



THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS IN KHANDEKAR'S YAYATI

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ABSTRACT



Yayati is a mythical tale of lust in Mahabharatha and Khandekar's Yayati is a modern tale of human weakness and unhappiness. Incompleteness in human beings is inbuilt from their birth. Everybody feels and desires to have more of him and remain unsatisfied. The novelist clearly distinguishes between pleasure and happiness. All the characters of the novel Yayati, Kacha, Devayani and Sharmishtha exhibit their own strength and weakness. The younger generation Puroo transforms the older generation with his attitude. It is noteworthy that selfless love and sacrifice of Puroo changes the lives of elders and leads them to the path of righteousness.

Keywords: *Happiness, Pleasure, Death, Satisfaction, Fear*



The present paper attempts to explore the pursuit of happiness in Khandekar's Yayati. Khandekar's Yayati is not only about his lust but about his realisation and repentance. Even Khandekar throws light on the female characters that are strong, compiling, jealous, pride, sacrificing and passionate. The novelist has made the characters speak about themselves and confess their heart and mind in a realistic way. Khandekar wants to warn and educate men of their flaws and faults and learn from Yayati's story. "The world errs, even realises the errors, but seldom learns from them." (12) The theme of happiness and pleasure runs throughout the story. Yayati assumes pleasure to be happiness and Puroo's concept of happiness is sacrifice. Even today Yayati is apt to the present generation which lives in anxiety and where more stress is given to physical pleasures. Immanuel Kant says "the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what is that he really wishes and wills".

From his childhood Yayati had inclination towards beauty. Though he was destined to be a king of Hastinapur his life was filled with dreams and his heart was always beating for beautiful nature. He was a poet at heart. When he came to his teenage he got aware of his being handsome and admired his looks in the mirror. His education was mostly directed to the worship of beauty and strength. He was made acquainted with the valor of his father and great grandfather. Yayati had laughed at the prediction of an astrologer that he would be a king and "with all kinds of pleasures he would never be happy". He was very much inspired by the mythological stories which upheld the themes of the world sustained by the struggle for power, lives on rivalry conflict and strives for sensual power. Yayati became devotee of power and for his young mind, cruelty and bravery were twins. Yayati as a boy was shocked to know the truth that his brother had left the palace and was leading a solitary life. That night when he learnt the truth about his brother's existence he passed sleepless night. He felt in that one single night he had matured. "It was an awakening from a world of fantasy to one of fact. I

had my first acquaintance with grief". (16) Man loves his body and Yayati loved it more for which he was shocked, "I often thought there was a Yayati in me, different and distinct from the body. But how was one to understand the nature of that other Yayati?" (28) He knew that mind, heart and intellect had their separate identity from the body. Yayati was able to retreat happiness to himself by thinking and dreaming, recalling the memory of that night with Alaka. Yayati was happy escorting the victory horse but he feared death. Every atom of his body wanted above all, 'to live'. Who had succumbed to animal pleasure had experienced peace and intoxication in eighteen months. Yayati is unable to understand his brother's renouncement of the royal pleasures for the ascetic life. When Yayati questions his brother Yati answers that "There is only one abiding happiness in life.. eternal happiness. Worldly pleasure end in unhappiness.. be it the pleasure of touch or sight. The body is man's greatest enemy. It is the prime duty of man to strive persistently for mastery over the body". (35) When Yati learnt about the curse given to his father that his "Children will never be happy" he decided to be a happy hermit than being an unhappy prince. The farewell words of Yati to his brother were not to forget that it is easier to conquer the world than to master the mind. Sigmund Freud rightly opines "People strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so. This endeavour has two sides, a positive and negative aim. It aims on one hand, at an absence of pain and displeasure and on the other, at the experiencing of strong feelings of pleasure." (Ryan and Deci, 2001)

Devayani the only daughter of Maharshi Shukra was a spoiled child who had thought that she could have anything she wants with her beauty and her father. She had developed a sort of hatred and unhealthy competition with Sharmishtha from their childhood and always wanted to win over her. She used to get pleasure in that and her happiness lied in exhibiting Sharmishtha that she is superior from her race and beauty. Devayani was very clever and calculative in giving her right hand to Yayati. Devayani wanted to avenge Sharmishtha by making her maid for the life time. She had thought she won



by reducing the queen to a maid but in reality she had spoiled her peace of mind by this reckless decision. The happiness of Devayani is destroyed when she wants to know her future and shows her hand to a renowned palmist. His prophecy that Sharmishtha's son would be a king is a root cause for all the happenings. Sharmishtha is heartbroken that Devayani is coldhearted and she would not be allowed to marry and have kids. May be this revelation provoked Sharmishtha to surrender to the king thoughtlessly and have an affair with the king. The second prediction of the palmist invokes a strong doubt about the birth of Sharmishtha's son.

