

Karnad's use of Curse as an Unseen Character in *Yayati*, *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala*

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Abstract

The Present research paper explores the function of Girish Karnad's plays in the terms of myth and its relevance in the earlier times with different circumstances of character's life. Karnad has used the element of curse as a chief part of his plays and gives it the significant position in his plays. He has created so many seen characters who play a vital role in the plays as well as an unseen character who affects the situations and characters behind the bars and creates trouble for the seen characters in different circumstances. The characters like Yayati from the play *Yayati*, parents of Hayavadana from the play *Hayavadana* and the man who staged plays from the play *Naga-Mandala* have suffered because of the curse. The action of the characters reveals trouble in their life throughout the play. The researcher tries to study the problem minutely and evaluate it critically.

KEYWORDS: Character, Curse, Existence, Trouble, Unseen

Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. He is a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, translator and cultural administrator. Karnad is the most famous as a playwright. His plays were written in Kannada and then have been widely translated into English. Karnad's play includes *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala* and *The Fire and the Rain*.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines curse in about four different ways; the researcher uses the following definitions of the term in the present study:

“A word or phrase that has a magic power to make something bad happen”

“Something that causes harm or evil”

In the present research, the researcher has used the term curse as a tool to study the problem that occurred in the selected three plays of Girish Karnad.

Yayati was published in the year 1961. It is counted as the first published play of Girish Karnad. He produced it at the age of twenty two. He himself translated it into English and it is based on the myth of Yayati from *Mahabharata*. The play begins when Yayati is married to Devayani, the daughter of demons' *Guru Shukracharya* and Sharmishtha is her slave who is the daughter of the Demon King *Vrishparva*. The play starts with the complain of *Swarnalata* to Devayani against Sharmishtha. Though Devayani protects Sharmishtha, Sharmishtha does not give appropriate respect to Devayani because she knows too well that Yayati is married her as she is the daughter of *Shukracharya* who can bless him with immortality.

According to Sharmishtha, Yayati loves Devayani because Yayati lusts for immortality. Devayani's father has an art of '*Sanjeevani*'. Though Sharmishtha is born as *rakshasi*, she has beauty, education and wealth. She got everything except birth. She is jealous of Devayani because Devayani's credit is the knowledge of her

father for 'Sanjeevani' spell. That's the reason of love of Yayati towards Devayani. They both have a very strong argument. Sharmishtha angrily tells her that, "I had everything. Beauty, education, wealth. Everything except birth—an Arya pedigree, what was your worth? That your father knew the 'Sanjeevani' spell (Karnad 10). Devayani has heard all this before but she lets Sharmishtha go on. Karnad has created the character, a contemporary practical human being. The verbal conflict is going on and on between Sharmishtha, Devayani and Yayati. When Devayani came to know about the relationship of Yayati and Sharmishtha, she felt shocked and betrayed. She went to her father and he cursed him with old age in his prime life.

Sharmishtha: He has placed a curse on His Majesty—that he will lose his youth and become decrepit by nightfall. I fell to his feet. (Karnad 41).

The curse demoralizes Yayati, he gets violent and refuses to accept old age. Pooru informs Yayati that the curse will not have its effect on Yayati if a young man admits to take it upon himself and offers his youth to Yayati in exchange. Yayati is jubilant and he heaves a sigh of immense relief. Yayati is sure that any young person will be ready to accept his curse. But Pooru informs him that no one is ready to do so. Pooru also suggests that Yayati should accept the curse and behave as Sharmishtha suggests. But, at last Pooru is ready to sacrifice his youth for his father. This sacrifice also creates conflict in the life of newly wedded Chitrlekha who kills herself. The suffering of the king Yayati, Sharmishtha and Devayani creates conflicting atmosphere around them. At last Yayati accepts his old age by embracing Pooru. "Take back your youth, Pooru. Rule well. Let me go and face my destiny in wilds" (Karnad 69). Pooru once again becomes young but he has lost his beautiful bride on the nuptial night when he was to meet her. Yayati says, "We have a long way to go, Pooru. Come, Sharmishtha..." (Karnad 69).

