



HUMAN FRAILTY AND DIVINE GRACE IN THE PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD

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ABSTRACT

Yayati has been obsessed with sensual pleasures, shuns responsibility as ruler to his subjects, as husband to his wife and as father to his son. He searches his identity in evanescent worldly pleasures and does not learn from his errors. He ultimately suffers. His wife Devayani also shirks responsibility and comes to grief. Sharmishtha and her son realize their responsibilities and sincerely perform their duties. Yayati is an existential play on the theme of responsibility and human relationship. It is also a reflection on the condition of modern man, whose mind, disturbed by many worldly and sensuous passions, has turned into a veritable zoo inhabited by wild desires, sensual pleasures, and irresponsible exercise of power and utter forgetfulness of the imperishable values of life. The modern man is in no way better than Yayati. Karnad's famous play *The Fire and the Rain* is based on a popular myth from the Mahabharat.

Key words: frailty, Devine, grace, literature, culture etc

The execution of the play *The Fire and the Rain*, is concentrate approximately a seven-year extended fire forfeit deliberate to plead with the God to propel the rainfall. Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain*, one of the prominent plays written in Kannada in 1995. It was immediately transcribed into English for a workshop with professional actors at Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, U.S.A. Girish Karnad also worked with professional. American actors at the Guthrie Garland Wright, Artistic Director of the Theatre, who had also directed *Naga-mandala*, and Madeline Puzo supervised the entire project.

The production at Guthrie could not materialize because Garland Wright left the theatre. It was translated into Hindi. *Agni Mattu Male* was remarkably performed in Kannada, Hindi and English versions. It has chalked up perhaps the most extraordinary performance record and range of reader responses among Karnad's plays. Its Hindi translation, entitled *Agni Aur Varkha* was performed for the National School of Drama Repertory Company. Arjun Sanjani produced the play, as a commercial Hindi film under the title *Agnivarsha*. He did his best to retain the original dialogues and incidents in the film. Sanjani writes: It was the script of *The Fire and the Rain* that was most inspiring. It is something I found extremely powerful, contemporary in approach and set in the Vedic times and is a prime example of Indian thinking and Indian cultural ethics! Source The theme of *The Fire and the Rain* has been derived from the Vana Parva (Forest) of the Mahabharat. The myth of Yavakri occurs in Chapters (135-38) of the Vana-Parva.

Sage Lamsha narrates it to Pandavas during their exile. Karnad "first came across the story of Yavakri and Parvasu, while still in college, in C. Rajgopalachari's *The Fire and the Rain* abridgement of the Mahabharat that Rajaji, confronted with the stupendous task of abridging the world's longest epic to about four hundred pages, should not have discarded this seemingly peripheral tale is a tribute to his sensitivity and judgement."1 Karnad adds : "It was fortunate for me that Karnad did not do so, for the moment's read the tale, I knew it had to be turned into a play. For the next thirty-seven years, I struggled with it, trying to fit all the ramifications of myth within some sort of a manageable shape" (2). The dramatist acknowledges his debt to Arunacharya Katti of Dharwar, a purohit, who explained to him the importance of Yajna. The theme of the play deals with the misapplication of knowledge and spiritual powers that human beings receive from the gods after great penance. Yavakri, the son of sage Bhardwaj, acquires the knowledge of the Vedas from Indra after undergoing penance for ten years.

He misuses this divine knowledge to take revenge on Raibhya, an intimate friend of his father. Both Bhardwaj and Raibhya are learned and are endowed with spiritual powers. Yavakri, Bhardwaj's son, nurses a grievance against all for he feels that his father does not receive the respect and recognition which he deserves. Bhardwaj cautions his son Yavakri against the misuse of knowledge. His fears prove well founded. To him knowledge is the instrument for taking revenge. They first think that Yavakri does is to corner Vishakha, Raibhya's daughter- in-law and he molests her. Raibhya also takes revenge on Yavakri. He creates a demon, a Brahma Rakshasa, and a spirit resembling Vishakha and sends them to kill Yavakri. The death of Yavakri makes Bhardwaj to curse Raibhya that he will be killed by his own son. Bhardwaj kills himself in remorse. Raibhya's eldest son, Parvasu, mistakes the deerskin, his father is wearing, for a wild animal and kills him.