Sharmishtha who is an embodiment of purity and sacrifice is succumbed to love and its pleasure. Kacha had even saluted Sharmishtha for being mother to the whole demon kingdom, the inner strength which prompted her for this sacrifice. Sharmishtha's first love was Yayati she had dreamt to marry him but Devayani had snatched him from her and had married. She had drawn a picture of Yayati and worshiped him like a god and garlanded it. As Devayani moves to her father and then deliver a baby boy, in her absence Yayati meets Sharmishtha daily at dead night and turns it to happy nights. Sharmishtha found completeness with her motherhood. She had named her son Pururava after his majesty's great grandfather and to hide it called him Puroo. Devayani wanted to test the old palmist so she gave similar dresses to her son Yadu and Puroo. The palmist said that Yadu was unfortunate and Puroo would be a great king. Now Devayani wanted to know the father of Puroo and she puts Sharmishtha and Puroo in cellar and gave a nights time to reveal the truth. Yayati managed to free them from the cellar.

Yayati was able to free Sharmishtha with the help of his friend Madhav. As it was raining heavily on that night Madhav had picked up fever and was struggling to live. Yayati was torn apart from his death and the separation of Sharmishtha and his Puroo. He started cursing himself as treacherous lover, passionate sex ridden husband and irresponsible father and drunkard. The guilt of not saving those two lives of beloveds and the fear of death tormented him like hell. He took shelter in the wine and sex. The intoxication of wine made him

senseless. When he went to Devayani heavily drunk she abandoned him saying he would never touch her. Yayati was in great distress and unhappy so he embraced other women and wine to gain happiness.

Sharmishtha managed to walk many miles to keep Puroo safe and far away from Hasthinapur. She kept walking till she met Yati in a sane form she had confessed her heart to him. Yati was saved by Kacha and his mother on the Bhrgu Mountain. Yati said "the body and the soul are not enemies of each other; they are the two wheels of a chariot. To torture the body for the uplift of the soul or to deaden the soul for physical pleasures are both wrong. The relation of man and woman is just like that of the body and soul". Devayani had cursed Kacha for the disuse of power Sanjeevani so Kacha wanted to go penance for peace on earth. Devayani's father Shukra was in search of a destructive power to kill by wishing. Puroo grew at hermitage and learnt art and Vedas. At his very young age revealed his valour and as a mother Sharmishtha had feared about this. Puroo when he comes to know that Hastinapur Kingdom is attacked by Dasyus he leaves to war without telling his mother and she follows him to Hastinapur after eighteen years. Devayani always wanted to take revenge on Sharmishtha and her son who was an aspirant to the throne. When her son Yadu, was defeated and was captured by Dasyus, to her surprise he was saved by a stranger later she learns that he is Sharmishtha's son Puroo.

The second prediction of the palmist had made Devayani to doubt Sharmishtha and her husband having an affair. She was able to make out by broken words of Madhav. She was jilted and deceived by the king and she was heartbroken. She had announced prize reward for those who would bring Sharmishtha and her son Puroo. She was restless as it was not possible to take revenge on her. Yayati drifted from palace. Devayani looked after the administration and her son. Yayati indulged in wine and women. She had guilt feeling as a failure and irresponsible wife. When her son was captured and Yayati did not turn up to rescue she is forced to think that it was all her sin. Devayani was unable to provide selfless love to anybody even her love with Kacha is proved by the curse she bestows on him. She



was always egoistic and when her ego is hurt she goes mad. She behaves recklessly and eighteen years have passed and she was unable to forgive her husband and have cordial relationship with him when she learns about the flirtation with the other woman that too with Sharmishtha.

