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**Aging as crisis in Modernity: A Reading of Girish Karnad's *Yayati* and  
Mahashwetha Devi's *Rudali***



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**Abstract :** *This paper reads Girish Karnad's **Yayati** and Mahashweta Devi's **Rudali** as texts of modernity in the Indian context. It argues against reading them as purely mythical or traditional narratives and suggests that they transform the historical mythical materials in order to carry forward their preoccupation with modern experiences. Secondly it also suggests that these texts even though pursue different styles of narration are comparable thematically in that their locus*

*is the fixation of our modern times i.e. class and sexual relations. As an extension of these concerns they present the phenomenon of aging as crisis of modern Man.*

**Key words :** *modernity, modern angst, modern aging, one dimensional man, female desire, fantasy elements, pleasure principle, repression, structure of feeling, voyeurism, family drama, hegemonic practice, class relations, sexual relation, Yayati legend, rudali legend.*

## **RESEARCH PAPER**

Herbert Marcuse the German Frankfurt school sociologist who wrote extensively on the characteristics of the modern civilization in his books such as *Eros and Civilization* (1956) and *The One Dimensional Man* (1964) notes the excessive elements of fantasy in modern culture, including in mass medias such as films, Television and print media like popular romances and in consumerism trends. He also notes the increasing celebration of opiates, hallucinogens and sex drugs as extension of this inclination for fantasy and the imaginary life of the mind. He comes to the conclusion that this character of modern life must be mark of repression of the pleasure principle in real or actual life we lead, framed as it were by the contingencies of market, money and work.

His argument is that in the modern age the forces of late capitalism is taking away all the aspects of pleasures of life and replacing it with urge for money and material success. Humans hedged in by the demands to gain more and more wealth and material success are reduced to merely their economic dimension and have lost all freedom of other enjoyments of life. The fantasies of a good life that are provided by the capital driven mass medias and consumerism become surrogates and compensation for the real pleasures that cannot be had. Films and TV, for example provide materials for the passive fantasies of the modern individual through their exhibitiv value just as consumerism. Central to them is the projection of a longed for good pleasurable life on to fantastically libidinous sexual erotic desires which now have been rendered impossible to fulfill. As a more recent thinker Baudrillard would say the technology driven mass media consumerism today ply us with empty hyperreal world of images and narratives that are mere surrogate dummies of the real and ultimately cannot be consumed with any sort of pleasure.

Thus modern culture is dominated by voyeurism and consumption of the spectacle. Marcuse's observations on our ages' modernity's culture are insightful and farsighted. Marcuse is not singular in making such an observation. Karl Marx for instance wrote of the preindustrial pre capitalist societies as organized around work labour that was artistically and emotionally rewarding. Thinkers such as F R Leavis wrote of the organic society where work and pleasure were integrated. In this regard reformulating the Marcusean view within the

cultural theoretical framework provided by the British cultural thinker Raymond Williams, that of the concept of Structure of Feeling; we might say that modern culture is organized around particularly a bipolar mental structure; on the one hand the capitalist ethic drives man to control his libidinal nature and keep it at bay; and on the other it makes it even more desirable on the rebound. The modern man is caught between wanting and not wanting, between restraint and abandon. By this sort of schizophrenic urge seeks to sublimate into fantasy life of infinite prowess of all sorts, sexual erotic not withstanding and its fulfillment. This essay presents an analysis of the bilingual English-Kannada playwright Girish Karnad's plays with special focus on *Yayati*, in this framework. It examines *Yayati* as a play that explores the angst of the modern bourgeois man and the repression of modern bourgeois sociality. Much of Karnad criticism has promoted his plays as archetypes and the issues they raise as timeless and universal. To the contrary this essay proposes that Karnad's plays give expressions to our modernity's fault lines. Thus for instance the pursuit for physical immortality and permanent youth the main theme of *Yayati* may be considered as a peculiarly modern ideal which makes sense only in the context of our own ages' contingencies. Not only does this theme sit at loggerheads with the Hindu belief that worldly birth is the only certainty of human existence, it also begs the question why any individual who has lived a full life would wish to live in an unchanging body when the inevitable fact of rebirth lures him with the magic of infinite varieties of physical forms and experiences (as in the Buddha's recollection of rebirth to Ananda). It thus puts into doubt that fear of old age and death of the physical body is a timeless universal problematic. On the other side humans may seek for an afterlife, an urge to live on even after one dies by their great acts and deeds. It is only the one-dimensional man who fears death.