Parvasu, a learned man, also misuses his knowledge and he falsely accuses his elder brother, Arvasu of patricide and Brahminicide. Arvasu begins his own penance and worships the Sun God for attaining knowledge and enlightenment. The Sun God grants him a boon. Arvasu asks the Sun God to restore Yavakri, Bhardwaj and Raibhya to life. They come to life and Parvasu forgets his evil act. When Yavakri comes to life, the gods reprimand him for his folly and ask him to follow knowledge in the right spirit. Girish Karnad introduces some significant changes in this story from the Mahabharata in order to impart dramatic effectiveness to the theme. In *The Fire and the Rain*, Yavakri and Vishakha have been intimate lovers. Their love relationship both precedes and follows Vishakha's marriage to Parvasu. This is a deviation from the Mahabharata. She, therefore, is not a passive object of Yavakri's lust. In *Fire and the Rain* Yavakri does not molest her but coaxes her to have consensual sex with him. She agrees to it and says :- "I'll give you the knowledge Indra's couldn't give you." (9) Then, they go behind a dry tree on the bank to consummate sex. At least Yavakri was warm, gentle. For a few minutes he made me forget the wizened body, the scratchy claws, and the blood, cold as ice. Bhargava Dharwadkar writes : I let marriage itself appears to be an arid contract : after a frenzy of sexual gratification. Parvasu has abandoned Vishakha to Raibhya's care, and the relationships between the three are startling in their loveliness and malevolence.

In *The Fire and the Rain* Bhardwaj and Raibhya are presented as brothers and not as friends. Karnad gives this twist to the original theme in the Mahabharat in order to intensify treachery and deceitfulness between two highly learned brothers and their families. In the Mahabharata Parvasu kills his father Raibhya out of ignorance. In *The Fire and the Rain* he deliberately kills him out of deep rooted hatred. Arvasu sees signs of life in brutally wounded Raibhya: "Is he alright? We must do something. He may still be alive. There. His eye lids they're moving. Let's move him to" Parvasu slaps him and declares him dead. Parvasu hates Raibhya from the very depth of his heart and does not want to see him alive. He says to Arvasu : "Stop it. Don't be a child. There's no time to howl and wail now." Parvasu is 'NO' deceitful and treacherous that he holds Arvasu responsible for Raibhya's death (39). Karnad adroitly invents the story of Arvasu's intimate relationships with the tribal girl, Nittilai, in order to counter the superiority of Brahminism, which is represented by Raibhaya, Parvasu and Yavakri.

Arvasu is the antithesis of the Brahminical order which believes in the display of erudition, austerities and penance but in reality, indulges in jealousy, revenge, fornication, sexuality and deceitfulness. The tribal social order, on the other hand, is liberal and frank but mistrusts the Brahminical order. Nittilai asks Arvasu. "But what I want to know is why are the Brahmins so secretive about everything." (45) This is a bitter comment on the Brahminical order. Commenting on the tribal order she says: "Look at my people. Everything is done in public view there." Dharmadkar says : As an actor and as Nittilai's lover, Arvasu counterpoints the Brahminism and

asceticism of the other male characters, and enables Karnad to systematically contrast the life of discipline and sacrifice with the life of instinct and emotion" (2). The play within play in the Epilogue of *The Fire and the Rain* is also Karnad's creation. It has been included to emphasize the devastation caused by jealousy and treachery in familial relationship.

On the celestial plane Indra betrays and kills his brother Vishwarupa, and humiliates Vritra. On the worldly plane Parvasu betrays his younger brother, Arvasu and indicts him of patricide with the Treatment of Myth Girish Karnad structures his plays *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga Mandala* and *The Fire and the Rain* on myths, derived from various sources. The plot of *The Fire and the Rain* is based on the myth of Yavakri in the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. Karnad has introduced many changes in the original myth in The Mahabharata in order to create dramatic effectiveness and to reinterpret it in the modern context.

