

MYTH AND FOLKLORE IN KARNAD'S *YAYATI*

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Abstract:

The aim of this research paper is to explore the myth and folklore in Karnad's Yayati. It highlights the beliefs, rites and rituals, customs and traditions in light of myth and folklore of Indian culture. Every culture, community or country has its own unique mythology and folklore. Indian myths and folklore are an integral part of the Indian culture.

Keywords: *Myth, Folklore, Culture, Rituals, Tradition. Decrepitude.*

Introduction

In general myth is a story concerning with religious or cultural tradition of a community and folklore is traditions and stories of the country or community. The Oral tradition was the basis of Indian culture. It consisted of history, religious practices, cosmology, rituals, folktales, proverbs, riddles, games, songs, dance, magic, epic tales, myths and narratives.

Girish Karnad uses myth not merely as ritual or a structural device. It is a means of exploring the modern outcome of a traditional situation. Karnad tries to establish a 'dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity' which is a central theme in contemporary Indian society. Karnad does not employ the myths in their entirety. He picks up threads of legends and folk tales that he finds useful. He uses his imagination to construct the plot to suit these tales.

Yayati is a famous play of Karnad which is known as best play writer of Kannada literature. He is a playwright, poet, actor, director, and translator. He is a recipient of prestigious Jnyanapith Award in 1998. His contribution to literature is a unique one because he reformed the theatrical arts and skills.

Indian myths give us an idea of how they lead their life and their views about this world, their faiths and religious rituals. It is awesome that the world of his myths and folklore is so vast that it needs a separate treatment in the form of a research work. Indian mythology and folklore is like an ocean owing to the fact that it has thousands of languages, cultures, tribes, communities and traditions. *Yayati* is the first play of Girish Karnad published in 1961. Karnad was just twenty-two years old when he presented his own interpretation of the play *Yayati*. This play established Karnad's reputation as a dramatist in Kannada literature and launched him on his celebrated career in the Indian theatre. *Yayati* has been translated into many Indian languages and has continued to be performed all over country.

The story of Yayati is originally taken from Mahabharata's 'Adiparva'. Most of character of *Yayati* is taken from original story. *Yayati* is the central character of the play and an Indian mythological king and Pooru's character is from mythology but the character of Chitrlekha and Swarnalata is created by Karnad himself. *Yayati* is based on mythology and folktales with the intention of focusing on the present social, emotional, political and psychological problems of the modern man.

Karnad *Yayati* begins with Swarnalatha complaining Devayani against Sharmishtha. Story takes turn after the entry of Sharmishtha. They recollect how they passed through and became queen of Bharath pedigree. The story line is very clear that Yayati was Bharath pedigree. Once he went to forest for hunting while returning from forest he heard a voice of a girl shouting for help whose face was covered with mud. It so happened one day that Devayani, the daughter of demons' guru Shukracharya and Sharamishtha, the

daughter of the Demon King Vrishparva goes for swimming. God Indra took the incarnation of wind and changed their clothes. With the result, Sharmishta put on Davayani's blouse. The situation grew wild as Devayani's fury knew no bounds. She admonished her saying that she should not have worn the costume of an Aryan. At this, Sharmishta was infuriated and the quarrel went to the pinnacle of abuses. She scolded her by using abusive words like "You poor people. You only have to get into a piece of Arya attire" (Karnad 20). In wrath, Sharmishta drew her to a nearby well to push her into it. It was *Yayati* who saved her. This gesture of his fascinated her. She wished to marry him. As a matter of tradition and custom, the marriage between a Kshatriya and a Brahmin was a taboo. This was the barrier for their matrimonial alliance.

There was no other way for her. She was turbulent with fury. The complaint reached her father, Shukracharya who conveyed this undesirable event to the king. His determination was that he would go away from the kingdom if Devayani was not pacified. The condition and punishment that Devayani proclaimed was that Sharmishta had to be her maid when she would get married. She agreed to her proposal.

Sharmishta is shown as her slave. Yayati was carried away with a wave of emotion to find the miserable plight of Sharmishta, a princess, in fact, and secretly married her in spite of the warning by his Father-in-Law that he should never let Sharmishta share his bed. When Shukracharya came to know this, he uttered his curse on Yayati to become an old man in the prime stage of his life. Shukracharya was so divine that he also said the only way to restore his youth that he could give his old age to someone and take their youth from him.

Yayati feels impatient and dissatisfied even after having much pleasures of life. Yayati takes the youth of Pooru, his youngest son who came to palace by marrying Chitrlekha. He doesn't understand the plight of newly wedded girl but Yayati soon realizes after the death of Chitrlekha who died by taking vial of poison because Yayati refuses to return her youthful husband and he not ready to accept her. This action made Yayati furious and alienated.

After this action of Chitrlekha, he feels cataclysmic disillusionment and loss of faith in life. His torment and burden for Pooru's youth is revealed in the following words; "Please help me, Pooru. Take back your youth. Let me turn my decrepitude into a beginning" (Karnad 69). In the end renouncing all worldly pleasures, Yayati retires to the forest for performing penance. Lastly Puru asks: "What does all this mean, O God? What does it mean?" (Karnad 69)

In fact, the mythical story of *Yayati* ends with Puru's accepting his father's curse as an obedient son. But the playwright, being an excellent craftsman, heightens the dramatic effect by introducing a remarkable character of Chitrlekha. Karnad has portrayed her so realistically that her role becomes inevitable in the play.

In this way, by using the *Yayati*-myth, Karnad has succeeded in dealing with the contemporary issues like patriarchy, man-woman relationship, caste class and gender and pervasive sense of alienation and different manifestation of human passions like love, hatred, anger, sex, sacrifice etc. Really speaking, the play succeeds in exploring the complexities of responsibilities and expectations within the Indian family. A celebrated Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar's impression of the play is worth mentioning. He writes: "When I first read *Yayati*, I was amazed. Those characters, those minds, so alive and true!" (Karnad coverpage)

Works Cited

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