



USE OF MYTH AND SYMBOLS IN THE PLAY “YAYATI” BY GIRISH KARNAD

Mr. Malhar Jayesh

Vyakhyata sahayak, Gujarat
Arts and Commerce College
(Evening), Ahmedabad.

E-mail : jshmalhar@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

My attempt in this paper is to study mythology as to tool to show the reflection of society, its culture and the technique used by the writers. To prove this I take Girish Karnad's play 'Yayati' from the point of view of Myths and Symbols.

Girish Raghunath Karnad's first play "Yayati" (1960) is a story taken from the epic Mahabharata. This mythical story is a tale of responsibility, sacrifice and self realization. In this play the central character is Yayati characterized by his insatiable desires symbolised though his actions. The story is about the exchange of ages between father and son.

Myth is an idea or story which is handed down through generation sometimes orally or sometimes by the written word. The stories are especially about gods and men of courage. Myths often explain natured and historical events. They are the best way to study such cultures and are often related to creation.

Symbols are objects, signs, characters, figures and colours used to represent ideas or concepts. The purpose of a symbol is to communicate meaning.

Using a story from Mahabharata, Karnad has created this meticulous play with a very strong idea. An idea which is still a subject of study the myths and stories of mankind, no matter how ancient or new are based on some general mythical structures and formulas that are meant to touch human hearts throughout the time and ages.

He chose of piece of mythical narrative and completely reinterpreted the main characters in a way that is more human and close to the modern world. The emotional

and psychological drama and trauma faced by the women in his play is not a mere depiction of some ancient story but is modally becoming universal and can be sensed by any initiated reader of any time.

He hasn't changed the structure of myth but took it further and evolved it. He has assigned new perspectives and meanings to the symbols used in the narrative. All the rules and duties of that time and gestures and codes of conduct have a new refreshing from in this play. As a reader I can fairly sympathize with the mental and social conditions of characters. The reason to choose this topic was based on the fact that I love to read mythological story and Yayati is one of them. This is also a study of signs and symbols in a mythological structure. I chose Yayati as a subject for this study. The reason to choose Yayati was purely based on the fact that I was charmed by the modern outlook of the play yet it was the same story in the core. I tried to focus on the points where the author has successfully transformed the mythical element into a new form with which the reader and viewer can sympathize in a more direct way. Specially the fact that tradition and religious rules and duties always had a form which was only meant to assist the powerful and people in higher position of caste, class and more prominently in gender.

ABOUT MYTH

Our word "Myth" derives from the ancient Greek word "Muthos" which originally meant 'utterance' and came to mean a spoken or written story. In general a myth is a story which is not "true" and which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. For example: Yayati borrowed a myth and create a new idea.

Myth is not simply wild tales about the gods or false stories that no modern person would believe. Myth has always involved ways of telling stories that had special significance. Myth change history into significant history. They tell how things were in the beginning and thus how they must be now. Myths can be so old that their origins are lost in prehistory, but they can also grow up within our own history.

For 19th Century men, Myth was anything that was opposed to "reality". Thus, the creation of Adam and the notion of invisible man were "Myths". It also meant "Fable", Talk" or simply "Speech". Myths are one of the segments which serve to determine the Indianness in our literature.

MYTH USED IN YAYATI

Girish Karnad's First play Yayati (1961) which was a major success on the stage. He has borrowed the myth of Yayati from the "Adiparva" of the great Indian epic

Mahabharata and other Puranas. Yayati retells the age-old story of the mythological king who in his longing for eternal youth does not hesitate to usurp the youth and vitality of his son.

As the Mahabharata story tells Yayati one of the six sons of Nahusha. Devyani, who is love with Kacha, the disciple of her father Sukracharya. After Kacha's betrayal, she married Yayati to desire to hurt Sharmistha for whom she nurses a childhood jealousy. Sharmistha is deeply in love with Yayati and subjects herself to a lot of mental and physical torture for love. A son is born to her out of her clandestine liaison with Yayati. Consequently, Devyani brings a curse of old age upon him. Yayati blinded by his insatiable thirst for sensual pleasure, dreads old age.

