

Yayati: Myth or Reality

Akanksha Deep Inder Kaur Watts

Department of Language and Literature,
Jaipur National University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Received Sept. 30, 2017

Accepted Nov. 12, 2017

ABSTRACT

Like American Literature, Canadian Literature and Australian Literature, Indian Literature in English has attained very important place in World Literature. In the Ancient Literature writer presented himself through myth and mythical representation, a colorful world where God and men coexisted. Though, modern era is being dominated by realism yet many writers have return about classical myths. Where we can co-relate mythical stories with present era (Kalyug) where Karnad talks about the absurdity, responsibility, self-sacrifice, dreams and desire and many other things. As a true Indian writer he has returned to the past mythical, historical and oral tales. The Mahabharata is a source for play Yayati. This paper is an approach towards the reality of life. It focuses on the various characters' personality by the help of Freud's-psycho sexual development & the Oedipus complex.

Keyword: Yayati, myth, reality, dreams and desires, religion.

Introduction:-

This study focuses on purposes of life which is mainly based upon pleasure principle. This principle dominates the human mind throughout the life. According to Freud's theory, the mind consisted of conscious and unconscious behavior.

Girish Karnad takes up the theme of psycho sexual development. Freud postulated that as a human being we move through various stages based upon different zones. Freud argue that if the development of an individual follows the paradigmatic chain then the development of healthy personality takes place, If not, then leads to unhealthy, fixated personality as an adult. This paper mainly focuses on the development of the human mind through the series of stages.

Introduction to Freud story:

"My life is interesting only if it is related to psycho analysis" (Freud, 1884).

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist born on sixth May 1856 in a small town named Freiberg, Moravia (now the Czech Republic). In 1923 Freud published *The ego and the Id* revising the structural make up of the mind, and continue to the work passionately during the period of developing his ideas.

Freud takes on the development of the personality (psyche). It is the stage theory which is based upon the development of the human being. The different stages are: Oral, Anal, Phallic (Oedipus complex), Latency, Genital. Freud believes that the individual's life is based upon two principal. The pleasure principal is one where all our acts are governed by the need to attain pleasure. The reality principal enables us to understand that our pleasures cannot be fulfilled the way we want therefore it inspire us to seek other ways of attaining pleasure.

Freud purposed that the human psyche could be divided into three parts: Id, ego and super ego. Freud discussed this model in 1920 in an essay "*Beyond the pleasure principal*" and elaborated upon it in the "*The ego and the edge*"(1923).

Introduction to Girish Karnad:

Girish Karnad (1938-) is regarded as one of the great contemporary Indian writer. His plays became a byword for imagination and innovation. He wrote his place in Kannada formerly and later on himself, he translated them into English. Karnad approach to myths, taken mainly from the great epic, *The Mahabharata* and *The Kathasaritsagra*, is modern. He brings out the subtle distinctions between the male and the female concerned regarding their identity and behavior. His plays question the Patriarchal ideology of Indian society. He uses mythically episode in his plays and aims at using them for social, religious and philosophical purpose.

Introduction to Yayati as modern text:

Karnad has given to this traditional tale "Yayati" a new meaning and significance highly relevant in the context of today's life. According to epic Mahabharata, Yayati is mentioned in chapters 75 to 93 of Adi Parvah. It was Karnad's first attempt at reworking a myth. King Yayati was tenth in the line of Brahma's family. The major characters in the play are: Sharmishtha, Devayani, Yayati, Pooru and Chitrlekha belong to different races namely The Rakshasa, Aryan, Brahmin and Kshatriya respectively.

Yayati's story begins with his wife, Devayani, the daughter of Shukracharya, the guru of Asuras. Before the marriage Devayani and Sharmishtha, the daughter of Demon king, Vishaparva, went on the river bank for bath. Suddenly a strong wind started blowing and quickly came out of the river and put on their cloths. By mistake Sharmishtha wore Devayani's cloth and they started fighting. Sharmishtha pushed Devayani into the river and went away. Fortunately king Yayati was passing by, helped her to come out of the river by holding her right hand, accidentally (according to Hindu mythology, if a man holds the right hand of a lady it means that he is infatuated towards that lady). Devayani was drawn towards Yayati since this moment. And Shukracharya punished Sharmishtha for the deed by making her a lifelong servant of his beloved daughter. Devayani later, offered to marry Yayati, who being a Kshatriya, showed in ability to marry, because she was the daughter of a Brahmin, Shukracharya. However, Shukracharya agreed to make an exception to the Pratiloma rule. As dowry he gave away Sharmishtha. Yayati has married Devayani in the hope of the securing immortality from Shukracharya.