The basic frame work of the myth has been changed but the basic nature and atmosphere of the myth remain the same as in the original. The myth of Yavakri in *The Fire and the Rain* has been interpreted on many planes. Dharwadkar says : In his elaboration of the myth, Karnad forges closer connections between the principal characters, gives them rounded personalities, and inserts an unambiguous intentionality into their actions. Vishakha's marriage with Parvasu is not a union of two souls and hearts but is a means of sexual gratification. For a year their married life was a bliss but after that "happiness receded into background". She says to Yavakri : "His used my body, and his own body, like an experimenter, an explorer.

Shame died in me. And I yielded Alone, I have become dry like a tender. Ready to burst into flames at a breath"(67). When Parvasu goes to act as the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice, he leaves her to the guardianship of his father, Raibhya, a lustful old man, who sexually assaults her in his son's long absence. The relationship between father and son, brother and brother, husband and wife is complex.

The myth of Yavakri also exposes the dangers of the misuse of knowledge for realising personal ambitions and for taking revenge. The misuse of knowledge boomerangs on the evil doer. Yavakri attains knowledge to destroy the happiness and reputation of Raibhya and his son, Parvasu. He says to Vishakha : One night in the jungle, Indra came to me and said : "You are ready now to receive knowledge. But knowledge involves control of passions, serenity and objectivity". And I shouted back: "No, that' not knowledge! That's not knowledge! That's suicide I want knowledge so I would be vicious, destructive (39). The basic framework of the myth has been changed but the basic nature and atmosphere of the myth remain the same as in the original. The myth of Yavakri in *The Fire and the Rain* has been interpreted on many planes. Dharwadkar says: In his elaboration of the myth, Karnad forges closer connections between the principal characters, gives them rounded personalities, and inserts an unambiguous intentionality into their actions (1).

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Karnad interprets the myth to emphasis that knowledge without love, compassion, social welfare, understanding and humanity on result in inflated egos, jealousy and destruction loar acterisation Characters are well-portrayed. Karnad has created complex and multi-dimensional characters in *The Fire and the Rain*. Yavakri is depicted with precision, minuteness and depth. He is learned but revengeful. He feels that his father a highly learned sage, is humiliated his brother Raibhya and his son Parvasu. He burns with revenge. He needs knowledge for taking revenge. So, he goes to the forest to perform austerities and penance for ten long years. One-night Indra confers knowledge on him. He misuses it for taking revenge on Raibhya and Parvasu. He fornicates Vishakha and invites Raibhya's wrath. He takes the help of supernatural agency and gets him killed. Raibhya, who is also a learned sage, pretends to be moral and spiritual. He is an adulterous hypocrite who molests his daughter-in- law, Vishakha, day after day in the absence of her husband. He too misuses his knowledge.

Raibhya's eldest son Parvasu acts as the Chief Priest in the fire sacrifice. He is learned. He is well versed with the Vedas and has ample knowledge of religion he is proud of his Brahminhood. He is intentionally mean and malicious, and misuses his knowledge for the fulfilment of his selfish motives. His married life with Vishakha is arid and joyless. He violates the sanctity of married life. On the wedding night he assured his wife, Vishakha, that he would make her happy only for a year and after a year happiness vanished from their life. Parvasu began using his body and Vishakha's body as "an experimenter" and as "an explorer". He intentionally kills his own father, Raibhya and accuses his younger brother, Arvasu for patricide and compels him to observe penance and atonement for the death of their father, a Brahmin.

During the fire ceremony he insults and humiliates Arvasu and provokes the royal guards to

throw him out of the sacred precincts and beat him fatally. At last, he is consumed in fire, which is his expiation for the crimes he has committed. Arvasu is a fascinating character in the play, *The Fire and the Rain*. Although he is not erudite like his father and brother, he is proud and arrogant like them. He has a heart of gold. He is not very proud for his brahmin status and even he falls in love with Nittilai, a tribal girl, and renounces his caste for her sake. He joins the troupe of actors because he is fond of singing and acting. The profession of acting was reserved in those days for low castes. He is a silent sufferer. He owns the responsibility of patricide, an abject crime which his brother, Paravasu committed. Arvasu assumes a demonic role in play within play, *The Fire and the Rain* temporarily. It reveals his real self. He is instrumental to the desecration of the sacrificial precincts and the death of Paravasu.

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