

THE ASPECTS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITION OF THE MEDICAL CREEPER IN CHANDRASHEKHAR'S *MAHAMAYI*

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Indigenous knowledge refers to the unique, traditional, local knowledge, regional existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographical area. It provides recognition of common ethnic identity through historical and oral traditions. Generally, it refers to knowledge system embedded in the cultural traditions of regional, indigenous or local communities. It is also called as traditional knowledge, local knowledge used interchangeably. Of all the plays of Prof. Chandrashekhara Kambar, the two plays that stand apart from the rest are *Mahamayi* (1990) and *Sivaratri* (2011) they are exceptional.

The present study focuses on *Mahamayi*, a great play originally written in Kannada by Prof. Kambar later it has been translated into English by Prof. Laxmi Chandrashekhara. What strikes about this play is, it is an allegorical dramatization of an abstract idea about fate and human freedom. The issues it deals with are those that have rooted in indigenous knowledge of medicinal creeper and its conscious use by the protagonist and that have hunted the human mind since time immemorial.

Kambar's play adopts all the features of *Bayalata* a very popular folk performance; the use of *Sutradhara* (narrator) and induction scene, songs and dances, racy dialogue and free mix of serious and comic elements are part and parcel of his plays. These were the very features that mesmerized city audiences who had become tired of both the realistic plays and the absurd plays of the sixties. Kambar uses a myth of goddess, Shetavi Taayi (the goddess of fate) who is responsible for one's death in *Mahamayi*.

The myth through which Prof. Kambar chooses to examine these abstractions is one of deaths. Kambar doesn't make selective use of indigenous forms to explore it the genuinely integral part of the old world; his imagination and the world of his feelings are full of the goddess, ghosts and other forms of being as well as superstitions which disenchant the modern world seeks to suppress. The chief quality of the Desi imaginations is that it is not awed by the power of western forms or reasoning. Innocence becomes a state of intellectual courage as D.R. Nagaraj points out:

Kambar partly constructs his indigenous world: he creates his own readings of history, spirituality religious experiences, superstitions, a theory of art. Writers like Kambar are holistic creators. They can't remain constant simply with the act of writing plays. He has created intellectual universe successfully, he sometimes abolishes the line that separates myth from history for instance Karnad can talk about the most recent theoretical debates on language, culture, history, political theory in an eminently intelligent and informed manner. Kambar does nothing of the kind but he offers his own modes of theorizing on all these issues, leaving the listeners in his own mode of creativity. Indigenism has at once made him terribly modern. His plays are drama of the whole world coming in terms of the new" (Mavinakuli Jayaprakash (Ed) *Shivapura Kambar Namaskar*229).

In his work he exhibits exorbitant indigenous knowledge i.e., local knowledge that originated locally and naturally is a unique one to a given culture or society. It is characterized as cumulative, holistic and practice oriented. His indigenous systems of knowledge recognized the significance of other than national modes of knowing such as visions, dreams and intuition is expressed and transmitted through language,

ceremonial practices, observations, values, institutions and laws. It provides the basis for local level decision making about many fundamental aspects of day-to-day life; social changes, local medicine system, agriculture, food production etc., as matter of culture.

In Kambar's *Mahamayi* Indigenous knowledge is embedded in culture it includes both explicit and implicit knowledge. Some of it initiatively practiced through cultural and superstitious rituals. Sometimes it may not be apparent to outsiders to understand, record, interpret or apply as it with Sanjiva, the hero of the play. In *Mahamayi* the indigenous knowledge tradition is sort of specialized knowledge often which belongs to certain group or individuals as Shetavi and Sanjiva the main characters who had only diagnosing capacity and illness, Sanjiva could tell, the suffering by observing the pulse rate. It is limited to Sanjiva only.