Sharmishtha develops secret relationship with Yayati who on the revelation of the relationship is cursed by Shukracharya with old age. Yayati doesn't want to accept this premature old age. Sharmishtha advises Yayati to become a hermit and lead his rest of his life with her in the forest. As Shukracharya requested to take back his word, but it was next to impossible. Shukracharya suggested that curse can be taken by someone. Yayati requested to people of his kingdom to his old days but no one agreed. In the end, Pooru comes forward to accept the king's curse though he was recently married. Then Chitrlekha, Pooru's wife comes to know this transfer of old age, she feel proud later she was not able to accept this fact. She even goes to Yayati and offers herself to him. Being her father in-law Yayati accuses her having such low thoughts and refuses to accept her. She questions Yayati about her existence in the palace. Ultimately takes poison and puts an end to her life. Chitrlekha's suicide opens the eyes of Yayati and he returns the youth of Pooru to him and retire into the forest as a hermit.

Analysis:

To understand the participation of Yayati and his performance, one gets to read Freud's *-psychosexual & Oedipus complex*. Freud says, what decides the purpose of life is based upon the pleasure principle. This principle dominates the mental apparatus. In the case of King Yayati, the id seems to be more active than ego or superego. The id is the only component of personality that is present from birth. The Authentic 'I' is powerful in case of King Yayati, the Kshatriya ruler who believed to have kept his people happy and managed matters well, but in reality it was not so. Queen usually shares the throne of the king but does not seem to have any powers.

Yayati knows that his problems are due to the presence of Sharmishtha in the palace, but he does not intend to send her away. Even Devayani does not do so. The crisis in his life is precipitated when he refuses to part with Sharmishtha. Devayani after a period of time does not want her in the palace, but Yayati does not agree to this. The long awaited revenge is put to trial by Sharmishtha with Yayati. The main aim of Sharmishtha is to get into contact with the king. She deliberately developed hatred among everyone in the palace, so that none could argue with her. Sharmishtha became the talk of the palace. Now her argument with the queen brought her very closer to the king. Their encounter proved to be fortunate for Sharmishtha and unfortunate for Devayani. It did not end the conflict. But ultimately she falls prey to marginality.

Swarnalata: That spiteful whore – I would have torn her hair out if you hadn't stopped me. Taught that fiend a proper lesson. The rakshasi. You heard us, madam. The nasty jibes. They are too horrible to think. She didn't even spare His Majesty. I...I can't bear it.(7)

Sharmishtha has been cursing everyone including the king. The news reaches Yayati's ears and he wanted to settle the matter as his son and newlywed bride were on the way to the royal palace. Yayati calls for Sharmishtha and sends Devayani and the servant out of the chamber to have a secret meeting of enquiry. Devayani's mistake lies in leaving Yayati and Sharmishtha alone. This forms the greatest opportunity for the salve to take over the king. Sharmishtha felt this as the right opportunity to sow the seed of reprisal. She explains to Yayati what was shadowed by Devayani. Sharmishtha reopens the plot of Devayani's marriage to Yayati.

Sharmishtha: Please, Sir, bear with me. If those words had come from anyone else, I would have brushed them aside. I was used to worse. But Devayani my-Devayani to whom I had dedicated myself! My mind froze. I watched myself, like in a dream straining to stop myself but powerless to do so, as I got up and grabbed her long loose hair. I twisted the strands round my hand and pulled her up. And as she screamed and thrashed about, I dragged her to a well nearby and pushed her in. And I stood there and watched, as she crashed through the brambles that filled the well. The world

knows I threw her into a empty well, But not that I was sitting there, for I don't know how long ,racked with sobs. Does that surprise you, Sir? I do have tears in my eyes. But the world only cares for the embers there. (20)

Sharmishtha tactfully thanks Yayati for listening to her sad story and immediately shows him the vial of lethal poison she has been carrying with her. She intended to bring the game to an end by ending her life. She is about to drink the vial of poison. Yayati unconditionally tries to stop her by holding her right hand. He commits the same mistake once again. Sharmishtha reacts and says 'Sir, you are holding my right hand. And I am a princess'.

