

## **Treatment of Myth In Yayati**

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**ABSTRACT:** Girish Karnad, a popular playwrights, scriptwriter, actor, director and reception of various awards, is a significant name in the Indian literary scenario. Karnad established himself as a noted and talented dramatist after the publication of *Yayati* (1961) and *Tughlaq*(1964). Karnad being a translator, his translations sparkle with ‘eye catching’ novelty and he peculiarises the trends from mythology or from history. The modern dramatists have successfully made use of such modes and myths. In the Indian theater tradition there has been a strong impact of mythology and history though it has not produced anything of permanent worth. Karnad was aware that this tradition has a tremendous potential, as the elements of myth and history are very common to Indian audiences. So Karnad makes use of such myths and legends as metaphors for contemporary situations and this has induced to make a study of his play – “YAYATI”.

**KEY WORDS:** Myth, fantasy, contemporary relevance, absurdity of modern life.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Any traditional tale is likely to present a combination of reality and fantasy. Drama, one among the literary genres, pleases all men with an infinite variety of taste. It is considered to be a common entertainment for people of different tastes. Its power is that it lives in the borderline between fantasy and reality. G.S.Kirk opines, “Myth seems to possess essential properties like their fantasy, their freedom to develop and their complex structure” (25). One of the reasons for the invention of tales and myths is that they act as a vehicle for relieving boredom. They are sought by people all over the world and at all times, not only in modern western culture. This is often masked as something that seems more worthy.

### **II. MYTHOLOGY**

Myth is imaginative and it is defined as that which has no real existence. It is an anonymous story rooted in primitive beliefs. Myths are the tales that have been passed on from one generation to another and they have become traditional.

Indra Nath Chouduri affirms that “... myths are one of the segment which serve to determine the Indianness in our literature”(22). The inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends that pattern and define our culture offers immense scope for the dramatist. The myth is neither tragic nor comic; it is only a perfect vehicle of embodying reality. It is a mode for expressing reality and it is logical and concrete. They represent the collective unconscious of a society. As Naik says, “... if the playwright in English has neglected myth, he has likewise failed to make full creative use of his extremely complex historical heritage.” (190).

### **INDIAN MYTH – SCOPE FOR DRAMATIST**

The inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends that pattern and define our culture offers immense scope for the Indian dramatists as Harry Levin’s says, “Myth, at all events, is raw material, which can be the stuff of literature” (229-230). Our early playwrights writing in English like Sri Aurobindo and Kailasam selected their themes from the myths and legends of Indian Literature. Though Karnad’s themes appear to build castles in the air, he took refuge in the myths and legends and made them the vehicle of a new vision. A vigorous vitality that combs the past for apt myths to analyze the present has been the hallmark of Girish Karnad, the pre-eminent Indian playwright in the Kannada language. Karnad’s creative genius lies in taking up fragments of historical-legendary experience and fusing them into a forceful statement. By using the ‘grammar of literary archetype’, Karnad links the past and the present, the archetypal and the real. Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past, giving new meanings and insights reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an internal part of cultural consciousness of the land, with different meanings and it reflects the contemporary issues. Karnad believes in the Jungian collective racial consciousness and so turns to the past

habitually for the source materials. As Clyde Kluckhohn says, the borrowed myths are “reinterpreted to fit pre-existing cultural emphasis” (58). All his plays are literary excavations of the Indian collective past – the racial, mythical, legendary and the historical and they have a strong contemporary relevance.

#### **MYTH – A TOOL TO REVEAL THE ABSURDITY OF LIFE**

By using these myths he tried to reveal the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man’s eternal struggle to achieve Perfection. According to Sinha, “Girish Karnad’s art can be described as a vision of reality” (123). So, Karnad delves deep into the traditional myths to spell modern man’s anguish and dilemmas that are created in his mind. Karnad does not take the myths in their entirety, he takes only fragments that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination to make his plots interesting. His interest was not in recreating old myths and legends but in representing them to suit his artistic purpose.

Gifted playwrights have discovered source materials from myths and legends and have employed them creatively. Realism in drama was a totally new concept and it was alien to theatrical conventions. Myths and legends serve as a surrogate for Karnad’s plays. When Karnad was asked the reason for his handling of myths and legends, he replied that his sole purpose was to narrate the particular story effectively and so, “the borrowed tales are given a turn of the screw, as it were, which works wonders with his plays” (Chakravartee 36). All his plays right from Yayati to Tale-Danda have a story line with which his audience is more or less familiar. Karnad’s handling of the sources of his plot in the plays makes it abundantly clear that his interpretation of the ancient Indian history not only differs substantially from his originals but also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with a new meaning which has an urgent relevance to present day thinking about man and his world.

