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## Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain*: A Paradigm of Eternal Human Complexities

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Girish Karnad occupies a very prominent place among the dramatists of 20<sup>th</sup> century not only in India and Asia but in the entire world at the same time. If we look up at the genesis of, especially in English, in India it appears to be originated as late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> though with a great difficulty in emotional and sensuous comprehension of thoughts, for English being neither the regional nor national language of this sub-continent. If we examine the origin and development of drama in India it has a very old rich and golden history though brought out in different regional languages besides the immortal and perennial works of great stalwarts of Sanskrit like Kalidasa, Bhwabhuti, Harsha and numerous others. If we look towards great Indian dramatists of modern age, it includes several dramatists who brought out their works originally in their regional language and later we get their English translation either by the author himself or by other scholars. These regional languages; belonging to different regions of India, are Marathi, Tamil, Bengla, and Kannada that witnesses a large number of dramatists and their dramatic creations. Though these regional dramas are designated to cater the interest of the regional people but they also contain certain moralities, values and technicalities that take it closer and nearer to European counterparts like Inasco, Kafka, Becket; the champions of modern drama and theatre of absurd. Girish Karnad is one of such dramatist besides other pioneers like Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Sri Aurbindo, and Rabindranath Tagore, Sarath Kumar Ghose, V V Srinivas Aiyanger, T P Kailasam, A S Panchpakesa, Harindra Nath Chhattopadhyaya, Bharati Sarabhai and several others of great merit significance. Girish Karnad is phenomenal among the contemporary Indian dramatists, for dealing with the concern of contemporary life with the help of myth, symbols and folklore and thus providing the objective dramatization of human complexities. The present paper attempts exploring the complexities inherent in Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* (1995) which incorporates the variegated nature of complexities of entire human race.

If we pay attention towards the history of human evolution, it appears to be a process of composite whole of complexities, shaped, managed and regulated in such a way as to impart irreconcilable harmony to human life, though in precarious manner, "All human history is only the manifestation of their conflict. In this conflict they may repress each other and impose restriction on each other .Consequently, human beings can neither enjoy life completely nor renounce it fully". (*Indian Drama Today: A Study in Theme of Cultural Deformity*, P.124) We witness the fragmentation and deformity of human soul during the course of development. The development of science and technology in modern age has generated antagonistic forces that are in direct clash spirituality hampering the harmony of human life and leading humanity towards alienation brought upon by the discordant and antagonistic values. Girish Karnad aptly remarks in this regards:

I think anxiety has become part of existence today, triggered partly by the endemic violence. In India more we claim we are a spiritual people, the more violent we seem to get. (Karnad, Girish, 'Where is the Tradition?' Interview, *Frontline*, P.75.)

The play *The Fire and the Rain* appears to be a powerful and effective portrayal of unaging conflict of humanity. It displays how human beings turn violent on account of non coordination of human selves presented through enforcement of ancient myths, parables, legends and folk- lores. It can be viewed as a play centering around the fire of jealousy, love, sex and lust for power modern man is questing for that ought be quenched with milky rain of love, kindness and compassion. Treatment of myth in this play appears only subservient to portrayal of human complexities and it does not appear wise to look upon it as a mythical play for Karnad appears more concentrating around the fretting issues of modern contemporary society, undoubtedly Iyengar appears appropriate for the remark made in the following excerpts:

Karnad's approach is modern and he displays the conventions and motif of folk art and curtains so project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements. (Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, P.735)

The play can be looked upon as re-appraisal of Puranic myth contained in the Mahabharata where Indra attempts destruction of his brother out of jealousy; one of most fatal of human emotions behind all human distresses. The appears evolving a complex framework because of central myth that assumes the form of dramatic technique emerging from the larger framework of the story of Arvasu's betrayal of his brother Parvasu where the chief Priest is performing a Yajana to bring rain to drought stricken land. The central myth is strengthened and re-enforced with the treatment of the three stories, each highlighting and supporting the central one as story of betrayal from time immemorial. The third story centers around the revenge generated because of jealousy between two brothers; Bhardwaj and Raibhya and later on extended to their children and finally at most personal level between father and son and between brother and brother which appears ineligible blot upon the very intimate relations, reverting the rich Indian paradigm of *Ramayana*, where one happily renounces the royal possessions for the sake of another brother, being completely overshadowed by individual quest for power, prominence, and personal possessions, an act central and emblematic to modern human civilization. It appears noteworthy to take into account that the myths treated are part and parcel of human temperament, and deeply rooted into human nature and completely successful in effective portrayal of human predicament beyond time and space. It appears artistic greatness and piercing vision of Karnad in re-interpreting and enforcing the myth to explore the complexities of contemporary human society with great credibility and startling degree of objectivity making it central to human predicament which appears timeless and temporal and temporal and timeless at the same time. Karnad very pertinently remarks:

