



A Story of Yayati in Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa and Yayati, a play by Girish Karnad: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Modern Indian English dramas now a day are popular among readers. Indian English playwrights are very comfortable in presenting new look and ideas regenerating the old stories. The present paper deals with the play Yayati by Girish Karnad, the origin of this play is found as a form of story in Adiparva of Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa. The researcher has probed into ancient and modern introspections of Yayati in the light of comparative ground and has explored the antithesis from myth to modernity in these two works

KEYWORDS: • Yayati, • Story, • Play, • Myth, • Conflict, • Lust, • Curse

Drama is the oldest literary art which is meant for stage and action. Many Indian English dramas are found to be explored on the base of ancient stories. Playwrights reshape the theme, content and thoughts of ancient myth for readers and spectators of contemporary literature. Girish Karnad is one of the famous playwrights among Indo-Anglian writers. His first play Yayati is based on a story of Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa.

The original story of Yayati is found in Adiparva of Mahabharata. Shukracharya was the preceptor of Asuras (demons). The Asura king Vrishaparva greatly respected Shukracharya as he knew the secret of Mritsanjivani, that brings the dead back to life.

Devayani was Shukracharya's only daughter and spoiled by her father's indulgence. One morning, Sharmistha, the Asura princess, daughter of Vrishaparva, came to Shukracharya's hermitage with her friends. She asked Shukracharya to allow Devayani to accompany them for a bath in a nearby lake. Shukracharya agreed. They soon reached the lake and left their clothes on the bank to go into the water. Suddenly a storm blew up and scattered their clothes. The girls hurriedly came out of the lake and got dressed then princess Sharmistha, by mistake; clad herself in Devayani's clothes. Angered by this, Devayani insulted Sharmistha, the Asura princess. Argument began and Sharmistha pushed Devayani into a dry well and left Devayani in the well.

Yayati, the king of a nearby state, hunting in the forest and was looking for water to drink. When he came near the well he was surprised to find Devayani lying at the bottom. Devayani introduced herself and said that she fell into the well. She then requested the king to pull her out. Yayati helped her out. Devayani demanded that Yayati marry her as he has held her by the right hand. Yayati was alarmed and turned down her request on the ground that he belonged to lower Kshatriya (or warrior) caste, and Devayani was a Brahmin (priestly) maid. Yayati then left and Devayani continued to sit under a tree. When she did not return, Shukracharya set out in search of her. He found Devayani under a tree, her eyes filled with tears of anger and grief. When Shukracharya inquired, Devayani told her father everything, carefully hiding her own faults. She refused to return to the kingdom of Vrishaparva as she was badly insulted by the Asura princess, Sharmistha. Failing to change her mind, Shukracharya returned to Vrishaparva and announced that he was leaving the Asura kingdom because of his daughter Devayani's unhappy conflict with princess Sharmistha. Vrishaparva begged Shukracharya to stay. Shukracharya left the decision with his daughter Devayani.

Vrishaparva went to Devayani taking his daughter Sharmistha along. He begged forgiveness for his daughter. Devayani agreed to return on one condition that Sharmistha be her handmaiden for the rest of her life. Sharmistha agreed for the sake of her father, the king. Devayani was pacified and returned to her father's hermitage.

She reminded Yayati to marry her. Yayati repeated that he could not marry a Brahmin girl. Devayani then took Yayati to her father. Shukracharya gave his blessing on their marriage. They were soon married and led a happy life. Devayani had two sons.

Sharmistha continued to stay as Devayani's handmaid. Yayati made a palace for Sharmistha at the request of Devayani. One day Sharmistha secretly met Yayati and told him what happened between her and Devayani. Yayati was sympathetic. Sharmistha begged Yayati to take her as the second wife. Yayati agreed and married her but without the knowledge of Devayani. Sharmistha had three sons.

Devayani met the three sons of Sharmistha. She asked the boys the name of their father. They pointed to Yayati. Devayani was shocked. She felt deceived and ran to her father's hermitage. Shukracharya was enraged and cursed Yayati with premature old age. Yayati begged for forgiveness. Shukracharya and Devayani felt sorry for him. Shukracharya then said as I cannot take back my curse, but if any of your sons is ready to exchange his youth for your old age, you will be young again as long as you wish.

