



HAYAVADANA

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I wrote about Girish Karnad's Yayati. Another one of Girish Karnad's seminal works is Hayavadana. After Yayati, which he wrote in 1961, he published Hayavadana in 1971. There are several nuances to Hayavadana and it is not possible to get into all of them. But what is important for us is that the heroine Padmini is married to Devadutta who is a man of the mind. He is good looking but has a weak body. They have a friend Kapila who is a man of action and thus strong but not very intelligent. Soon Padmini starts developing a liking for Kapila and starts wanting him.

Devadutta realises his wife's growing affection towards Kapila. Liking both of them, he decides that the only way out is for him to get out of the way of the two of them. He thus goes to a Kali temple and beheads himself. Kapila sets out in search of him and finally finds him in the temple. He is filled with remorse and decides he cannot live without his friend and beheads himself. Finally, Padmini manages to reach the temple and finds the two dead bodies. She is about to kill herself when Goddess Kali stops her and tells her that she can revive the two by just attaching the heads to the bodies.

This is when things get ambiguous. Padmini claims that it was dark and therefore by mistake she affixed Devadutt's head on Kapila's body and Kapila's head on Devadutt's body. She is secretly happy now and begins to live happily with the entity which has Devadutt's head and Kapila's body. The entity that has Kapila's head and Devadutt's body retires to the forest.

The story moves ahead. Padmini and Devadutt have a child. But soon things start deteriorating. Devadutt who now has Kapila's body soon starts becoming weaker. Finally, Kapila's body starts resembling Devadutt's body. Devadutt gets back his weak body and we also see that Kapila's head which had been attached to Devadutt's body is now fully resembling the original Kapila.

There is more to the story. There is Hayavadana, a man with the head of a horse who is trying to become complete. The audience of course believes that by the end of the play Hayavadana will be a complete man. But by the end when the transformation is complete, Hayavadana is a complete Horse. He even loses his ability to speak. Instead of the Horse's head turning into a man's head, the man's body turns into a Horse's body.

There are several aspects to the play. Did Padmini really make a mistake or was it her desire for Kapila that made her attach Devadutt's head to Kapila's body. The crux of the story however is this question. Who is Devadutt or Kapila? Is the entity with Devadutt's head and Kapila's body Devadutt or is it Kapila?



The play then answers this question by showing the transformation of Kapila's body into Devadutt's body, thus making the entity with Devadutt's head complete Devadutt. Similarly, Hayavadana with Horse's Head and man's body becomes complete Horse. The play proceeds to show that the Head (mind) drives the entity. Even a strong body which has Devadutt's head eventually becomes weak.

There is a lesson for a trader in Hayavadana. The trading system used by the trader should match the trader's personality. If there is a dissonance between the trader's personality (head) and the trader's system (body) then the resultant composite is not complete. The trader will never be able to make money. The same system can however be used by another trader whose personality suits the system and that trader can make a lot of money. Instead of running after Trading Systems, it is important for the trader to understand himself and find a system that suits his personality. This is the key to success in trading.

I have been saying for a long time that this is also extremely important for investors. For example, investing in equities over the long term is the right thing to do and this is accepted by everybody. Even long term equity data supports this assertion. But if an investor's temperament just does not accept the volatility of the equity returns then there is no way at all that the investor can get the complete returns that the equity investments actually give. He/she is most likely to get out of his investments at the worst time. An investor of that type needs to have a balanced approach to his investment. A mix of equity and fixed deposits will work much better for the investor.

On the other hand an investor, who has the ability to withstand big risk, will not like to have investments in fixed deposits. It is important to match the personality of the investor with the type of investment that is done.

If the investment plan does not match the personality, something will give. And as Hayavadana tells us, the investor will keep trying for completion and finally find an advisor who will give him a plan that suits his personality. The real problem is for the investor who buys the story that equities are good for the long term and wants to invest in equities but whose personality just does not allow him to stomach the volatility in equities. Such an investor is truly lost.