Girish karanad has introduced new characters in this plays, Swarnalata the servent of Devyani and Chitralkha the wife of Pooru. Karnad has beautifully used the work of both the characters. Swarnalata is constantaly shown in the play with three of her female character. While Chitralkha kills herself which changed in Yayati's sensual desires.

In Mahabharata Devyani had two sons Yadu and Tarvasu while sharmistha had three sons Druhyu, Anu and Pura on the other hand in the play of Yayati, Karnad only mention Pooru the only son of Yayati and Devyani.

Mahabharata story tales that Devyani is in love with Sage Kacha (The Disciple of Sukracharya) Who had been given curse to Devyani that she would not marry another Brahmana. On the other hand in Yayati there is a very small reference about Kacha an it tells that Devyani had taken oath after Kacha's betrayal never to love a man.

The Mahabharata story tells that Devyani is the only daughter of Guru Sukracharya. She is stubborn and arrogant although very beautiful young Woman. One day the daughter of Varishapurva, sharmistha, came to Guru's Ashram, along with her friends. The girls decided to take a bath at a lack nearby. A violent storm blew away their cloths, and their cloths got mixed. When Devyanin saw sharmistha wearing here cloths. They started fight, abuses each other. During the fight with Sharmistha and her friends Devyani falls into a well nearby. They leave her there. Yayati rescued Devyani by took out from the well and they loved each other at first sight. Devyani proposed to marry her but Yayati denied because of his lower cast Khstriya and is Brahmin but later he married her after Sukracharya's permission. But karnad here used this myth and gave the readers different structure. King Yayati and Devyani married and Pooru as their son. Sharmistha has shown very badly most of the time but after the conversation with Yayati, he accepted her as his second queen which made Devyani angry and the cause of Yayati's curse.

In Mahabharata story when Devyani came to know that Yayati has three sons from Sharmistha. Devyani was livid and went back to her father and Yayati followed to persuade her on the other hand in the Yayati play, king Yayati directly tells Devyani that he will make Sharmistha his second queen. This made Devyani angry and she went back to her father who is that time in the city to come to greet the Prince. Yayati did not follow her but Sharmistha persuaded her.

When Shukracharya came to know that Yayati had wronged his wife Devyani. He cursed Yayati that he would lose his youth and become an old man immediately.

“Yayati attained the old age which destroys beauty and brings on misery.”

It is needless to describe the misery of youth suddenly blighted into age where the horrors of loss are clearly seen by the pangs of recollection.

HIS FIVE SON'S REPLY

As soon as Sukracharya uttered his curse, Yayati became an old man. Sukracharya also said that his curse once uttered could not be taken back and added that the only concession he could give was that if Yayati wanted, he could give his old age to someone and take his youth from him. Yayati was still hunted by the desire for sensual enjoyment.

Yayati had five obedient sons. He made a request to his first sons, by turns first eldest son Yadu laughed at him, and said, “I have my own life father, I am enjoying it. I can't give it all up”. He then went to Druhyu, who also refused, says “But Father, being old will also make me lose all my intelligence. “I have just started learning about this world”. Next came Turvasa and Anu, but both of them refused.

The last son Pooru was his only hope. He readily agreed to the proposal as he thought it to be his duty towards his father who had given him life. One might think him to be lunatic but Pooru had a very convincing explanation for his action. He classified sons under three categories and said, “Three are three types who can be called sons. One, who rises to the expectations of the father without being prompted, occupies the top most position and finds the ultimate goal of life. Second is the son who obediently helps on request. The third grudgingly agrees to help.

