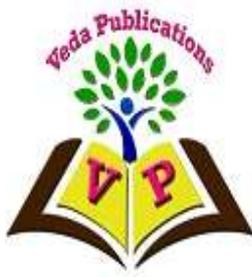




## GIRISH KARNAD'S YAYATI/UNDER THE PARADIGM OF NORTHROP FRYE'S "THEORY OF SYMBOLS"

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### ABSTRACT

Literary Criticism is a disinterested application of the free play of mind on its subject to understand and interpret. Northrop Frye (1912- 1991), has been one of the most influential and schematic thinkers and critics of the twentieth century. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) gained worldwide popularity. In the third essay, "Theory of Symbols", Northrop Frye endeavours to systematize literary symbolism. Frye talks about the sequence of contexts which constitute 'phases' and forms the general idea of the "Theory of Symbols". 'Phases' are meant to analyze the symbolic meaning within which literature can be interpreted. The play is deeply rooted in the mythological framework, depicting the story of King Yayati and Devayani, the daughter of *Daitya Guru Shukracharya*. Through the mythic character of King Yayati, rituals like Pratimola and also the exchange of ages between father and son, Girish Karnad takes the readers to the rich heritage of India. Myths are used as archetypes in this play. Through the epitome of king Yayati, Karnad shows the temperament of a modern man, his craze towards materialism.

**Keywords:** *Theory of Symbols, Mythical phase, Archetypes, Existentialism.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Literary Criticism is a disinterested application of the free play of mind on its subject to understand and interpret. Intellectual freedom is necessary for critical understanding and analysis. In the twenty first century many holistic and healthy platforms are erected for scholarly debates, discussions and healthy questioning. Thus, today, literary criticism has an altogether a new face. Along with the formulation of theories, their application is also encouraged.

Northrop Frye (1912- 1991), has been one of the most influential and schematic thinkers and critics of the twentieth century. He became popular for his deep understanding of literature, morphological and Biblical narrative, symbol, ritual, and archetypal literary criticism. Three of his works namely *Fearful Symmetry* (1949), *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), and *Fables of Identity* (1963) gained prominence in the field of Archetypal Criticism.

**NORTHROP FRYE'S "THEORY OF SYMBOLS" (MYTHICAL PHASE)**

Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) gained worldwide popularity. In the third essay, "Theory of Symbols", Northrop Frye endeavours to systematize literary symbolism. For instance, the writers in different ages have drawn symbols from different sources. Frye adopts the term 'polysemous' from Dante which means multiple meanings. Northrop Frye provides a very broad definition of a symbol. For him, a symbol is "any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention" (*Anatomy* 71). Frye talks about the sequence of contexts which constitute 'phases' and forms the general idea of the "Theory of Symbols". 'Phases' are meant to analyze the symbolic meaning within which literature can be interpreted. In the present work, an attempt has been made to analyze Girish Karnad's play *Yayati* under the paradigm of Northrop Frye's Mythical phase where a symbol performs the function of an archetype.

A symbol, according to Frye, performs five types of functions:

- Literal/Descriptive (Motifs and Signs)
- Formal (Image)
- Mythical (Archetype)
- Anagogic (Monad)

In the present work, an attempt has been made to analyze Girish Karnad's play *Yayati* under the paradigm of Northrop Frye's Mythical phase where a symbol performs the function of an archetype. Archetype, Frye states, is "a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps us to unify and integrate our literary experience" (*Anatomy* 99). Archetype has been used as a communicable symbol in the literary works and through the usage of it Frye's focus is towards the unification and integration of literary experiences. According to Frye, a poem is an imitation of another poem. There is nothing new in the poem related to idea and theme. The newness in the poem comes when it is treated in different ways by different writers.

While discussing the concepts of myth, dream and ritual, Frye shows their relationship with one other. Frye defines the mythic aspect as, "the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth" (*Anatomy* 106). 'Ritual' writes Frye, "is pre-logical" and "pre-verbal" (*Anatomy* 106). 'Dream' writes Frye is related to dreamer's own life. But the element of myth is present in all dreams and in all rituals which provides meaning to both and the power of independent communication. Narrative of literature constitutes two basic patterns cyclical and dialectical. Ritual basically involves in the cyclical process of nature like the usage of seasons, the recurring cycles of human life etc. The dialectical on the other hand, reinforces from dream wherein the constant conflict between desire and reality can be seen like love and hate, liberty and capture etc. This pattern can be found in poetry when it is expressed hypothetically.