One might argue that Karnad's *Yayati* is not so much about death as it is about being forever young and youthful. Because according to the plays plot Yayati wants to live a life of a young man and enjoy the pleasures of the young timelessly. So he obligates his young son Puru to give up his youth. The theme of aging is therefore more important in Karnad's *Yayati* than any other matter. And regarding this, Karnad like any child of modernity addresses the question of aging in a typical modernist way. It is within the rubric of modernity's crisis I outlined above we must read the phenomenon of aging in his play. In Hinduism old age is assigned as one of the four roles to be played by man in society. In Sanskrit literature the aged is usually addressed as maharishi (great ascetic or sage) and pitamaha (great father or originator), Bhagavan (divine) and peer (seer). They are held in great prerogative in the vanaprastha leg of their worldly journey and endowed with the virtues of worldly wisdom got by a gainful and full life. They are live books of wisdom and sagacity of the primarily oral culture of the old world view. In this role of the wiseman they are succor of the young who might avoid folly of youthful ignorance. Needless to say in contrast to this grand vision of aging of our ancients, in modernity aging is turned into a sickness and illness that needs medical attention. It is viewed as time of physical deterioration of the individual, especially the sexual prowess. A whole science may be devoted to minimize the signs of aging because we are ashamed of its visibility.

One of the most important issues in the modern experience of aging is the clash between the young and the old, or what is called as generation gap, the power struggle, the deceptions and the angst. Karnad's *Yayati* play exemplifies all this par excellence and thus comes out to us as representative of our own times rather than a remote or timeless archetype. Karnad's *Yayati* simply refuses the Hindu role assigned to old age. In his chase for youth and its pleasures, our modern sensibility may be assaulted that Yayati must emerge victorious in

this struggle over his young son Puru, but then we forgive him because he regains his youth and we are on his side for that. Yayati is us, every modern individual who seeks to preserve his youth and remain forever young.

Thus Karnad's earliest plays, *Yayati* remains very popular with a mass appeal because it fulfills the fantasies of the modern Indian individual in many ways. In *Yayati* Karnad has reworked a well-known story from the Indian epic Mahabharata for the purpose, suitably to the modern Indian sensibility and wish fulfillment. In the Mahabharata the Yayati episode is a brief and simple one (see Sastri, P P S (Ed, 1931)) . It presents a typical vedic Hindu problematic especially among the rich, powerful and the ruling nobility: King Yayati's family is facing extinction as his daughter Devayani is found barren due to a rare condition in the epic termed as *jaraa* (prolonged virginity). She has failed to give Yayati an heir. Yayati having grown old has lost his vigour and having led a full life of royal pleasure and fulfillment longs to die and seek the otherworld of the gods. But he is deterred by the lapse of manly obligation, failure to have an heir who would continue his dynasty on earth. So he decides to adopt Sharmista the daughter of the equally wealthy and powerful Vrishapavan in the role of a wife who would fulfill his worldly obligations and release him to seek heaven of the gods. Of course Sharmista gives him three male children Puru, Yadru and Dhruvu (by a brahmana mate Yayati being too old). Puru of course inherits Yayati's kingdom; Dhruvu (the famous Dhruva) is given away to the forest gothra; while Yadru becomes the founder of a sect known as Yadavas.

Karnad has reworked this story by making Devayani as Yayati's first wife instead of his daughter as it is in the epic version. In the Mahabharata story Yayati has gifted Devayani to Sukracharya by Daiva marriage right in lieu of an immense ritual favour the great Sage had performed for him which made him rich and powerful. But Devayani being far younger to Sukracharya does not care to take him for a husband and seeks his blessings in the role of a daughter and has an affair with Galava. But Galava being a poor brahmana cannot afford purchase her from the Sage as per the sastric laws in such a case and ditches Devayani who now finds her barrenness.

