

Human Life and Its Value on Girish Karnad's *Yayati*

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Abstract

Drama is an entertained series in the classical era. It may be made fun of the people for rejoice in their leisure time. If a serious note is given to the people, play will be selected as a tool and it may be reached easily in a short period. At present scenario, Drama is a form of art is inherently social and contemporary and it thrives on social themes. It deals with the problems of the present day or a futuristic society, which is governed by the existing social processes. The modern dramatist aims to present ways of the mundane world and enlighten the audience through entertainment. He tries to bring the peace of mind to those afflicted by the ills of the world and its numerous problems. Banker has aptly commented that the modern drama reflects, "The traditional Indian conception of human life". The present article discuss on the various dimensions of human life through Girish Karnad's *Yayati*.

Key words: Realism, Westernization, Alienisms, Mythology,

Drama, through stage production, comes directly in contact with the people and its study is partially literary and partially sociological. As Sarat Babu has pointed out, "There is a close parallel between life and theatre and quite often life is theatre-like and vice-versa".

Realism in India is confined within the social problems. For, in India in spite of the large urban population, there really has never been the bourgeois class of people who had true faith in individualism. Westernization is an alien term and therefore they define themselves in terms of their relationship to other members of their own family, caste or class. Hence, they extend the same reference to the theatre as well. The comment of D.H. Lawrence about the modern novel can be applied to the modern Indian drama also, for it reveals, "The relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment". As he further observes, "Art speech is the only truth. An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day".

Girish Karnad, the most renowned media personality, an outstanding playwright and an adept practitioner of the performing arts, could authentically be called as a true artist. Commending his play, Kirtinath Kurtoki observes "Karnad's plays are thoroughly modern in

outlook and spirit". Karnad's approach, according to K.R. SrinivasaIyengar is "Modern and he deploy the conventions and motifs of folk art and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouement".

It is evident that his plays evince a profound concern for man, a sympathetic affirmation of the wordily life and an incisively insightful contemporary social revelance. When his plays are analysed, what surprises us is how traditional his plays are. His plays serve as a vehicle for communicating man's aspirations, jealousies, and madness, quest for perfection, completeness and eternal conflict of passions. Dr. V. Gnanam, former Vice-chancellor of Madras University, has commented as follows: "Drama is an effective means of communication besides being an entertainment medium". It is quite true in the case of the scriptwriter Girish Karnad.

Girish Karnad, a popular playwright, scriptwriter, actor, director and recipient of various awards, is a significant writer in the Indian literary scenario. He cultivated a keen interest in art and culture and on his return from England to India, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras in 1963 and in 1974, he was appointed as the Director of Film and Television Institute, Pune. In 1987, he was awarded Fullbright Scholar-in-Residence at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. Karnad established himself as a noted and talented dramatis after the publication of Yayati (1961) and Tughlaq (1964). His creative currents went on and a result. Hayavadana (1971), Anjumaliga (1977), HittinaHunja (1980), Naga-Mandala (1988), Tale-Danda (1990) and Agni Mattu ale (1995) were published. These plays, originally written in Kannada were translated by Karnad himself, became rich contributions to Indian English Drama. He has translated Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, Tale-Danda and The Fire and The Rain. LaljiMisra had projected the view that "Karnad, as a translator, felt it was difficult to sort out the cultural equivalent in English; his translation must, therefore, be seen as approximation to the original". But his plays were equally appreciated in India and abroad and they received universal acclamation in the European countries as well as in the United States of America.

Karnad is regarded as one among the three great dramatists of contemporary India; the other two prominent dramatists being Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar deal with the problems of the middle class, GirishKarnad on the other hand takes refuge in the Indian legends and myths and tries to show the absurdity of modern life through his notable plays Yayati, Tughlaq, Hittina Hunja, Hayavadan, Naga-mandala, The Fire and the Rain and Tale-Danda. He received the state award for his first play Yayati.

Mahabharatha, which is "an inexhaustible, literacy reservoir", forms the source for two of the complex plays of Karnad. Yayati, the first play, is from the book of the epic: Adiparva" and The Fire and the Rain is from the third book of the epic "Vanaparva".

Hayavadana is indirectly based on the epic with reference to the episode of the abandoned child Shakuntala.

Karnad's Yayati, (1961) initially written in Kannanda, conveys the message of performance of duty and acceptance of responsibility, In this play, Karnad presents the age-old story of the mythological King Yayati who was the tenth in the line of the Brahma's family. Once, a conflict arises between Devayani, the daughter of Khukracharya, guru of the Assuras and Sharmistha the daughter of Vrishparva, the King of the Assuras, and the later pushed Devayani into a well and escaped. Fortunately, King Yayati who came there and saved her. Since then Devayani for pushing her into a well. With the consent Shukracharya the marriage between Devayani and King Yagati was solemnized. Sharmistha as a result of her punishment was sent to King Yayati's kingdom along with his bride Devayani. Unable to bear this; he loses control of himself, becomes violent, adamant and refuses to accept old age.