The tale of Parvasu fascinated me as an unusual variant of this Indian obsession with fratricide and it seemed logical too that Yavakari should be their cousin, though the Mahabharata does not explicitly say so. (Karnad, Girish, *Notes on The Fire and the Rain*, P.69)

Such fascination for myth obsessed with primordial human nature Karnad delves deeper with incorporation of another myth of similar nature, capable enough in stressing the complexities of human civilization; coming down from time immemorial i.e. Indra-Vrita legend that not only strengthens the credibility of portrayal but also succeeds in projecting human temperament with greater reliability and acceptance. Karnad's own opinion in this regard appears worth quoting:

I cannot remember when I decided to incorporate the Indra-Vrita legend in my plot, but years later, while rereading the original origin, I was astonished to find that right at beginning of the tale of Yavakri, Lomasha mentions the whole story took place on the banks of river in which Indra had bathed to cleanse himself of the sin of killing Vrita! One of the fascinating aspects of dealing with myth in their self-reflexivity. (*Notes on The Fire and the Rain, P.69*)

Now empowered with three myths exactly of similar nature supporting, strengthening and reflecting upon the obsessive concern of each other that dramatist magnificently projects through its reflection upon cotemporary human society that appears deviating from the ethical goals of life which are –*Purusharthas-dharma, artha, kama* and *moksha* under the onslaught of individuality acutely operative at extremely personal level, seeking gratification of personal selves evolving complexities of diverse nature i.e. morality and immorality, complexity of human relationship, complexity of caste system-Brahmanism and shudrism, jealousy, personality and split personality, real face and the mask as a result characters are finally discovered as victim of complexities of attitudes and thus appears reiterating and enforcing upon human nature and humanity as whole. The play takes into account how morality turns to immorality and *dharma* becomes *adhrma* when two prominent characters of the play – Bharrdwaj and Raibhya two brothers and intimate friends and propounder of knowledge turn against each other with enmity in pursuit of position of chief priest of fire sacrifice symbolic of economic and political power and their enmity, jealousy and temperament have appropriately been projected and transferred upon the contemporary human society where not even single man appears available who can be looked upon evolving ,cherishing and nourishing the attitude of compassion and humility, a hallmark of human sensibility, appear wiped out from the contemporary society ably impressed upon with ancient myths and contrary to it entire human civilization appears to be engulfed by crookedness, selfishness and cunningness in the pursuit of different selves affecting adversely even the most intimate relations.

Undoubtedly Raibhya is an eminent scholar par excellence but his conduct appear contrary to his knowledge even towards the one of the most intimate relation of daughter-in-law; with whom he is depicted behaving like a beast using all the filthy, ruffian and boorish language and is depicted stooping very low to assault physically. The following lines in this regards appear worth quoting:

You whore – roving whore! I could reduce

You to ashes –turn you into a fistful dust –with

A simple curse. (*The Fire and the Rain*, P.20)

Raibhya has developed enmity against not only his own brother Bhardwas in pursuit of economic and political prominence and is depicted burning in the eternal fire of jealousy but also against his own son Parvasu, husband of Bishakha as well. Karnad has very realistically depicted the perverted and degraded parameter of morality inculcated in the highly educated and upright section of society completely wrapped into the heinous sin towards his their own near and dear; utterly unmindful of the responsibility towards society which is usually expected from that section of society to which they belong and their inter-personal social relationship can be looked upon as microcosm of the broader social spectrum of contemporary society ably evolved and reflected through the panoramic description of humanity as whole subdued in the narrow and snobbish world of individuality and self-centeredness. Raibhya can be looked upon as representative of cotemporary elite section of society and his attitude and temperament can be deduced and projected as attitudes and temperament of modern elites. The exposure of Bishakha regarding his personality and character appropriately reflecting upon the personality and character of contemporary society is vividly described in the following lines:

Something died inside your father the day the king invited  
You to be the chief priest. He's been dying up like a dead tree  
No saps run in him.