In contrast to the above story Karnad's reworking rather foregrounds the erotics of family domestic relations in a typical modern bourgeois way. Indeed the epic story emphasized the implicit rivalry between the two women Devayani and Sharmista as they were competitors for giving the great king an heir. The dharma sastric law held up female primogeniture in that a daughter is placed first as the parents' parcenor and heir, but Devayani fails in this role. Sharmista the other wife who fulfills it is indeed the victor. Karnad on the other side makes Sharmista into Devayani's servant and slave, voluptuous and alluring, producing a typical modern bourgeois love triangle, the pati, patni and woh plot commonplace in modern Indian culture, films and sitcoms. Karnad's play thus presents a typical bourgeois household rather than the royal household of the vedics. Even the architectural features of the Yayati's house in Karnad's play harks back to not earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century upper class south Indian households and not to the vedic. Given the vedic urban landscapes, Sanskrit romances are usually set in the open air, on misty riversides, in flowering gardens, around beautiful fountains and baths such as in the stories of Urvashi-Pururava, Nala- Damayanti, and Satyavati- Parsara. The confined spaces of Karnad's domestic erotics thus seem to be symbolic of the repressive culture of the modern household. There can be no two opinions that Karnad belongs to our age and he reworked the old stories within this typical modern world view. The Mahabharata story version makes no bones that

king Yayati has lived a full life of royal pleasures and now seeks to be released of his transient body which was afflicted with old age. But Karnad's Yayati is an unfulfilled man who is still unresolved of worldly pleasures, presenting a Marcusean problematic I discussed earlier. It is possible Karnad had heard of another Mahabharata story that of raja Piyusha who is said to have acquired the magical power to change form at will and thus achieved immortality. But Piyusha stole the youth of his dutiful wife Chitrlekha and not a son. This story is more representative of the sex war between man and woman rather than father and son. Karnad makes Chitrlekha Puru's wife suitably to his version of the erotic domestic and suppresses the sex war.

Karnad's erotic domestic drama thus presents the problematic of the modern life and modern man. The area of sexuality and sexual relations has undergone the most changes in our age; the strict adherence to monadic sexual relations enforced through our modern legal institution of marriage, strong notions of love and fidelity enjoined by the sentimental obligations within this relationship and that which holds up this formal institution, curb the sexuality of men and women today. Even the reduction of the architecture of the middle class home and household into closed confined spaces is indicative of this narrowing or closing of relationship. This combined with the inroads of profit driven consumerism and capitalist contingencies on this relationship gives rise to repressive sexualities that seek fulfillment in voyeuristic fantasies of bigamy and hyperreal consumption of imagined pleasures.

Karnad's plays exhibit strong erotic plots of unfulfilled fantasies of their protagonists, not just in *Yayati* but also such as in *Nagamandala*, *Hayavadana*, *Male mathu Benki*, even *Wedding Album* and *Broken Images*. In *Yayati* this element is given its fullest expression. The Mahabharata story is unmistakable in its ethical content. King Yayati is of royal birth and has led a life of luxury and pleasure all his life much to the neglect of his worldly duties. He has lived a life of excess for so long that he now longs to achieve moksha, redemption. But the gods reject his plaint until he gains a son. (This plot line is the Hindu version of the religious mystery and miracle plays of the medieval ages in the West whose subjects were also the definition of good life and redemption but they presented a different sort of world view from the Hindu).

Karnad makes his Yayati a middle class average male who hasn't enjoyed life to its fullest as yet having been caught up with the worldly duties. Karnad's Yayati emerges as a modern day protagonist parallel to any kitchen sink drama much popularized by English literature syllabuses in postcolonial India, (rather than of course the *Everyman* plays also popularized by the same). And the theme of incestuous-antagonist relation between the parent and children carries this forward. Our modern Yayati is antagonist and rival to none other than his son, seeking to steal his youth and life giving fullest expression to the fears of our age. Surely a fear that develops within the erotic domestic set up of the modern family. Thus Karnad's play gives a cathartic experience of the modern man's fears and angst.

Karnad's revision of Sharmisita's social status from a princess and friend (sakhi) to a servant and of low birth brings us to another area of mass fantasy today. In the Mahabharata story Sharmisita is a princess by her own right and daughter of Vrishapavan who was of the ruling class just as Yayati was. He belonged to a class of rajas known as Diwans while Yayati belonged to the Yahiya (Agha) cadre. Both of them were therefore members of the ruling elite in any province and kings by their own right mostly having an alliance among them and forming a class. Karnad on the contrary subverts Vrishapavan's racial identity as an Asura

and as of Dasas (Brotherhood of Ten) sect into a slave by low caste birth, and Sharmista to a servant of Devayani by the same virtue. It must be reminded here that Asura referred to Persian (modern day Iranian) descent and in no way indicates lower caste status. As per the Rk veda even Indra is addressed as Asura and is said to be of this race. The concept of caste enables the playwright to elide over class conflicts endemic to capitalist cultures. Caste today is mostly defined as a peculiarly Hindu cultural construct and an entity come from the past economic arrangement. It is mostly seen as a vestigial institution and never as a modern set up. Its social value today for us is that it enables us to misrecognize the class conflict typical of modern culture and deeply embedded in the capitalist processes and the very nature of capitalist system itself. The flow of money, goods and power at the outset requires hierarchies of social relations and therefore proceeds to maintain it. But today in India these disparities are elided by harping back to a past system uniquely Hindu and traditional and oppressive as opposed to the ever-liberating capitalist system.

