

Myth and Puranas: Decolonisation of Indian English Drama

Nagraj Holeyannavar

Myth is fictitious belief of the people in a popular manner. Hence, many of them do not believe it because of its allegorical nature. But it is the belief which is fore-grounded in the tradition of the past and it is of real life presented in a fictitious manner. This has led human mind to accept the belief in a conscious manner. And, it is not like a story told in history. It is a history told in a story. According to Lillian Feder:

“Myth is a story involving human limitations and super human strivings and accomplishments which suggest through action- usually of a ritual, ceremonial or compulsive nature- man’s attempt to express and thus control his own anxiety about those features of his physiological and psychological makeup and his external environment which he cannot comprehend, accept or master. The characters of myth may be God’s, men or monstrous creatures with a qualities both, but even in his myths dealing exclusively with immortals, the narrative material, the portrayal of conflict and sorrow and the resolution or revelation are all reflections of human concerns.”

And further myth is collective unconsciousness of the society found in orature. Later, these myths are written in expository form as seen in the puranas. They celebrate the powers and the works of the God. Today, the playwrights derive their thoughts directly from these and build up their thought. Puranas are of eighteen in numbers and even there are upapuranas. Upapurana deals about the superiority of the one god to other gods and treat other gods as subordinate, whereas, the puranas deal with philosophical, theology and mythological narrative writings of the Hindu culture. These come under poetical tradition. Under epic traditions, Ramayan and Mahabharat are the epics. These epics give the sources for the modern writers to present their ideas and thoughts in a new perspectives. These epics consists the themes which are common stories even of today as myth always shows the man in internal and external world, how he suffers and struggles in the world. They deal with abducting another’s wife for the sake of physical fulfillment, fighting among brothers for property, committing of adultery and marriage issues.

Indian drama is deeply rooted in mythical stories and puranas. Indian English playwrights take the mythological elements in exhibiting their thoughts on the present condition with inner or external struggle of a human being. Mythical thoughts give more meaning, and it widens the horizon in a more thoughtful way. Everything is based on socio-culture patterns of the society of today’s. Since, myth has abundant storage of stories relating to the present condition. The stories of myth are being of common men and the society. Indian culture and tradition has not changed much compared to that of Europeans and Americans. Hence Indians thought is fully fore-grounded on Hindu religion. Although modernity has invaded, Indians have not left their culture and tradition. Even today to them the religious ideals and thoughts give meaning to the existence. And there is no existential anguish like that of European thought. The problems which are highlighted in the plays are of social.

Myth and puranas decolonize the thought of colonized culture and tradition. This type of writing was started with Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo and T.P.Kailasam before independence. In taking these essences in the stories, they wrote the plays with

highly symbolic in their approach and style. The use mythical and puranic element teach the public, the moral, and to instruct them in a philosophical way and to know better about the life, what is it? Like these Girish Karnad, Sriranga, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Chandrasekhar Kambar and others had taken similar approach in their place and are popular in using of the myths.

Whenever, there is turmoil in the society and social unrest, awareness to the public is given through with mythical approach in solving of the problems. And better understanding of the human values of those myths help with the mythical aspect of the God, which is there in the subconscious mind of the people or audience which works as dramatic ritual. The inner struggle of the man is nowhere seen in the Indian literature like that of unrest in metaphysics. It is only the external struggle what is seen in Indian life. Every dramatist has his own approach in instructing the public. If the playwright takes the mythical element, then he is likely to capture the attention of the audience; by giving his vision of thought in regard to the culture prevailing at the times.

Rabindranath Tagore's plays like *Chitra*, *Karana and Kunti* and *Gandhari's Prayer* are being inspired from Mahabharat. In *Chitra*, transformation of Arjun comes from physical to spiritual life. Chitrangadha has got the supernatural power with that she gets the attraction of Arjun. And then, when the beauty of Chitra decrease, Arjun negates Chitra. Later Arjun comes back to the sense.

In *Karna and Kunti*, both the characters are thinking for their salvage at the last hour of the war from its wreckage. In *Gandhari's prayer*, Gandhari knows the truth of Duryodhana's bad things, whereas his father Dritarashtra supported him. Gandhari knew that the Duryodhana will be doomed for his bad things.

Aurobindo has written different mythological plays but not on Hindu mythology. Still he wants to show the struggle of human being with the use of myths in his plays. *Perseus, the Deliver*, shows old myth falling and rising of new myth in this. His other plays are *Rodogune*, *Vizeiers of Bassoria* and *Eric, the King of Norway*.

T. P. Kailasam's plays are based on the Indian epics. *Burden* is taken from Ramayan's story. *Fulfillment, the Purpose* and the *Curse of Karna* are taken from Mahabharata. Kailasam justifies Karna, Ekalavya, Krishna and Keechakas roles in the play.

In post independence period Girish Karnad, Chandrashekar Kambar, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Sriranga (Adiga Rangacharya), Vijay Tendulkar, Asif Currimbhoy and Uma Parameshwaran.

Sriranga has written 47 plays of *Shadows in the Dark*, *Yama Vanquished* and *Ramarajya*. *Ramarajya* starts like in Pirandello style. Although, there is no mythical essence in the play but, it gives dramatic thought to visualizes, why playwrights take mythical writings in their plays? What is there in that? These are being answered by 1st person a character who wants to write the play based on mythical element which is the best way to instruct the public as the public awareness comes only with this element. And public knows the struggle of myth person:

1st: what sort of a play?

3rd: A mythological play

1st: What did you say?