Hence this knowledge of medicinal creepers and healing treatment of Sanjiva seemed as part of scientific knowledge. Sometimes it diminishes its breadth and value of it (science). Also, the knowledge of Sanjiva fostered the local empowerment against his mother's wish. Hence, the indigenous knowledge system becomes complex, lacks legitimacy and here it is perceived as being outside conventional scientific understanding. In this play the goddess Shetavi, the goddess of fate in folklore is described as "Goddess of Death", the Mandi has adopted, Sanjiva, an orphan, and blessed him with great medical skills and healing powers but he can save only those whom the goddess favors as it can be seen in opening scene of the Play. The patients-Madanatilaka. The court jester, Mara a grave digger and a young cowherd boy accompanied by his mother, approached him for treatment. He is moved by the mother's sorrow and wants to save the boy. When he is examining the three, the mother signals that the boy should not be cured and the other two leave. Sanjiva loves his mother but feels humiliated by the total lack of freedom and choice from which he suffers. Sanjiva's intention of the indigenous knowledge of medicinal creeper should be used by his right conscience, as it is meant for the well being of the society this made him crucial. Through Madanatilaka, Sanjiva learns that the daughter of the local king is ill with strange disease which no doctor has been able to cure. When a chance of meeting brings Sanjiva and the princess together. Sanjiva decides to offer medicine and restore the princess to health, in spite of the fact that the mother appearing as an old woman gives clear signals that she should die. This results in an open confrontation between mother and the son. The mother shows her strength by causing the death of Sanjiva's pet deer, Netravathi and later by taking away the life of Manjari, Madanatilaka's wife. When she was acting the role of Siva in a play performed to celebrate the princess recovery. Drawn by the princess's love for him and determined to preserve his human dignity, Sanjiva neglects the mother's orders that medicinal creeper tied around the princess neck rouses her fury. The play ends with mother's 'defeat' ironically brought about by her gift of an extended life span to her son which transfers to the princess. The princess is restored to life and health marries Sanjiva. However, the mother is terribly angry with her son's actions, orders him to remove the root (creeper) from the princess's neck and allows her to die as she is predestined. In the end the mother moves in such a way that the princess herself removes the creeper from her neck and dies. However, when the mother blesses her son doubling his life-span, he gives half of it to the princess and saves her. The last scene of the play shows a symbol of death. Shrieking in pain and the servant of the mother informing Sanjiva that due to mother's curse. Hence forth he will lose the power of healing anybody. Sanjiva's intention, if mother herself declares in the prologue, "Mother of all knowledge and being" how could she not know that Sanjiva would gift part of his life given to him by mother? If she knew and kept quite who should curse him? Apparently, it appears that human effort, love conquers all including death. But it should be remembered that princess's re birth is due to the indirect blessing of the mother. In that sense she doubles the life-span of Sanjiva. Then the question which comes to the forefront in this juncture is death the only ultimate truth available to man. Not exactly; it is Sanjiva's knowledge of indigenous creeper and conscious decision to give half of his life to the princess. Hence the ultimate goal of the indigenous knowledge is to make people survive and not to put an

end to their life.

The paradox of the man's freedom and pre-destination is at the center of the play and is emphasized in it. In prologue itself the mother declares: "I am the mother/final destination/of all things, moving and motionless." Then Sanjiva tells the mother that he treated the princess so that she might escape 'untimely death' mother bursts out:

"Mother: Who are you to decide, what is timely or untimely for her? Can you decide her fate/with your medicine?

Sanjiva: then my medicine is-human effort-of no consequence at all?

Mother: Truth lies too deep your knowledge, son, doesn't have the power to die so deep. To grieve for the sake of grieving is a sign of weakness-why is death, death like or birth-like-birth what is special about the princess dying? Death is a normal condition in this world" (Kambar Chandrashekhara, *Siri Sampige and other plays*170).

In spite of his mother's rebuke Sanjiva chooses to disobey her order because he knows as a man blessed with indigenous traditional knowledge, that he has to make a right choice of it and that only can made him as rational man with right conscience.