Pause

On the one hand, there's sense of being humiliated by you.  
On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's  
cull'd lust. And there is no one else here to take his rage  
out on but me. (*The Fire and the Rain*, P.32-330)

Raibhya has not only been against his brother so far as the position of chief priest of the fire sacrifice is concerned but is equally against the success and glory to be conferred upon his own son from Royalty as chief of fire sacrifice. He has stooped low to the Yajna for rain by killing Yavakari, the son of Bhardwaj, shrewdly hitting at two ends—firstly to revenge against the molestation of Bishakha on the one hand and secondly to disturb his own son Parvasu to come back from Yajna on hearing the news on the other. He does not have words of appreciation and encouragement for his own son, his knowledge remains confined to preaching others on the one hand on the other gratification of his own selves on the other. He can appropriately be looked upon as a nihilist of modern society where knowledge is not regulated for social welfare but for sabotage and anarchy. His own words reflect upon his temperament contained in the following lines:

How could I father two such imbeciles? I told the king, 'mark  
My words, my son defecates where he goes. And he will  
defecate in your sacrifice. (*The Fire and the Rian*, P.29.)

It is out of ambition and jealousy that Raibhya has discarded the sanctity of as a brother, father and father-in-law; defiling the path of righteousness and dharma being

blinded by *artha* and so sunning the path of *moksha*. It can be looked upon as Karnad's impassioned concern about contemporary society regarding human relationship and kind of culture being inculcated and catered. Bhardwas is in no way different from his bother Raibhya and appears to have darkened his vision with sluggish paternal love and reproaches his brother for killing his son Yavakri and curses that he will also be killed by his own elder son; Parvasu, in spite of the awareness that his son Yavakri has molested Bishakha for the fulfillment of *Kama* blurring all the other goals of human life. Basically there is no difference between Bhardwas and Raibhya; both appear treading on the path of immorality and *adharma* and are depicted subject to eternal damnation.

Yavakri is microcosm of modern man full with political ambitions, and seeks super knowledge in short cut method without proper ritual of going to Guru but directly from God been depicted as disastrous and annihilating due to arrogance being generated to feel supremacy above all which is meant only for divinity, hence is deemed to eternal damnation casting the fate of modern man. Another demerit associated with Yavakri is that besides supreme knowledge he is also looking towards fulfillment of *Kama* with Bishakha, wife of Parvasu, another act of deviation from the path of *Purushartha*, hence is depicted undergoing eternal damnation brought upon by attitude and temperament, thus he is depicted as living embodiment of contemporary man caught in sensuality and jealousy for supremacy. This temperamental complexity of Yavakri explicitly contained in the following dialogue of Andhaka, his servant to Nitalai:

Every Brahmin on this earth wants to gain spiritual Powers.  
 But few succeed. In my life time I have known only two who  
 Did your uncle and your father, Arvasu. But they got their  
 knowledge from human gurus. By diligent study. Yavakri  
 has gone beyond even them. He received his knowledge  
 from the gods, direct! -----

The whole world is at his feet. (*The Fire and the Rain, P.10*)

The very central character to drama is Parvasu, a perfect embodiment of complexities – ambition, jealousy and self centered so much that he could not even care about the feelings of his own wife due to persistent pursuit of economic and political power. It is because of negligence on the part of her husband that Bishakha is drawn towards Yavakri for sensual gratification which she feel denied from her own husband due to his hectic and desperate pursuit of economic and political power, a vivid and lively depiction of contemporary scenario of man-woman relationship utterly jeopardized on account of emotional negligence from either sides, which appears to be the sole cause of perversions of so many kinds in human society. Bishakha can be looked upon as representative of modern women of contemporary society looking for alternative source of emotional and sensual gratification due to either denial or proper reciprocation of human emotions. Parvasu appears very typical representative of modern man who can go to any extent for the gratification of his selves even at the cost of very intimate personal relationships like desertions of his own wife and killing of own father and is portrayed very apprehensive

towards his father's killing of Yavakri as revenge of Bishakha's is molestation misinterpreted as an act of treachery and distraction from his destination of chief priest of Fire ceremony and in a very rash manner obstinately attempts the killing of his own father, an act to avert the hurdle on his way to success, defiling the very pious father-son relationship. It is reflected in the following disclosure of Yavakri himself:

