Abstract

Indian ‘English Drama’ was structured on the various European Models and plots of Sanskrit plays. The peregrination of Indian English Drama has been the canvas portrayal of diffidence until the literary wizard like- Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Harindranath Chatopadhyay occupied the stage in the pre-independence era. Their plays were largely inspired in soul from the deep rooted beliefs and values of the Indian soil-the ‘Indian Sensibility’. In the post-independence era the trend of translation of plays from various original vernacular form of language to English was in vogue. The prime flag bearers of the genre were great playwrights like Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Mahesh Dattani, Uma Parmeswaran and Vijay Tendulkar. Girish Karnad has been the playwright who impacted the Indian English Drama in a big positive manner. Through his first play-Yayati in the year 1961, Karnad embarked on what was going to be a splendid set of contribution to the Indian English Drama. Being a convincing voice of the era Girish Karnad has through his plays being able to convey beautifully the various shades of ‘Thematic Concern’. It would be apt to term that he had the connoisseur eye in visualizing and building the under lying currents in the relationships of the characters of his play. These would though appear complex in display, but were simple to comprehend and correlate. The power of communication that his characters imbibed from his outstanding yet simple style of creation had a phenomenal effect on the audience. The ‘Thematic concern’ in his plays has received a meticulous treatment. Yayati displays the complex structure of relationship between the trio of Devayani, Sharmishtha and king Yayati on one hand and Puru and Chitralekha on the other.
Yayati:

Humane relationship:
In Yayati as the family concept is used in a broad way. We can see the warped images in this play that the kings were allowed to have many wives and in Yayati, Yayati marries many women. Yayati does not hesitate to usurp the youth and vitality of his son. Karnad invests new meaning and significance for contemporary life and reality by exploring the king’s motivations. He has many sons but it is Pooru who willingly accepts the old age of his father and willingly offers his youth as filial duty and devotion. On the other hand, Yayati without any hesitation takes the youth of his son Pooru. In myth, the sentiments of the kings and queens are not shown like common human beings. Father-son relationship in the play is remarkably stressed. A father expects from his son, his daughter-in-law and his wives, without observing his own responsibility. As a father, Yayati is failed and as a son Pooru is passed. In Yayati, sexual relations are also significant because Shukracharya curses Yayati due to his illicit relationship with Sharmishtha. Yayati has many queens and the complexity in the relationships is due to these sexual relations. Devayani was in love with Kacha. But as Yayati saves her life, she has to marry him.

Now comes to the character of Swarnalata. Her husband thinks that before marriage Swarnalata was in love with her teacher. In order to take revenge on her he indulges himself in many women and drinks. Means humane relationships have no value. With a single affair of his wife Swarnalata husband is disturbed. But he does not think of Swarnalata and her mind, what would have happened to her by his many affairs? In mythology women’s freedom is curtailed and the same happens in Karnad’s Yayati also. The male characters suppress the women. Only Chitralekha thinks in a rational way. Pooru is married with Chitralekha and the young married couple has arrived into the palace. Chitralekha suffers first at the hands of her husband, Pooru, Who does not think of his wife even once before acceding to the supreme sacrifice of giving up his youth and vitality to serve his father’s unconventional behavior which serves no purpose but to fill up the invalid in his own life. Yayati himself is a warped image because Yayati recognize the horror of his life and assume his moral responsibility after symbolic encounter of Chitralekha.

Power Politics
Yayati craves for power, for youth. When Sharmistha suggests that Yayati should accept the old age
and go into solitude, he is not ready to sacrifice his throne. He loves his youth and throne and is ready to sacrifice anything for his youth. He sacrifices his son’s youth for his own. The struggle in between Devayani and Sharmishtha is also for power. Devayani does not want that Sharmishtha should enter and encroach on her relationship with Yayati. Both of them want to live Yayati because Yayati is a symbol of a power as well as a king.

Violence

Karnad’s Yayati is based on the responsibility of a person. It is based on the sentiments of the man. Class-distinction and the caste distinction take the society to violence. Sharmishtha, being disturbed by the comments of Devayani, pulls her with her long hair, takes her to a well and throws her inside. Sharmishtha’s behavior is violent whereas Devayani’s words are violent. In order to take revenge on Devayani, Sharmishtha seduces Yayati. Being psychologically disturbed by Sharmishtha’s behaviour Devayani goes to her father and makes him to curse Yayati. Pooru’s acceptance of old age is responsible for the death of Chitralekha. The most violent thing in the play is Chitralekha’s death. Karnad created Chitralekha’s character on his own. It is due to Chitralekha’s death Yayati’s mind changes. Indirectly Yayati was the main reason of her death in this play.

The Oppression of Women:

In Yayati, the issue of gender is highlight especially in the way Yayati treats women in the play. One who suffered the most due to choices of others was always a woman in Yayati. The desire of women is always curbed in a Patriarchal order: here it makes little differences whether she belongs to a high class/ caste or low class/ caste. Chitralekha in Yayati is an Aryan princess but suffers at the hands of patriarchal order. The character of Chitralekha as has already been said is Karnad’s creation. “Through her Karnad explores the Futility of being born a princess who finds reality too much to bear and kills herself”.

The death of Chitralekha makes Sharmishtha comments at the patriarchal set-up, crushes and oppresses women and offers them not even an infinitesimal hope of emancipation. Sharmishtha accuses Yayati of Chitralekha’s death—“this is the foundation of your future life: one women Chitralekha has become a ghost: and the second Swarnalata mad: and the third Sharmishtha a fallen woman”.

A very significant portion of the play is devoted to the study of the decisions of the Patriarchal
set-up that expects women to surrender to the will of the male decisions makers without protest. Swarnalata is jilted by her husband who thought she had a relationship with a Brahmin boy before their marriages. Swarnalata tried her best to prove her innocence to her husband but failed. His husband became miserable and Swarnalata, who loved her husband very much, could not bear his condition. She decided to give him peace of mind by lying to her that indeed the Brahmin boy had violated her. A woman whose virginity has been violated is looked down upon, but the men are never called a question. Like Sita in Ramayana too had to take ordeal to prove her innocence. Condition of women Unaltered by (Caste/ Class/ Race). In Yayati it is very evident that the social standing (Caste/ Class/ Race) hardly seems to affect the condition of a Woman. Chitralekha is an Aryan princess, born in to a royal family and coming from a privileged clan, the Aryans. Despite her caste and class superiority, she has to undergo oppression and suppression at the hand of men. She finally commits suicide for she sees no other escape from the unjust Patriarchal order where she has to unduly repress her feelings and desire in the name of Pativrata (dutiful and dedicated wife).

In the same play, there is another character Swarnalata, the maid confident, who comes from low class and who too like Chitralekha does not receive the love of her family and husband, because the latter believes her to be unchaste.

Thus the woman in Indian society, whether of high or low social standing is always looks down upon by virtue of being a women and ill-treated by the domineering Patriarchy, whether a Queen or a maid, woman are always relegated to the background forming a marginalized group in the patriarchal order.
Reference