Yayati: Because I feel bewitched by her. Even now, at this moment, I want her. I have never felt so entranced by a woman. What is it? Is it some spell she has cast? Some secret sorcery? I can feel youth bursting out within me again. Her beauty, her intelligence, her wit, her abandon in love. Not to marry her is to lose her, don't you see? I must have her (30).

Sharmishtha's position was misfortunate, but she was intelligent enough to tackle the situation. This is the point Sharmishtha stresses to win over the King and ruin the life of Devayani. Sharmishtha leaves an open statement that it was for him to seize the initiative to seek on revenge Devayani for trapping him. Sharmishtha knows the reality though she acted as a gatekeeper oh Id throughout her life.

Sharmishtha: Me his concubine? You must be jocking. Yes, I got him into bed with me. That was my revenge on you. After all, as a slave, what weapon did I have but my body? Well, I am even with you now. And I am free. I shall go where I please. (29)

Sailing in the same boat, Yayati opens his heart and tells Devayani that her position as a queen is not in danger with the presence of Sharmishtha. She will be the Senior Queen and be on his side on all public ceremonies. Moreover, Sharmishtha can never be a threat to Devayani because of her race. Yayati also tells the audience about Sharmishtha's undeniable beauty.

In the due course, Devayani becomes marginalized and factor of super-ego arrised in her where Sharmishtha becomes liberated. Yayati's speech reveals his defeat in front of Sharmishtha. The king now brings out his desire to have another wife. Devayani comes to know that Yayati has not solved Sharmishtha's issue but has cultivated more. She refuses to accept the new position given to her slave. Sharmishtha is a great defeat for Devayani.

She leaves the palace and goes to Shukracharya. After hearing the news of his daughter and son in law, he gets into a hot rage. He curses Yayati to attain old age at sun set. The king is upset, none comes to his rescue.

On seeing me even my son spits fire. Would he try to save me from the curse? No, I myself should go, I should go and meet Shukracharya (49)

Yayati loses control and does not know how to handle the situation. Sharmishtha asks him to accept old age. Yayati gets violent and remains adamant .When Pooru comes back to inform him that the curse can be redeemed if some young person accepted the old age, Yayati is jubilant. Yayati immediately orders Pooru to arrange a meeting to tell the matter to his pupil, so that someone would take his old age and transfer youth hood to him. He feels very hurt when no one comes forward to take upon the curse. He is ready to give whatever one wants in return.

The last son Pooru agrees to exchange his youth with the king. Pooru proposes the curse given to Yayati should be transferred to him. Sharmishtha tries to dissuade him saying that the pride of sacrifice is also a kind of poison. She also reminds him about his responsibility towards his wife, but Pooru does not listen to all this.

Chitrlekha says,

I thought he was an ordinary man. What a fool I have been! How utterly blind! I am the chosen one and I ...which other woman has been so blessed? Why should I shed tears? (56)

Pooru did not consult his wife, regarding his decision. Initially, she was excited and thought himself of saving the kingdom. Very soon Pooru comes and enters into the nuptial chamber. His face could not be seen in the dark. He explains to her that it was not an ordinary old age. It was the sum total of his father's transgression and the burden of the whole dynasty. She answers that it was really her good fortune and he does not have to explain anything to her. She was actually privileged. Pooru wants her support for the responsibility he has undertaken. Chitrlekha gladly extends her support. At this point of hour, Chitrlekha just wishes to take the ritual of aarati. Chitrlekha has not seen his old husband's face yet. Pooru immediately agrees. Chitrlekha takes aarathi closer to his face and moves it in a circular form. The flames

cast their light upon his face. His withered face looks even more terrified in the dim light. She screams and drops the dim light to the ground. She instantly orders him to get out of the chamber and never to come back again. Chitralkha realizes what has befallen. Yayati comes with his ever youth progression to see the newly wedded bride and groom in their chamber. He is shocked to see Pooru outside the chamber. He comes to know the disapproval of Chitralkha. Yayati tries to convince Chitralkha that it's all a part of the royal game and she must be proud to possess such a husband.