**GIRISH KARNAD'S YAYATI**

The plays of Girish Karnad are deeply engaged with our cultural past. It has been rightly said by Vanashree Tripathi that "deep engagement with his cultural moves has brought into being in terms of his drama a new artistic sensibility that speaks of our culture confidently and advances an indigenous concept of modernity" (8). Karnad plays talk about the past which is forgotten. More than a playwright he is a famous thinker, artist, actor, poet and a producer. Through his plays he tried to awaken the lost and the past culture of India. The rich wealth



of folklores told in the childhood took Karnad into the world where animals spoke like humans and gods changed their forms.

Numerous plays like *Tuglaq*, *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Tale- Danada*, *Naga- Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Bali* and *Hittima- Hunja* encompasses histories, myth, folklores which are rejuvenated and expanded into the poetics of contemporary drama. Vanashree Tripathi states, "extending into the twenty first century, the composite art of Indian drama as Karnad visualizes world serve significant functions providing for instructions, entertainment, enlightenment, happiness, peace and moral elevation" (15). Similar to Northrop Frye, Karnad doesnot see history as a linear progression of events instead "a process by which past is constructed and invented by the subjective self- shaped by the cultural institutions\_ family, religion, state" (Tripathi 25).

#### **YAYATI UNDER THE PARADIGM OF NORTHROP FRYE'S 'MYTHICAL PHASE'**

If we move from Northrop Frye's notion of the relation between literature and myths which has its roots to the Indian literature, we find that myths have been given importance in the Indian Literature from time immemorial. It derives its material from the epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* etc. Girish Karnad's play *Yayati* is a story taken from an episode of 'Adiparva' from *The Mahabharata*. The play is deeply rooted in the mythological framework, depicting the story of King Yayati and Devayani, the daughter of *Daitya Guru* Shukracharya. Girish Karnad uses the myth of King Yayati to depict the existential situation of a modern man and his invincible desire for sensual and sexual pleasures.

The play began with King Yayati and his wife Devayani. Before her marriage, Devayani was insulted by Sharmistha, daughter of the King of *asuras*, Visvaparva. Sharmistha had thrown Devayani into a waterless well. Yayati who was a trespasser had rescued Devayani. She was proposed by King Yayati for marriage. Devyani refused and stated that the Pratiloma rule (which forbade a *Kshatriya* to marry a *Brahmin* girl) as the major obstacle in their marriage.

Devayani complained to her father about Sharmistha. Sukracharya told the King that if his daughter was not satisfied then he would leave the Kingdom. Then, Devayani, in order to take her revenge from Sharmistha, set a condition that she had to be her *dasi* ("handmaid") forever. Sharmistha agreed to become the handmaid of Devayani to save her father's honour. Later on, Devayani married to King Yayati as Sukracharya agreed to make an exception to the Pratiloma rule and Sharmistha as the punishment went along with Devayani.

In the meanwhile, Sharmistha was attracted towards King Yayati. They married secretly. When Devayani discovered the secret, she became very furious and went to her father. A furious Shukracharya cursed King Yayati with old age. Yayati believed in enjoying the pleasures of life and this curse had left him distraught. He later appealed Shukracharya to reduce the severity of his curse. Shukracharya told him that if anybody would be ready to exchange his old age then he could get his youth back as before. Yayati approached each of his sons but no one agreed except Puru. He transferred his old age to Puru. Puru became an old man and Yayati regained his youth. And at the end, Chitrlekha wife of Puru committed suicide. Through this action, Yayati realized his mistake and returned the youth to Puru.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The play can be seen under the limelight of Mythic phase of Northrop Frye's "Theory of Symbols". Through the mythic character of King Yayati, rituals like Pratiloma and also the exchange of ages between father and son, Girish Karnad takes the readers to the rich heritage of India. Myths are used as archetypes in this play. Through the epitome of king Yayati he shows the temperament of a modern man, his craze towards materialism. The motif of using myth in the plays is to depict the condition of man and to link present with the eternal and the contemporary with the archetypal. Karnad's usage of past histories and myths to reflect the present scenario is unremarkable. Karnad technically turned the old myths and stories into plays providing a new dimension to it. Social Archetype of moral guidance has been used in the play. Through the usage of myth



he tries to bring harmony to the society and the concept of existentialism can be seen.

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