You did not need to. He observed to die. He killed Yavakri  
To disturb me in the last stage of the sacrifice. Not to  
Punish Yavakri, but even to me. I had to attend to him  
before he went any further. (*The Fire and the Rain, P.33.*)

The pinnacle of his insensitivity and selfishness reflected in his dialogue with **Brahma Rakshsa** where latter's insistent pleading for release and **moksha** is arrogantly denied by Parvasu; though he is capable of doing so, a vivid and realistic reflection of contemporary society overpowered with arrogance of knowledge, power and possessions.

At last but the most commendable character appears to be neither Arvasu who is neither like his father, uncle, brother and cousin so far knowledge is concerned nor does he has their complexities like arrogance, jealousy, revenge, power, passion and lust and contrary to it he is embodiment of goodness, kindness, benevolent and sensitive towards humanity as whole without any distinction of caste, class and creed appears projected as superior Brahmin above all for he knows better god and religion and divine planning behind creation of this world and against all the isms appears proliferating the fragrance of humanism, an ism superseding all the isms in which divinity is contained. He only knows love as superior of all knowledge and religion and is finest aspect of godly essence and so forgetting all the constraints is determined to marry Nittilai, a hunter girl which he considers call of **Purushartha** which appears contrary to that of all his relatives and is determined and ready to face any kind of distress that follows due to his marriage with Nittilai as he himself remarks:

.....I will never be learned like father and uncle. I shall not  
ever conduct royal sacrifice like Parvasu or perform penance  
like cousin like Yavakri .All I want is to dance and sing. And be  
with Nittilai.It does not matter a flake of crowding to my father whether I am  
alive or dead. (*The Fire and the Rain, P.7*)

Arvasu has not only been presented as mouthpiece of dramatist but also the most suitable person to perform the fire sacrifice together with Nittilai for they appear having coordinated their complexities in such a way that it never interferes in the deeds of righteousness, benevolence and kindness, qualities very dear and close to divinity which have been depicted far away from his near relatives, living a life of hypocrisy permeated with complexities of all the kinds. Accordingly finally the sacrifice of Arvasu and Nittilai does not only bring the soothing rain of love ,compassion, kindness and humility to pacify all the human complexities but also succeeds in liberating all the condemned souls being blessed with bliss of **Moksha** , the ultimate goal of

human life. The reconciliation of opposites becomes possible only because of the quality of renunciation and sacrifice that is made by Arvasu and Nittilai. It becomes explicitly evident from the following reaction of the crowd at the arrival of rain:

What's that? You smell that? - yes .The smell of wet earth  
of fresh rains. It's raining somewhere. Nearby the air is  
blossoming with the fragrance of earth. Its raining-It's raining- The  
Rain! The Rain. (*The Fire and the Rain*, P.62)

*The Fire and the Rain* can be looked upon as a rich dichotomy of complexities of modern sinister world ably projected through powerful treatment of myths beautifully interweaved in the texture of the drama that not only enables to deal the nature, temperament and predicament of modern society realistically but also renders great service in adding startling dimension of perfect objectivity on the other hand. With competent treatment of three myths running parallel to one another thematically succeed in highlighting almost all the complexities (*fire*) of human life that finally leads to eternal damnation shunning all the opportunity of redemption. It is through milky rain of love, compassion, humility, kindness that fire of complexities can be mitigated, appropriately presented with the character of Arvasu and Nittilai, where a perfect blending and coordination of discordant selves appears to be achieved and thus drama renders great service to modern society of diverse complexities to tread on the path of righteousness to obtain bliss, and what T.S.Eliot has strongly recommended in *The Waste Land* to safeguard the modern European consumerist society from annihilation and the betterment of humanity as whole, contained in the following lines:

Datta. Dayadhwama. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih  
(*The Waste Land*, 1923, Line: 432-433.)

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