Yayati questions the vows taken in front of spiritual fire. He emphasizes that a good wife must follow him, whether home or forest. She ironically remarks that he has forgotten to mention one thing that she should follow him to his pyre also. This annoys Yayati and he rebukes Chitralkha for wishing death for her husband.

Chitralkha puts a proposal before Yayati. She should like Yayati to take the place of Pooru in her life so that she can bear a child of the family. Yayati stood speechless, but did not lose his hope to convince him.

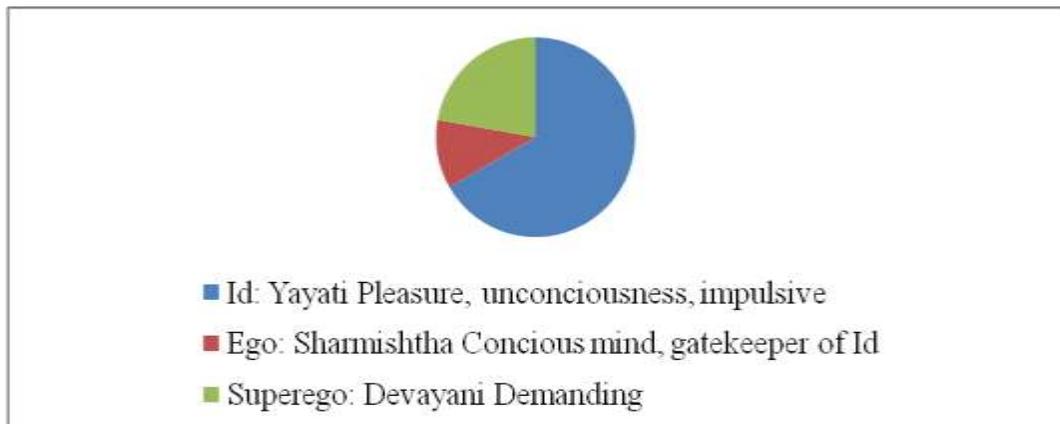
Chitralkha: Oh, come, sir. These are trite considerations. We have to rise above such trivialities. We have to be superhuman. Nothing like this has ever happened before. Nothing like this is likely to...It is a part of the sacrifice we all have to make. Your Majesty would say that this sacrifice measures up to the demand? (66)

She instantly takes the vial of poison misplaced by Sharmishtha and avails to drink it. Yayati moves forward and grabs her hand and he himself stands horrified. His mask is torn into pieces. Does he not know the difference between a wife and a daughter in law? goes the question. He holds Chitralkha by his right hand. Chitralkha smiles defiantly, swallow poison and collapses. Yayati understands his offence, calls Pooru and re-exchanges his old age. It is all too late to lead a life with his wife. Pooru rules the kingdom and is hailed as a philosophical king.

The character of Chitralkha as already said is Karnad's creation. Through her, Karnad explores the futility of being born as a princess finding reality too much to bear. Karnad alters Yayati's character. Equally, he casts Pooru as a conflict torn drama protagonist. In this play, Karnad's Pooru vacillates between his desire to reclaim his youth and fulfill his duty as a son.

Conclusion:

As we have observed that king Yayati has all the factors of Id likewise is the condition of today's men. He also craves for aristocratic life. Most of today's men run after the same aspect of life-money, power and class. So it's the *Reality* of life.



References:

1. Baskaran, G. Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani: methods and motives. Jaipur: Yking books, 2012. Print
2. Kosta, Abhishek. The Plays of Girish Karnad: a study in Myths and Gender. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) LTD, 2012. Print.
3. Karnad, Girish 2008 Yayati. New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2005. Print.
4. Nayak, Bhagabat. Girish Karnad's Plays: archetypal and aesthetical presentations. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2011. Print.
5. Saini, Alpna. Subjectivity as a locus of conflicts in Girish Karnad: a discussion of his plays. Germany: LAP Lambert academic publishing, 2012. Print.
6. Thakar, Rishi. Indian sensibility in Girish Karnad's select plays. Germany: lap lambert academic publishing, 2015. Print.