Karnad gave a different view of Pooru's thinking. Pooru was the son of Yayati and Devyani. After heard about the curse of his father he went to talk with the Sukracharya about to forgive his father from curse. But he did not meet him. But Sukracharya's disciple told him that Sukracharya give concession from the curse that Yayati can transfer his youth from any young man. He had asked their courtiers about the concession but all refused to take it. After learnt Yayati's plight Pooru is ready to

take Yayati's old age upon him. But in this play he takes it because of glory and fame. He did not want any battle like his fore fathers. In Yayati, when Chitralkha crosses the limits of all the so-called "Morality" and hypocrisy and claims directly for her sexual rights to king Yayati. He soon realises the impropriety to his shallow action and feels an alienated common man. He tells his son :

"Please help me Pooru, Take back your youth,
Let me turn my decrepitude into a beginning."

He went, with Sharmistha, and there is no mention about Devyani.

In Yayati, Pooru took upon his father's curse because he has not won many battles likes is forefather and has not reached upto that level, So to get glory and time. He took the curse on himself.

In Mahabharata, after took upon Pooru's youth, Yayati lived with Devyani for several years and enjoyed worldly happiness. One day, it dawned to him that he had wasted his life running after insignificant things and had not ever thought of life's most valuable aspiration of spiritual enlightenment. He made up his mind to detach himself from the transit enticing world and take to the part of Godliness. He gave all his property to his sons and went to forest to dead a life of renunciation with Devyani and Sharmistha. On the other hand Karnad gives a totally different view in Yayati

REVIEWS ON YAYATI

Jaydeepsinh Dodiya talks about karnad that he has given this traditional tale a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of life today. The Symbolic theme of Yayati's attachment to life and its pleasures and also his final renunciation are retained. In the Mahabharat, Yayati recognizes the nature of desire itself and realises the fulfilment does not diminish or end the sexual desires.

Jaydeepsinh Dodiya in his work talks about how Yayati recognize the horror of his own life and assumes moral responsibility after a series of symbolic encounters with reality. Thus the playwright takes liberty with the original myths and invents some new relationship to make it acceptable to modern sensibilities.

Karnad's Yayati successfully convey his message of disapproval of improper sensuality as well as performance of duty and acceptance of responsibility. Ramasamy compliments Karnad as follows:

"Talking of Myths and legends the one modern English Play-writer who has used them with imagination and creativity resulting in stage worthy play is Girish Karnad.

The technique of bringing together myth and legend to folk narrative style is the way in which he succeeds where many others have not.”

Karnad as a self-conscious playwright has beautifully shown the Yayati's lust for sensual pleasure and his appearance as Dharma Raja. By holding the hands of Devyani in well and Sharmistha who was about to swallow the veil of lethal poison. In these both actions the full advantage goes to Yayati. Both are said to marry him. But at last when Chitrlekha was about to swallow the poison he rushes forward and grab her hand but he then recoils in horror and Chitrlekha said that you can't even bring yourself to stop to me. Yayati does not hold her hand because if he holds he has to marry with Chitrlekha also.

Yayati has shown the strong female characters in his play. He cleverly used both the generation in one scene. After Pooru has taken his father curse Chitrlekha proud of him and tales that her husband is not a ordinary man, but a glorious man and she could really to live with him. But Karnad's view about modern woman Chitrlekha is very strong and practical about her rights. When she shows Pooru in old age, Decrepitude she denied to accept him. She tells Yayati's that she is married Pooru for his youth, for his potential to plant the seed of the Bharata's in her womb. Pooru has lost his potential now. So, She tells Yayati for her sexual rights.

ABOUT SYMBOL

The word “Symbol” derives from greek verb “Symballein” to throw together and its noun, “Symbol on” ‘mark’ ‘emblem’, ‘token’ or ‘sign’. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or ‘stands’ for something else. Symbols are objects, characters, figures and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. It represents something else by association, resemblance or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible.