2nd person: Look here, sir! What the public wants is a mythological play. Gods, demons, the court of Indra,

the dances of Rambha and Urvashi....

(1s person cannot control his laughter. He laughs loudly)

3rd Person: (Seeing 1st Person shaking with laughter.)What is, sir?

1st person: Oh no! (Stops laughing)Do you think I'm a small boy? Gods, demons, miracles-all these subjects appeal to the very young. After all these years, you are telling me to write about such things? Am I living in the 20th century, or in the Stone Age? What will the intellectuals say if I write such plays?

3rd person: What do you mean by such plays?

1st person: A story which goes like this: a king or perhaps a sage. Enter s demon. The demon abducts a woman, followed by war, a curse and miraculous acts. Does it bear any resemblance to what happens in daily life? Do such things ever happen in everyday life?

2nd person: That's the very reason why the public likes it, sir

Yama vanquished – A sick man is thinking that he will die. Yama comes asks him to get ready as he will take him. He requests Yama to take him when he is alright. Hence, Yama does not care for the excuses made by him. Meanwhile, the doctor comes and tells him that he is perfectly alright. The wife of the sick man complains, and later she abuses Yama. And then, she threatened to leave him. When the sick man comes to know that his boss is coming, he gets up and prepares himself to welcome the boss. And the wife is surprised to look that her husband is alright.

In *Ramarajya*, Sriranga satirizes the political system. After fourteen years of exile Ram returns to his kingdom and immediately there is a problem to who to rule. If Ram does not take the prime minister-ship then who will become the Prime Minister? And who are all likely to become the ministers and the Deputy Prime Minister? In *Ramarajya*, people are given the ultimate rights as seen with the character, Siddhanta. Siddhanta, even questions the position given to Sita as a deputy prime minister, is not so good because she was there in the enemy's country for few years.

Girish Karnad has been popularly known for using mythical elements in his plays. In *Yayati*, Girish Karnad presents a mythical story taken from Mahabharata. Yayati is cursed for the adultery by Sukracharya to become old on the complaint of his daughter and also granted him that he can become young if someone gives him the youthness. So he asks in regard to the exchange his old age to his sons' youth. Hence, none turns, only Puru turns to his demand. He enjoyed the life but at the end he came to know that there is meaninglessness in the physical pleasures. And a person cannot change his fate whatever he might of his age.

In *Hayavadhana*, Girish Karnad comments on the incompleteness of the human being. It is because; human beings have instinct and thinking ability because of this he differs from animals. Human beings have to face the conflict between the two. Even the play takes turn for the search for ones belongingness like that Sartre. Although, absurdity is there in Indian context, which is on meaninglessness of life, but, the meaning differs on the grounds of philosophical level. And it is not possible to stick to anyone of these. With the use of the myth of Lord Ganesh and Gandharva supplies the meaning to the play in the highly modernistic thought of identity.

In *Nagamandala*, myth of cobra stands as fertility. Even, it stands for physical attraction. In taking this element he points out the differentiation of the societal norms for male and female. In *Taledanda*, caste system as an off shoot of myth is associated

with religion such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. *Fire and the Rain* is taken from Mahabharat. Arasu and Parasu are the sons of Raibhya, a sage. Parasu killed his father and Arasu's devotion brings back his father. Rain god, Indra comes whenever kills the demon Vritha. This myth symbolizes as fertility and drought. Hence, rain comes of good deeds but not of bad people deeds as they are being unimpressed to God, whether they priests or any influential people performing the ritual.

In Girish Karnad's plays, the characters are based on the existentialism and they are unable to find out their identity in the external world. At the end of each play Girish Karnad as a socio-moral critic gives his opinion as the solution to the problem and there is poetic justice at the end. His thought differs from Eurocentric thought, in using of absurdity in the plays because, Karnad knows that Indians thoughts are deep in religion.

In Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*, Indrajit as Meghanad Ravana's son is taken from Ramayan, who opposes the system and neglects follow to the rules, unable to find anything good. He comes to a point in his life that future makes the person to survive which is like dream. Death is the greatest happiness.

Vijay Tendulkar in Ghasiram *Kotwal* and *Kanyadhan* expose the myths of caste system in the one as he shows a Brahmin turning as the kotwal of the city and on the other one exposes the impossibility of casteless society. It is because the culture is based on ideals of the caste. Ideological clash takes place in regard to the caste.

Asif Currimbhoy's *Om* and the *Dumb Dancer* have mythical essence. In *Om*, Svetaketu is character from Chhandogya Upanishad representing for historical development of Hindu culture. In *Dumb Dancer*, mythical character, Bhima is taken from Mahabharat, who is facing a psychological problem.

Uma Parameshwaran's *Meera: A Dance Drama* and *Sita's Promise* are taken Mahabharat and Ramayan.

Chandrasekhar Kambar's *Jokumaraswamy* "is folk mythical ritualistic play fertility impotence and their implication extended to agriculture as well as the failure of revolution in India just as tenant and not the land lord is the real owner of the land .The potent servant Basanna happens to own sexually the wife of the impotent village chief"³. In his play *Siri Sampige* he mix up the narcissism myth and the thought of body and soul. In both plots, the characters Shivanaga and Avali and Javali are shown with dilemma of body and soul

Mohan Rakesh in his play *Half way House* depicts the condition modern life which has been fragmented. Savathri and Mahendranath stereotype characters in mythical manner. Savatri is the savior of her husband's life as per the myth. Over there she is not the savior of his life but turns out to be destroyer of her husband's life.

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