This sort of makeover of class conflict in Yayati to my observation appears to be an overture to the bourgeois masses in an attempt to negotiate their interest on Karnad's part. The main angst of the bourgeois masses today is the fear of extinction by sheer anonymity and facelessness. This is something promoted by the mass media and visual technologies that promise us an afterlife. As a dramatist and a theatrist he knew the pros of a good popular play and he would be tempted to use such symbolic caste / class differentiation to bring democratic mass appeal to his plays' bourgeois domestic fantasy underplot. So his bourgeois hero Yayati falls for a working class princess and even marries her, thus defying the disparities and inequities of modern culture and makes over class conflicts. There are almost cathartic moments in the play wherein the working class heroine punishes the bourgeois upper class hero and humbles him. This provides a sort of fantasy fulfillment with great mass appeal.

The class conflict makeover becomes a fully-fledged subplot with the play developing as a Freudian psycho drama. This is achieved by making Yayati's son Puru as a half caste, who is characterized as a brooding and retributive Hamlet (as in Shakespeare's play *The Hamlet*). By this the erotic domestic play acquires the dimension of a Freudian psycho drama about exorcising the ghost of a half caste mother and wife. Ultimately the resolution of this psychodrama comes with the suicide/murder of Chitrlekha, Puru's wife symbolic of the longed for matricide. This Freudian psycho drama makes up the subplot of the play and fulfills the class conflict makeover.

So far we have looked at the play from a male centric point of view taking Yayati as the locus of experience. Let us look at the other side, i.e. from Karnad's female protagonist Sharmista's view point. We might be troubled by the question why should Sharmista wallow in the relationship with Yayati? She deliberately incites and seduces him into the adulterous relation, which ultimately leads to his ruin. What about her psychological character, how does it relate to modernity? Parallel to Marcuse's theory of one dimensional man, feminists have always argued that the progress of modern capitalism goes hand in hand with the legal development of the private domestic sphere of the feminine and woman as the other of the public sphere that belonged to the masculine and man. In modern cultures the home and the family has evolved in a complementary functional role and as compensatory to the functions of the public sphere of economy, politics and bureaucracy. The private domestic sphere serves to provide precisely that which is lacking in the public sphere, what the feminists call as the sentimental needs of man and what Marcuse would call as the pleasure principle of life.

In other words the one dimensional man increasingly places the onus on the home and the domestic institution for the fulfillment that the public sphere of profession and money deprives him of. The role of the wife within the so called companionate modern marriage and nuclear family thus is over determined as the opposite of the public man's role, She becomes chattel and handmaid to the desires of and victim of the deprivations faced by the one dimensional man. As a consequence the psychological norms of female character and personality is designed to please and serve the male, even to the extent of denial of her full adulthood and dignity, and most of all economic freedom. She is kept away and suppressed from the public sphere and privatized for the pleasure of man. Feminists like Rosalinda Coward have argued that modern patriarchy promotes a dependency complex by this. Women fail to develop an independent wholesome aspiring spirit and tend to look to man to fulfill their every need. Psychologically they develop a concept of self that exists to please man and therefore expect to be treated and cherished as delicate play toys and baby dolls for the pleasure of man rather than as equal adults.

So in modern cultures the feminine character is cast as complimentary to the masculine. The very destiny of femininity is to fulfill the needs of masculinity, and women become subordinated in every way to the modern man, for his every need. We may interpret Karnad's Sharmista precisely in this light, as a woman who takes on to fulfill her destined role as chattel of a successful public man. It is not without reason that Karnad, unlike in the Mahabharata epic version depicts her as failing to attain the status of a Queen and projects her as a serving woman.

Thus Sharmista's desire for Yayati is a complimentary echo of Yayati's own desire. They are one of a set that belongs to our modernity in every way. This complimentary dyadic character typology and emotional structure serves to fulfill the modern audience's emotional expectations from any play.