SYMBOLS USED IN YAYATI

Sutradhara can be interpreted symbol of the one who holds the strings of the play. He or She may speak in verse or dialogue. Girish Karnad used this symbol in the prologue of his play. Sutradhara first address the audience that Yayati play deals with the ancient Myth, but it is not a mythological. He also says that our play has no gods and it ideas with death. He gives almost the play structure so audience can related the paly from the starting.

His majesty is the symbol to address the king. Here it refers to king Yayati and her majesty refers to Devyani. It is the symbol of honourable people whom the courtiers give to kings of their land.

Kshatriya palace is the symbol of power & wealth in which brave Yayati and his inheritors lived in this place. Kshatriya is the caste of fighter. Through the play we can see this palace on the stage all the actions happened here in this palace. Karnad wrote this play when he was 22 years old. So he did not have more experience about stage elements.

Caste is the system of dividing people into such classes. In Yayati it is symbolized in all characters. Devyani (Brahmin), Sharmistha (Rakshashi, Asura, Demy), Yayati – Kshatriya. Karnad has beautifully shown the social heirarchy of the characters. He reshaped the ancient caste system from the Dev and Danav to Brahmin, Asura, Kshatriya in a very good way that modern generation people easily related with the play.

“Sanjeevani” vidya (the art of reviving the dead) is the secret which Sukracharya has and Yayati needed this sanjeevani spell for immortality and that is why he married Devyani. Yayati does not want to die. He knows that Devyani is the daughter of Guru shukracharya who has this Sanjeevani spell.

Holding a right hand is the symbol of marriage which Hindu Society believes. In the play Yayati Devyani was in the well, frightened and Yayati came and pull her up with his right hand. So Devyani spoke to Yayati saying, “Sir, I am a maiden, and You have held me by my right hand. So marry with me.” Yayati also held Sharmistha’s right hand and she replied, “Sir, You are holding my right hand and I am a princess”. At last when Chitrlekha was about to swallow the poison Yayati jumps to stop her but he cannot save her: One might say that Yayati as a Drama Raja if he hold the hand to Chitrlekha. He would have to marry with her and one also thing that it is still a mystery.

A vial of lethal poison can be interpreted as a symbol of honour. This is the dowry that Sharmistha’s father gave her when she left home. Later Chitrlekha found this in the chamber and killed herself by swallowing the poison.

Pendant (Mangal Sutra) is one of the Symbols of marriage for Hindu Women – a hanging ornament or chain round the neck. Chitrlekha first found the pendant beside the leg of the bed in the chamber. It is the marriage thread of the Bharata queens.

CONCLUSION

To conclude that in 'Yayati' Girish Karnad inspires us to rethink about the myths, mythologies and symbols he has profoundly used in his plays, with the reflections of contemporary society and elements infused in them.

Karnad uses this mythical tale from Mahabharata and puts it in modern contexts because the 20th century generation does not easily relate to the Mahabharat Stories. But He with his innovative changes turns this tale into one which is highly relevant today.

The way the Karnad used his female characters for modern context just opposed the ancient time female characters who has been always oppresses by the male in a male dominance world. He showed his female characters intelligent and very practical which becomes this play a strong feminist play.

After studied this topic I found myself charmed on karnad because at the age of 22 he gave a fantastic play to the modern world. Karnad has cleverly used the symbols which made a play very beautiful.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- (1) Karnad, Girish." Yayati": New Delhi: Oxford University press , 2008.Print.
- (2) Dodiya, Jaydeepsinh."The plays of Girish Karnad": New Delhi : Prestige Books ,1999. Print.
- (3) Pauranik Katha, Part-2, Reference Book (Gujarati Version). Print.
- (4) Abraham, Jacob." A Handbook of Literary terms ":Kalyanji Publishers,Print.
- (5) Cuddon,J.A." A Dictionary of literary terms":Penguin book, 1977.print.
- (6) Dabney, Townsend." An introduction to aesthetics": Blackwell Publishers INC Usa,1997.