Yayati, now an old man, quickly returned to his kingdom and called for his eldest son. My dutiful son, take my old age and give me your youth, at least for a while, until I am ready to embrace my old age. The eldest son turned down his father's request and so also the next three older brothers. The youngest son, Puru agreed and immediately turned old. Yayati rushed out as a young man to enjoy his life. After years spent in vain effort to quench his desires by indulgence, Yayati finally came into senses. He returned to Puru and said, Dear son, sensual desire is never quenched by indulgence any more than fire is extinguished by pouring oil on it. Take back your youth and rule the kingdom wisely and well.

Yayati then returned to the forest and spent the rest of his days in austerities, meditating upon Brahman, the ultimate reality. In due course, he attained heaven.

The Indian myths have always been the source of inspiration for many Indian dramatists like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P.Kailasam and other. Karnad has used myths, mythologies, legends and folktales, and taken plots from these sources and invested with the contemporary events and problems in the modern Indian drama in English.

In 'Yayati', he has taken the story of the Yayati from 'Adiparva' of Mahabharata and reshaped it by giving it a modern touch. In the original story Sharmistha marries Yayati but this marriage infuriates Devayani who asks her father to bestow a curse of old age and decrepitude upon Yayati with a shaving clause that if someone shares it he would regain his youth. His four elder sons refuse to accept it but the fifth one 'Puru' 'yields to his entreaties' and accepts the curse. Karnad has moulded the original mythical story of Yayati. In the play, Yayati is already married to Devayani, but during the course of action, accepts Sharmistha as his wife. In the original story Puru is unmarried, but in the play he is married to Chitrlekha and her reactions to her husband's decision are recorded. Swarnalata, a maid servant, is another addition to the characters. Thus Karnad has treated feminine sensibility by the characters like Chitrlekha and Swarnalata. The mythical story of Yayati forms the basic plot of the play but the dramatist adds, "...new characters to deepen the connotative richness of the play as he gives it a contemporary appeal." (Yadava, 14). By using imagination and creativity, he has

"transformed myths and legends into a folk narrative style" (Ramaswamy, 278).

Through the repeated use of theme in his plays, he has displayed that "the ancient Indian myths can be harnessed to address the modern sensibility of loss of individuality" (Boratti, 62). Karnad knows that by linking the present to the past, a kind of continuity can be ascertained and human predicament, in the light of the present, in the lap of the past, can be established. The myths, legends and folk forms are reflectors of the racial and cultural unconsciousness and all ritualistic performances. Like Jean Anouilh, Karnad uses, "... myths and folk form in his plays to exorcise socio-cultural evils" (Babu, 235).

The play is a self consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility. His interpretation of the "familiar old myth on the exchange of ages between father and son baffled and angered my conventional critics, but for other, who were trying to root their contemporary concerns in old myth...Puru was a great experience" (Murthy, 7).

The play establishes that "...myth is not merely a narrative to be bent to present purposes, but a structure of meaning worth exploring in itself, because it offers opportunities for philosophical reflection without the connotations of realism or the necessity of a contemporary setting" (Dharwadker, 27).

Karnad's Yayati comes across as merely a pleasure-monger while in the original; his character is symbolic of a higher ideal, striving for truth, and eternal happiness. Yayati's long span of sensual indulgence is a symbol that indicates the futility of chasing happiness in things that

have a definite end. Indulgence only increases thirst, it doesn't quench it.

In the original, neither Yayati nor his son suffers from any kind of confusion or existentialist disease. They are aware of their motivations, their choices, and have great conviction. They feel no guilt or remorse. Puru considers it his duty towards his father, adhering firmly to the dictum of Pitru Devo Bhava (father is god). Yayati comes across as pretty straightforward when he expresses his desire to enjoy sensual pleasure.

Each climax of happiness ends with sorrow that it is over so soon, followed by a craving to renew, to repeat the pleasure once more. Yayati's disillusionment is complete only with dispersion. He has had his fill but remains unfulfilled, plods him to seek a non-cyclical happiness.

An analysis of myths, legends, folktales and history, Karnad has usurped in his plays, needs to be given in a brief account here. "The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head" (Karnad, 14). This statement of Karnad inspires us to rethink about the myths, mythologies and folklores he has profoundly used in his plays, with the contemporary life and elements infused in them.

The origin of myth and related stories can be traced to the primitive life, religion and culture transferred to the contemporary generation through oral and written forms, also is scripted in human unconscious mind. The folkloristic tales, in the long course of time, acquired mythical dimensions.

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