His son Puru informs him that he can be redeemed if somebody accepts his old age: Yayati, on hearing this becomes happy. But later, when he realizes that nobody is willing to accept his old age, he becomes dejected for he had a wrong notion that all his subjects would readily accept his old age. Karnad has portrayed the contours of the real world, i.e., when you laugh, the world will laugh with you, but when you are cry, you will be alone, deserted by your kith and kin. Yayati feels very much disheartened because old age has not come to him in its normal course but as a curse. So he promises that if somebody accepts it at present, he would relieve him from his old age within five or six years.

Our mythology is replete with parental figures demanding complete obedience from their children. In the play Yayati, Puru proves to be the best son, as he gladly accepts the curse inflicted on his father and willingly exchanges his youth with that of his father's old age. Though Yayati succeeds in transforming his old age and his sins to Puru, he acts in an irresponsible way by usurping the happiness of his son and daughter-in-law. Rajinder Paul has commented that the protagonist in Yayati asks for eternal youth which his son scarifies at the altar of paternity, a very Indian theme of a self-denying son indulging the whim of his unreasonable father".

In the process Yayati, feels disillusioned and loses faith. Though his subconscious mind tells him that it is not fair on his part, he justifies his acts as one that had been done for a noble cause that of serving his citizens. In reality King Yayati exchanges his old age with the youth of his younges son only to satisfy his own sensual pleasures. In the end Puru's wife Chitralekha commits suicide. Yayati realizes that he has committed a grave sin only after the suicide of his daughter-in-law.

Yayati asks Puru to take back his youth and be a good king as he has realized that there could be no better lesson than the Chitrakha's death. He requests Sharmistha to accompany him to the forest, as he has to wash away his sins by doing penance in the forest. He finally says that since he has spent his youth in the city, he would like to spend his old age in the forest. When Chitrakha dies, her husband Puru is shocked, but he does not shed even a drop of tear. Only when he regains his youth, he repents for the disastrous blunder he had committed.

It is pathetic that King Yayati and his son Puru realize the consequence of their evil deeds only at the cost of Chitrakha's life. Through her, the dramatist portrays the selfless nature and the helpless plight of Indian women who by willingly sacrificing their likes, dislikes and if necessary lives, try to create happiness and peaceful atmosphere at home. The dramatist through the portrayal of the character of Yayati focuses on the theme of attachment to life and its pleasures. Through the life of Yayati, the dramatist brings out the fact that selfish paternal authority and blind filial loyalty could ruin a family.

Almost every character in this play, except Sharmistha is irresponsible. Yayati who is cursed for his adultery transfers the burden most irresponsibly to his son. Puru his son, who is married to Chitrakha and owes a dharmic responsibility to ensure her happiness, equally irresponsibly vitiates her marital bliss by exchanging his youth with his father for the sake of preserving the latter's happiness. He is caught between the devil and the deep sea filial loyalty and conjugal felicity and whichever he chose he would still be caught in the web of irresponsibility.

Devayani who acts impetuously, brings a curse upon her husband King Yayati and runs away irresponsibly when he is visited by the ugly consequences of the curse. Chitrakha, unable to bear the consequences of her husband Puru's exchange of youth with his father, commits suicide instead of fighting to restore her rights. The only character who is willing to accept the responsibility for the consequences of what she does is Sharmistha.

The purpose and theme of the play are revealed through the character of Sutrakha. Sutrakha says that neither a scholar nor an ordinary person can escape the burden of responsibility. Karnad himself in his interview with Meenakshi Raykar has revealed that

Every character in the play tries to seek escape from the consequences of its actions. Even Puru does that. Yayati, Devayani, and Puru all of them try to avoid facing the consequences. Sharmistha is the only character who accepts the consequences of her action.

Commenting on the play, U.R. Anantha Murthy says, "Yayati is a self-consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility".

Each and every individual must have a sense of responsibility in his journey of life. It will be relevant to remember what Robert Frost, the twentieth century poet has said in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".

"But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep"

ParasuramRamamoorthi's comment that "...the central issue of responsibility of the old versus young assumed a new turn", is quite applicable to the play Yayati.

Puru appears to be the great in sacrificing his youth for the sake of his father, he drives his wife Chitrlekha to suicide. Chitrlekha mocks both Puru and Yayati for their ingenious notions when she commits suicide. Through her death, she affirms her life by her own death. The act of Chitrlekha reminds us of a letter written by elderly person and cited Beth A. Messner and Jacquelyn J. Buckrop. The elderly man has justified his act of suicide by arguing in the following manner:

If I can choose between a life of torture and death, why should I not select the latter? As I have the ship in which I shall sail and the house which I shall inhabit, so I will choose death by which I leave life... Why should I endure agonies, when I can emancipate myself from all of my torments?

The life of Yayati makes us realize that the most pathetic situation of human life is that all the teaching of Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and the great leaders of this world like Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandella are unable to remove the inherent selfishness in man.

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