Now with this we can turn to the story of *Rudali* the second text which I wish to read against the backdrop of modernity and its angst. This story can be found and popularized in three versions at least, Kalpana Lajmi's film by the name 'Rudali'. Mahashwetha Devi the Bengali writer's short story version and Usha Ganguli's theatre play version, both also titled as 'Rudali'. Set in our own age, somewhere between the end of British colonialism in India and the beginning of independence (covering the span of 1920 to 1950 AD) all the three versions broadly explore the socio-economic dynamics between two classes in a vestigial feudal agrarian economy, one class which has accumulative wealth, owns land and is therefore of the rank and the other which is dodged precisely by the very same accumulative wealth, i.e. the laboring class which makes up the folks of the region. The events of the story are located in the central Indian desert region and are specific to a caste-community that belongs to those parts.

Mahashwetha Devi's version being considered as the lead version, all the three are derived from some very popular folk legends and songs from this region, partly covering Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat regions the Rann of Kutch desert and belonging to the specific caste community which may be considered to be of non-mainstream Hindu social character. These folk songs and stories are about the desire of every pretty young maiden from the poor working class folk sections to find a lover among their rich counterpart class strata the Mahajans, who would give them a dream exit from the oppressions of their own class. Most of these songs are about real stories of real women who had in fact fulfilled

their dreams and where uplifted both economically and spiritually from the disparity of poverty and want.

Kalpna Lajmi's film version is the closest to these folk legends-songs and also least historical (the colonial hybrid liberal-feudal political context is not apparent in the film) as dramatized by the life of Sanichari the protagonist. Its main theme is the hegemonic practice of the wealthy upper class landlords adopting beautiful virtuous young women from the folk sections of the community as mistresses and chattels, who in their old age took up the official mourner (rudali) profession for the upper class. These women were usually either widowed or had terminally ill (suffering from TB or leprosy) ineffectual folksy husbands and no doubt the practice uplifted them economically and socially, placing them above the rest of the folk and therefore usually welcomed by them. The story and practice of rudali therefore fit the famous theory (proposed by Lombardi Satriani (1974) that folk culture serves as counter valuating and compensatory vis a vis the mainstream culture rather than challenging or changing it.

Like the folk songs Lajmi's film depicts the typical situation in which the working class folk coopted to the disparate class structure typical of accumulative patriarchy and participated in it to their advantage without actually needing to break it up. The practice is present as a hegemonic leadership mechanism in the truly Gramscian sense, by which at least some of the interests of the folk were incorporated into the dominant world view of the wealthy landlords and therefore produced a coherent social interest in the community. For instance the film places the wife and the mistress of these upper class in a comparable position, with the wife subjected to endless series of obligatory pregnancies and nothing less, she is deprived of the moral life of a companionate marriage. Moreover as wife she is shown as neither privileged in legal economic (she does not inherit the husband's property) terms. Her prerogative if any came from being daughter of an equally rich man and not for marrying a rich man. In contrast the mistress gained both economically and morally because some of the upper- class-ness rubbed off on her by intimate contact with the wealthy and privileged. Perhaps we can say that this version gives us the old world practice in its most coherent form. In contrast to this film version we have Devi's short story which foregrounds the colonial period setting. In this version the old world political system (in the sense of a Raja and his sabha) has been completely replaced by a colonial- hybrid- liberal feudal system in which the wealthy upper class has become mere landlords without any political, legislative role or transformative power. They have merely liberal socio-economic relations with the lesser folk who depend upon them for their livelihood completely. The story thus brings forth the depravity of the colonial hybrid machinery which role was limited to that of a revenue collecting (mainly taxes on land collected from these wealthy landlords but also on trade) bureaucratic, policing state; and the sheer neglect of the wellbeing of the folk, the utter abandon of any political obligation to uplift them either by providing educational avenues, skills or employment opportunity. It is a sore reminder to us that the liberal political system is not geared in itself to deliver to the people and has to be driven by retaliating mob forces. Coming to the matter of modernity and its angst, Devi's version (and Ganguli's which follows closely the former's short story) best exemplifies the impact of modernity on the compensatory conventional practice and the class relations within a primarily endogamous caste community.

Modernity is symbolized in several ways in Devi's short story even though it is not held up as emancipatory in any way. One such device is the constant traffic and flow of people between Tahad village which is the venue for much of the action of Devis' narrative and the nearby city of Tohri. The younger women of Tahad village are running away to Tohri



to become prostitutes and street hookers there. In the city they live an uncertain life even more than in the village, but for the spirit of rebellion against the Mahajans which makes them to be bold to accost even men outside of their caste community endogamy. In the city the rudali practice is replaced equally by free prostitution.