Sanjiva asserts:"I knew a moment would come when I would be compared to take a decision as a man. But I didn't think I would also have to decide to go against the mother. To marry you I must get my freedom. I am grateful to you, and princess, for making me realize how valuable, how inevitable freedom is I feel a man, who doesn't identify his freedom, creates horrible hell around him. Man's freedom lies in becoming human" (Kambara Chandrashekhara, *Siri Sampige and other Plays*181).

Accordingly, he makes the conscious choice of it and saved princess life and thus establish his human identity. While discussing the argumentative inter texture of the play in his introduction, G.S.Amur writes "The triumph of man over death has been the theme of myths all over world, though the instruments of victory have not been the same. In the *Markandeya* myth, which figures prominently as a sub theme, in *Mahamayi* for example it is Bhakti, devotion of god; in the *Savitri* myth it is Jnana, true knowledge; and in the *Hercules* myth, it is sheer physical power. *Mahamayi*; gives a new and complex twist to the theme." (Mavinakuli Jayaprakash, *Ed. A Felicitation Volume for Chandrashekhara Kambar* 223).

Besides the play gives us two perspectives-the human and the non-human, while the human leads itself to rational analysis, the non-human defies reason and intellect. Human values-pity, love, freedom, truth and creativity too these are reflected in play in a dual perspective, the human and non human. The Princess illness is a matter of sorrow and anxiety for the whole kingdom but for the Sedumari who eagerly awaits her death is totally unmoved.

Sedumari states:"I am friend of dead queen, the princess was supposing to die, today wasn't she?" (Kambara Chandrashekhara, *Siri Sampige and other plays*, 152).

Even more contrasting is the contest between Sanjiva's concern for the princess's life and the ruthless mother Shetavi. Sanjeeva's appeal to his mother is as follows.

Sanjiva:"The Princess's life is in your hands. My life is in her hands. Don't put out the light in her eyes mother?"(Kambara Chandrashekhara, *Siri Sampige and other Plays*, 171).

The true significance of *Mahamayi*; however, emerges from its fresh exploration of the human condition, of what it means to be a man in a universe controlled by forces which deny him freedom. Sanjiva, the hero of the play begins his life as an orphan, a symbolic beginning in a world without God. He is entirely the creation of the Goddess of death who paradoxically bestows on him miraculous powers of healing but denies him freedom. Sanjiva's gradual awareness of what is lacking in his life, his discovery of love and the realization of his spiritual potential constitutes the real development in the play.

It is this urge for freedom which gives him the courage to confront and defy his mother with the full knowledge of the consequences. His refusal to remove the healing creeper from princess's neck as

demanded by the mother is a symbolic act, which reveals his commitment to the purity of human life. “No man, he tells Madanatilaka, can dirty the only life he has however meaningless and miserable it may prove to be” (Mavinakuli Jayaprakash. (Ed) *A Felicitation volume for Chandrashekhara Kambara* 225). In this belief which enables him to reject the final temptation of the mother in the form of a gift of immortality. It is not without reason that Prof. Kambar calls his play after the goddess of death (Mother supreme). Sanjiva denies the power of death over life but not death itself which he accepts as a fact of the human condition.

Sanjeeva tells: “Then I give half of my remaining life to the princess she must live” (Kambara Chandrashekhara, *Siri Sampige and other Plays* 216).

Finally, it seems that though Shetavi and her indigenous knowledge tradition related to life and death of an individual is to make them aware of mundane pleasures and materialistic attitude towards the things and not life end of life itself. Indirectly she promotes Sanjiva not to become too possessive in nature and warns him to remain constant and aware of materialistic world. When he didn't heed at her inevitably, she compels princess to die. At the same time, she extends the life-span of her son (Sanjiva) and with that he gave her to restore it and got married. So whatever Shetavi and Sanjiva did in the play, and it is evident that the impact of indigenous knowledge tradition leads them to confrontation and made them to resolve it in a strange and unique way, carried out in oral tradition. Hence, the indigenous knowledge tradition of the creeper became the evolution of activities related to human will v/s death.

Works Cited

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