayavadana. This is part of the play, though we are supposed to think it is not, and following it Bhagavata segues into a completely different story. A chorus and Bhagavata comment on the action, the latter speaking to and about the audience occasionally. And at the end, the two seemingly disparate plots suddenly converge, all done in a way to make the audience reflect on the didactic nature of theatre, the fusion and fragmentation of drama and real life, and the nature of storytelling.

## Indian Identity

Karnad alludes to post-colonial India's identity problems through his characters, especially Hayavadana. After British rule, Indians were left with the vestiges of colonial politics, education, social structures, and more, which existed alongside and in tension with traditional Indian ones. Indians wrestled with their varying degrees of participation within the colonial system, and now in its vacuum had to come to terms with their fractured identity. By having Hayavadana try—and fail—to find completeness in purely Indian patriotic behavior, Karnad suggests how difficult this period is for his nation.