Devi presents a view of modernity comparable to those found in Yayati and as explained by thinkers such as Marcuse. It is not a coincidence that Sanichari's daughter in law Parbatia runs away with a medicine man to join the dances-cinemas-circus in the big cities, away from a sick husband. Haroa, Sanichari's grandson runs away with the magic show fellows, away from hard work on the fields of the Mahajans. The show biz and the world of fantasy aligned with Modernity draws them away from the conventional compensatory practices and even replace it in their lives. For the women one sort of prostitution is replaced by an equal sexual slavery, albeit a modern form of it. Devi's commentary on the feminine character parallels Cowards' views in many ways, in their self-image and attitude to youth and old age, their bodies and its needs, expectations from marriage and sexual relations.

Devi's narrative draws a continuous comparison between the two different generation women, Sanichari and Bikhini on one side and daughter in law Parbatia, Gulbadan, Ganu etc. They differ mainly in their attitude to their character as women. Parbatia for example expects her husband to support her completely. She views marriage as a haven for women and it was the duty of man to keep the wife while the older generation women are more independent, and viewed their husbands as companions besides whom they shared an equal responsibility for everything. The younger women are fixated on their beauty, youth and are less scrupulous about how they achieve their wants.

It is this hubris of the modern female character that ultimately produces the denouement of Devi's short story: The threat of old age looming over them constantly they finally join Sanichari as rudalis and come back to the village. Devi's short story thus suggests an impasse in the lives of these women. The moot point of Devi's narration seems to be the need for the intervention of a State apparatuses in the lives of these women. She seems to call for a State with a bigger role than the liberal state was designed for. Coming back to the main plot in this narrative that of Sanichari, the dominant responses of our age to this narrative, are that of rejection, shock and even revulsion of the rudali practice, its connection to free sexuality and its eroticization. Devi's story has shocked us to no end and upset us about our culture and society. The free sexual relations around which the rudali practice is presented upsets the norm of chaste love based on monogamous dyadic relations that is central to modern sexuality. In spite of the author taking recourse to an indirect secretive narrative strategy to disclose Bikini's and Sanichari's affair with the Mahajan (till the end the story does not affirm the affairs but leaves us guessing) to soften its reception, the narratives' very implication that the "other woman" may have benefitted from such a practice is something that upsets our modern sensibility.

This sort of reception foregrounds and highlights for us the hubris that underlies the modern celebration of sexual freedom; precisely because this very freedom is ambivalent and contradictory in the sense that it is built around the notions of sentimental love rather than individual rational choice and enshrined in the legal discourse of dyadic nuclear family, and monogamy. The modern feminine role is totally constructed around these notions of sentimental and chaste love. It is this modern sensibility that is assaulted by the *Rudali's*

narrative and turns it into a story of oppression and exploitation for some and for some others of depravity and immorality.

Secondly, our perception of the whole affair as a caste practice coming down to us from a remote past which was supposedly very different to our times: We would be nervous even at the very inkling that the story may be about modern class sociality and refers to our own times and not to any remote past. We fail to recognize that the rudali practice is in truth the apotheosis of the sentimental role of women in patriarchal cultures, the essence of the feminine and very much allied with our own modern times. Thus the epiphanic moment in the Devi's story is when the women who have run away to the city only to become sex workers decide to return home to embrace the rudali profession realizing fully well that it is the logical extension of the other feminine roles, both sexual and domestic, they will always play. We must surely note that this concluding *gest* of Devi's dramatic story is not meant to give a conclusion to the problems of gendered caste practices as it were, but directed at us the modern audience. It throws up the contradictions in our own rejection and horror at such a remote practice of oppression, which we as moderns typically situate in the past.

In conclusion, this essay has made an attempt to uncover the structures of modern Indian sensibility and experience in two very influential and prolific literary texts, those of Girish Karnad's *Yayati* and Mahashweta Devi's *Rudali*. Even though appearing as diverse texts they have several points of convergences and stem from the same modern protocols. Karnad's play located in an apparent discourse of the archaic or universal gives fullest expression to the modern man's angst and dilemmas. While Devi's dramatic narrative with its location in the feminist discourse of oppression and liberation of women holds a mirror to the follies of modernity's contradictions in their lives.

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