

# Myth and Patriarchy in Girish Karnad Play's Yayati

**Dr. Kunwar Sahab Singh**

Guest Teacher, Allahabad State University

## **Abstract:**

Girish Karnad play is the most significant playwright of post-independence literature and his plays have become a byword for Imagination and innovation. He used folktales and myths in her plays to reveal the social reality. This paper mainly approached the contemporary of Karnad's play, "*Yayati*" translated is the first dramatic venture by Girish Karnad, written first in 1961 and translated and translated by the dramatist himself into the English language in 2008. Thus, right from the beginning of his dramatic career Karnad immersed himself in Indian mythology of his motherhood and brought to life such mythical characters like Yayati on the stage with an amazing touch of contemporarily. Karnad has taken this from Mahabharata with a view to exploring the absurdity of human life with all its elemental passions and conflict, man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection, escapism from responsibilities, and self-sacrifice, dreams and desire, identity crisis, and women's predicaments. This research paper is a study of myth and patriarchy in the play of *Yayati* and reality of the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Myth, reality, feminism, selfishness, identity crisis, religion caste, existentialism, patriarchy etc.

## **Introduction:**

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 Vyas.

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 Mritasanjivani, who brought the dead back to life.

Devayani was Shukracharya's only daughter and spoiled by her father's indulgence. One morning, Shrestha, 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. The 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.

### **Myth and Patriarchal:**

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 the 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 remained 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 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 a vain effort to quench his desires by indulgence, Yayati finally came to his 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, and Sri Aurobindo. T. P. Kailasam and other. Karnad has used myths, mythologies, legends, and folktales, 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 molded 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.” (Yadav, 14). By using imagination and creativity, he has, “transformed myths and legends into a folk narrative style”. (Ramaswamy, 278).

Through the repeated use of themes 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.” (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 deal, 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, and their choices, and have great conviction. They feel no guilt or remorse. Puru considers it his duty towards his father, firmly to the dictum of Pitru Devo Bhava (father is god).

Yayati comes across as pretty straight forward when he expresses his desire to enjoy sensual pleasure. Each climax of happiness ends with sorrow that 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, which plods him to seek 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 stand on their head" (Karnad, 14). This statement of Karnad inspires us to rethink about the myths, mythologies, and folklore 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 primitive life, religion, and culture transferred to the contemporary generation through oral and written forms, also scripted in the human unconscious mind. The folkloristic tales, in the long course of time, acquired mythical dimensions.

### Conclusion:

Yayati did not gain much after being young again because he was the reason behind the death of Chitrakha, nor did Puru's old age bring him wisdom. Yayati has failed as a father and king, only to be left to face the consequences of shirking responsibility for his actions. Yayati found the true meaning of life and realized the true nature of desires. They never end. The end of one desire gives birth to another. This whirlpool goes on till the end of time. Humans are a unique species. They always long for something more, even when they have everything they need. When Yayati realized all this, he renounced everything to adopt the status of vanaprastha or forest dweller. Puru is still lost in the whirlpool of ideas and seeks to find a way out.

Thus, the play portrays the philosophy of existentialism in the myth of Yayati and Puru, but then it is highly relevant in modern men's lives. The message is that one cannot outturn his duty, and things cannot be solved by luck, or exchanges cannot alter destiny. Also, we cannot get away from the consequences of our actions or put them on some other person. Yayati is in many ways a reminder to the modern youth to bear the responsibility that the world has put on wrong notions like King Yayati, the end would be the same as the king. Freedom is a way very costly thing; it is said that cheap people cannot afford it.

### Work Cited:

1. Balakrishna, Sandeep. "Karnad Caricatures Yayati in the Black Hole of Existentialism". *The Dharma Dispatch*
2. Khursheed, Bisma. "Existentialism is the play of Girish Karnad." *Academicresearch Journals (2016):4*.
3. Gupta, Nisha. "Existence V/S Essence: An Existential." *Remarking An Analisation (2019)*.
4. *The Distilled Essence of the Mahabharata: Dr. S. R. Ramaswamy: Kantasakti*, the Commemorative Volume on Umakanth Bhat (pp. 91-104). Translated by Sandeep Balakrishna