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* is written in 1971. It is a story derived from *Kathasaritsagara* and Thomas Mann's *The Transposed head* and it is readapted for stage by Girish Karnad. The play introduces the story of Hayavadana who, due to a twist in fate, is born with a body that is half-horse, half-man. He is facing conflict with his own self for his physical disability, throughout the play; he struggles a lot for completeness.

Hayavadana's mother was the princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. On the occasion of her marriage, she was married to the white stallion. She has lived with him since fifteen years. "One morning when she wakes up, she doesn't find horse but a beautiful Celestial Being, a *gandharva* and this Celestial Being had been cursed by the God *Kuvera* to be born as a horse for some act of misbehavior. After fifteen years of human love, he had become his original self again. Released from his curse, he asked his mother to accompany him to the heavenly abode but she rejects. She insists him to be horse again so he cursed her to turn out to be horse herself" (Mangaiyarkarasi 319).

Hayavadana: My mother became a horse and run away happily. My father went back to his Heavenly Abode. Only I—the child of their marriage—was left behind. (Karnad 80)

Hayavadana became sad with her half animal and half human body. He wants to get rid of this problem but doesn't find any solution. On advises of Bhagavata, he prays to Kali to make him a complete man and went to the mount Chitrakoot with the company of that actor. Bhagavata gave his blessings to Hayavadana "May you

become successful in your search for completeness” (Karnad 82). After this incident Bhagavata told the story of Devadatta-Kapila-Padmini. At the end when the story reaches to its end, again Hayavadana comes but with the half granted wish for himself. Bhagavata also surprised to see him with the body of horse and voice of the man. At the end when Hayavadana roars with laughter, suddenly the boy too starts laughing hearing the voice of Hayavadana.

Hayavadana: Laugh again? All right. All right. I will try again. Ha!
Ha! Ha! Ha—Huhhuh.....Heahhhh..... (Karnad 138)

After facing much difficulty, at the end he gets voice of the horse. His laughter ends up in proper neigh. Hayavadana is happy as his human voice is gone and he can only neigh as a complete horse.

Karnad wrote a play titled *Naga-Mandala* in 1987-88. *Naga-Mandala* depicts the divine union of male and female snakes. *Naga-Mandala* is an elaborate and spectacular ritual of serpent worship. The term *Naga-Mandala* is a compound of two words: *Naga* and *Mandala*. *Naga* means serpent and *Mandala* implies decorative pictorial drawings on the floor. (Pinto 1)

The play *Naga-Mandala* starts with one man's incident emphasizes the inevitable disturbance of the storytelling process: a story demands to be told more and more again. In the first story, the man, sitting in the temple, has his own fight to survive his life from death. He is gloomy because he has a 'curse of death' on him.

Mendicant: You must keep awake at least one whole night this month. If you can do that you will live. If not, you will die on the last night of the month.

On his statement, the man asked him what he had done to deserve that fate. A Mendicant told him, "You have written plays, you have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who came trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs that all the abused mass of sleep has turned against you and become the curse of death" (Karnad 23).

The man hadn't realized that his plays had that much impact on others. He thought that day might be his last night so he had fled from home and came to that temple, nameless and empty. For years, he had been lording it over his family as a writer. He couldn't bring himself to die a writer's death in front of them.

Man: I swear by this absent God, if I survive this night I shall have nothing more to do with themes, plots or stories. I abjure all story-telling, all play-acting. (Karnad 22-23)

At night the man hears female voices outside the temple. They all are flames. These flames stand for female society. Each flame is a storyteller, decide to tell a story of their own, sharing it with others, her new experiences and observations. In the last story, she declares the condition to the man to convey the story to someone. If he will listen to the story he may survive from sleep hence from death, if he will accept the condition of story to pass the story to someone; he may break the vow; not to tell the story or not to act any play, consequently again he may have to face the curse of audience. The man accepts the offer and starts listening the story of Rani, who is married to Appanna.

Thus, one can easily notice the effect of curse on the characters and situations on these plays of Karnad. The characters get curse by their deed or fate in their life. The character of Hayavadana is cursed by his fate while the characters of Yayati and the man are cursed by their deed in their life. Because of these characters, other innocent characters of the plays have to face the struggle. Thus, the element of curse

is an unseen or invisible tool to study the problem of characters for their struggle throughout the play.

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