Yayati who was tormented by Devayani's rejection he wanted to commit suicide at that time he was soothed by Mandar's philosophy which was based on physical pleasure and there was no immortality in enjoying it. What Yayati did not realise is "in life the smallest happiness of any individual is circumscribed by his temperament, circumstances and the incompleteness of life". (229) In the multiplication of pleasure Yayati was guilty of wronging Madhavi his friend Madhav's fiency who committed suicide and Taraka had gone crazy shouting snake snake because of him. Yayati had seen Taraka playing with her dolls. Mukulika who was the first lady to introduce him to the world of sexual pleasure became the mediator in supplying ladies to him. He kept on asking for golden hair lady and they had brought his would be daughter-in-law who was finally rescued. Yayati feared his youth would end by the growth of white hair and Shukra cursed him to turn into a decrepit old man. Maharshi Shukra who is a great sage and can gain great power by his penance is having a weakness towards his daughter and can't control his anger and pronounced curse on Yayati thoughtlessly. With the petition of his daughter and son-in law Shukra pronounced a counter curse that if a young man of his flesh and blood exchange his youth for his old age then he can become young again. His son Yadu was not ready and left with his mother. Puroo without any second thought readily accepted to exchange his youth to his father's old age. But hearing Sharmishtha's sobbing and tears crushed his self and desire to have sex with a golden haired lady. He was ashamed and reduced to nought in front of Sharmishtha who is the epitome of sacrifice. Yayati was now ready to die and return his son's youth. Kacha who had come timely saved Yayati by restoring Puroo's youth.

Kacha is a paragon of modesty is a follower of Epicureanism which is a system of philosophy based upon the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. Epicurus believed that what he called "pleasure" was the greatest good but that the way to attain such pleasure was to live modestly to gain knowledge of the working of the world and to limit one's desires. This would lead one to attain a state of tranquility and freedom from fear as well as an absence of bodily pain. Kacha's duty towards his people was his priority so he was a great man without any weakness. When duty is at the topmost priority of any man then he will not be succumbed to any desires. Khandekar rightly opines "desire is never satisfied by indulgences like the sacrificial fire, it even grows with every offering". (251)

Sharmishtha is a gentle lady who stooped to folly. Her happiness was temporary with Yayati. All the sufferings she goes through after the birth of her son is reflection of the society where a woman is held responsible for all the mistakes and Yayati as a man is set free for his mistake. Yayati is responsible for all the sufferings who took advantage of Sharmishtha's loneliness. He was greedy for pleasure. "I am the son of king Nahusha. I want Sharmishtha. I want Devayani. I want every pretty woman on earth. Every day a fresh woman". (208)

Devayani's search for happiness is incomplete and was shattered by her husband who behaved wild. She had thought of making him a puppet and dance to her tunes. Sharmishtha's search for happiness was complete with her motherhood but she had longed for the reunion with Yayati and to have a sister for her son. Later she learnt that "the easiest way to be happy is to cheerfully live the life given to us, to find pleasure in it, experience the beauty and fragrance of it and to share it with others". (196)

Puroo is a high spirited, humane and civilized being who illuminated others by his altruistic nature. Puroo wanted his elder brother Yadu to be throned and asked Devayani's motherly love. "I want you as mother, I want yadu as brother. I do not want a kingdom. I want and mother and a brother". (250) He sets as a beacon light for elders who were



captured in the darkness of their mind. He teaches them the right path of happiness which is not to be searched outside us but is within us. It can be conquered by mutual love and respect. Puroo is entrenched as a role model for all generations. Aristotle rightly claimed "human good is equivalently the claim that it consists in the most excellent expression of the rational features essential to the human soul. The best life for human being is a life expressing in the most excellent manner those features which make us distinctively human". (323) Nature plays a vital role in making of Puroo. "Nature and man are inseparably linked together from the beginning to end. In fact they are twins. That is why life reveals in its true form only in the presence of Nature. Man then begins to understand the content and limitations of life". (197) Ultimately Yayati learns to sacrifice and renounces household and moves towards jungle. Shamishtha followed him was natural but Devayani too followed after transformation of her heart. At the end all realise in the lap of nature lies the happiness and truth of life. Finally all are enlightened beings and move towards leading a meaningful life. Self-revealing is used as the tool of mental health by all the characters in the novel.

Yayati followed the path of self-destruction denying the life of honour. According to Aristotle "Those who seek only pleasure ignore that they are rational beings and instead treat themselves as receiving only the sort of gratification possible for the unminded. In so speaking, Aristotle seems to be emphasizing physical over intellectual pleasure and to be suggesting that pleasure seekers situate themselves lower on the hierarchy of souls because they are limiting themselves to sensuous gratification in the absence of intellectual activity."(315)

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