#### **YAYATI**

His first play Yayati, which was a major success on the stage, he borrowed the myth partially from Mahabharata and other Puranas. In the Mahabharata, Yayati was one of the six sons of King Nahusha. Devayani, whose love for Kacha remained unrequited, marries Yayati to spite Sharmishta for whom she nurses a childhood jealousy. Sharmishta 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, Devayani brings a curse of old age upon him. Yayati, blinded by his insatiable thirst for sensual pleasure, dreads old age. Puru, Sharmishta’s son offers to exchange his youth for the age of his father. Enlightened at the end, Yayati gives up the throne and retires to forest to lead a life of renunciation with Devayani and Sharmishta.

#### **MYTH – EXPOSE ABSURDITY OF MODERN LIFE**

Girish Karnad 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 Mahabharata Yayati recognizes the nature of desire itself and realizes that fulfillment does not diminish or end the sexual desires. In Karnad’s play, however, Yayati recognizes 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 seems to have used this myth with a view to exposing the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts, and also to show man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. His Yayati, on the one hand, rejects passionate attachment to sensual pleasures to which the King is a slave and on the other hand, pleads for a life of responsibilities and self-sacrifice as represented by the King’s son Puru in the play. Chitralkha’s proposal to Yayati, who has become young by exchange of ages, to accept her may be a test to Yayati’s sensuality on the one hand and on the other hand it may be Chitralkha’s own selfishness. Thus Karnad’s Yayati successfully conveys his message of disapproval of improper sensuality as well as performance of duty and acceptance of responsibility. Karnad’s handling of the sources in the plot makes it abundantly clear that his interpretation of the ancient Indian story not only differs substantially from the originals but also indicates a bold attempt at investing an old legend with a new meaning, which is quite relevant to present day thinking about man and his universe. Ramasamy compliments Karnad as follows:

Talking of myths and legends, the one modern English playwright who has used them with imagination and creativity resulting in stage-worthy plays 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. (278)

A theatre is a place where the spectators are transformed into a magic world, and so there is an extensive use of songs, dance and mask in his plays for spectacular effect. When Shukracharya curses Yayati of old age, he accuses Sharmishta and loses hope over his sons. It is a fantasy that Puru comes back and informs that Yayati’s curse can be redeemed if some young person exchanged his old age and the decrepitude it brings. In reality nobody will opt to accept the burden of old age but, quite unbelievably, his son Puru willingly comes

forward to exchange his youth. After the exchange, Puru starts feeling weak and is about to fall when Sharmistha holds him. Ultimately Yayati succeeds in transforming his old age and his sins to Puru. When Sharmistha tells Chitrlekha the news that Puru has accepted his father's old age, though she gets absolutely stunned, courageously she declares that she is lucky to be honored. When Puru wants her to support him for the responsibility he has undertaken she gladly extends a helping hand. It is a fantasy that so far she is not able to realize the reality but only after seeing his face she understands the misfortune which has befallen her. She gets scared and tells him not to touch her or even come near her. Finally she requests Puru to reconsider his decision but to no avail. Though women are held compactly by the patriarchal society, she does not accept her husband's sacrifice of his youth in the name of filial loyalty. All this could never happen in reality. Karnad breathes into the mythical story a new consciousness, which is contemporary and highly imaginative.

### III. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Karnad has dramatized the myth of Yayati in his play Yayati with the specific purpose of glorifying the existential philosophy of the performance of duty and acceptance of responsibilities. Thus myths constitute the major theatre idiom of Karnad -the myth of Yayati in the play of the same name. In fact Karnad has taken this leap in order to provide new meaning to the myths and legends and has examined them from the vantage point of the present.

Karnad himself has justified that he has gone back to the old myths, histories and oral tales not because he does not have an amazing inventive power, but because they are very much relevant even in the present context. Thus, "Karnad's use of myth to deal with a theme which has a striking contemporary relevance is wholly authentic and salutary and has the weight of experiment successfully made in contemporary world literature" (Devindra Kohli 15). The purpose of drama is solely to depict the life of the whole universe and Girish Karnad through the element of myth has effectively portrayed the contemporary world making his portrayal universally appealing. There is no wonder that he has been hailed as one of the most appealing and successful dramatist of the contemporary Indian theatre.

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