SECTION I FEMINISM IN KARNAD’S MYTHICAL PLAYS
CHAPTER II – FEMINISM IN YAYATI

I INTRODUCTION : Girish Karnad wrote his first play Yayati in during his stay in England on a Rhodes scholarship in 1981. Karnad had the privilege of exposure to the Indian myths during his childhood and was motivated by the tales in the Mahabharata to write Yayati. He was able to get a recognition as a playwright with his first play itself as “The play received the Mysore State Award in 1962.”1 In this chapter, it is proposed to study Yayati with regard to the adaptation of Yayati episodes of the Mahabharata. However this chapter is divided into four parts. Part I forms the introduction to the aim of this chapter. Part II gives the plot of Yayati. Part III examines the play to detect how and why the myth has been adapted in the plot of the play. Part IV sums up out come of the examination in previous part.

II PLOT : The plot of the drama is mockery of the two principles the original episodes of Yayati meant to reflect. They are namely filial love and the state of Brhman. The play opens with a quarrel between Devayani and Sharmishtha. The playwright has used this quarrel as a flash back device to narrate how Sharmishtha, the asuara princess was forced to become Devayani’s slave after her marriage with Yayati. Then the play shows Yayati’s preparation to receive his son Puru and his wife Chitralekha. When he makes arrangements to provide his bed room to his son, Sharmishtha approaches him and coaxes him to share bed with her. Devayani complains it to her father, Sukracharya and he cures Yayati a premature old age.

If someone exchanges his youth with his old age, Yayati can regain youth. Therefore, he seeks the consent many youths in vain. When he is in dismay in this regard, his son volunteers to exchange his youth with his father’s premature old age and subsequently that deed is accomplished. Puru’s wife, Chitralekha feels proud of her husband’s filial love on hearing it. But it does not last long. When she sees Puru’s ugly personality, she becomes disheartened and commits suicide without being able to accept her husband as an old man. Yayati observes that Devayani has deserted him,
Chitralekha has died and Swarnalata has become insane because of his sexual relationship with Sharmishtha. He returns the youth to his son again and leaves for the forest with Sharmishtha.

**III SOURCE TEXT :** The author has fallen back upon Chapter IV Devayani and Kacha, Chapter V The Marriage of Devayani and Chapter VI Yayati in C. Rajagopalachari’s *Mahabharata* for making his play *Yayati*. A summary of these three chapters is presented as it is necessary to explain how the author has manipulated them in his play.

There used to be a serious struggle between the gods and the demons for the lordship of the three worlds. While Brihaspati, a pre-eminent sage well versed in the knowledge of the *Vedas*, was the preceptor, Sukracharya who was known for profound wisdom, was the preceptor of the *asuras*. As Sukracharya possessed the secret of Sanjivini and brought those who were killed in the battle back to life by using it, the *asuras* enjoyed an edge over the gods in the struggle for the power.

Hence the gods approached Kacha, the son of Brihaspati, and besought his help. They appealed to him to win his way into the good graces of Sukracharya and learn the secret of Sanjivini by becoming his disciple. Thus they thought that their handicap could be removed. Kacha conceded to their appeal and was able to become Sukracharya’s disciple.

Kacha spent many years under his *guru* rendering the prescribed duties to perfection in his house hold. Besides, he devoted himself pleasing and serving his *guru*’s lone daughter, Devayani with songs, dance and pastime and thus was able to win her affection. However he remained faithful to the vows of brahmacharya.

The *asuras* learnt Kacha’s progress, they suspected that Kacha was planning to learn the secret of Sanjivini to outdo them in the battle. Therefore, they tried to destroy him in order to prevent such a calamity.
Thus the *asuras* seized him one day while he was engaged in grazing the cattle of his master and cast his flesh to the dogs after tearing him to pieces. Since Kacha did not return home even after the sunset, Devayani feared some mishap had befallen him. Hence she seeks her father for the restoration of him. Accordingly, he employed the art of Sanjivini and invoked the dead disciple to appear. On another occasion, the *asuras* killed Kacha once again. They killed him when he had gone to the forest to gather flowers for Devayain and mixed his body up in the sea water after having pound his body to a paste.

Lastly, the *asuras* killed Kacha and burned him to ashes. Then they mixed the ashes in the wine and served it to Sukracharya subsequently. When Devayani found no trace of Kacha’s return, she approaches her father for help. When her father was reluctant to invoke Kacha again and tried to persuade his daughter to ignore the death of Kacha, she resorted to observe fast unto to death if her father was not ready to restore the life of Kacha. Consequently, Sukracharya learnt that Kacha was inside his stomach when he employed the art of Sanjivini to invoke him. He faced a crisis as he had to die if Kacha were to be invoked from his stomach. However, he realized that imparting the secret of Sanjivini to Kacha was the only solution to manage the crisis. Thus he taught the art of Sanjivini to Kacha. As a result, Kacha came forth formhis guru’s body while the great preceptor fell down mangled and dead.

However, Kacha brought Sukracharya back to life immediately by employing his newly acquired Sanjivini art. He told his guru that he was like father and mother to him. He justified his view thus: “The teacher who imparts wisdom to the ignorant is a father. Besides, as I have issued from your body you are my mother too.”

Kacha remained for many more years in Sukracharya’s *ashrama*. When he completed the period of his vow, he went to his guru to take leave of him to return to the world of gods. At that juncture, Devayani met and asked him to marry her. Kacha refused to oblige her stating that he and she were like brother and sister. He asked her to
serve his *guru* ever unto perfection and disengaged himself and proceeded to the abode of Indra, the king of gods.

Devayani and Sarmishtha, the daughter of Vrishaparva, king of the *asuras* were intimate companions. Devayani and the daughters of Vrishaparva went to bathe in the cool waters of a sylvan pool after having sported in the woods. They had left their clothes on the bank while they were bathing. As a strong breeze blew there, their dresses got huddled into heap. On seeing Sarmishtha clad in Devayani’s clothe, Devayani made a comment in half jester that it was improper for Sarmishtha to wear the clothe of the daughter of her father’s master.

Sarmishtha felt hurt and humiliated by Devayani’s conduct and became angry. In anger, she humiliated Deavayani by stating that her father was the king and the latter’s father was dependent on her father’s bounty. She also called her the daughter of a beggar. Due to uncontrollable anger, she slapped on her cheek and pushed her into a dry well. The *asura* girls thought that Devayani had lost her life in that incident.

Devayani had not died but was miserable by being unable to climb up the steep sides of the well. At that juncture, Emperor Yayati of the Bharata race who was hunting came to that spot in search of water to slake his thirst. When he glanced into the well, he noticed Devayani inside the well. On her request, he seized her hands and lifted her out of the well. She was unwilling to return to her father apprehending dangers to her from Sarmishtha. Then she asked Yayati to marry her as he had held her by her right hand. He replied that since he was a kshatriya and she a brahmana, their marriage would be treated as *pratiloma* and would thus amount to violating the ancient tradition as such marriages were prohibited by the *sastras*.

Devayani felt disappointed and had no mind to return home. Then her father’s messenger met and asked her why she had not returned home. She briefed her about what had happened to her asked her to inform her father that she would not set her foot in the capital. On learning it, Sukracharya hurried to his daughter and asked her to
Devayani did not butch an inch from her stubborn stand. Then Vrishaparva also arrived there and requested her to return to the capital. She puts condition that Sarmishtha should become her handmaiden and attend on her in the house into which her father gave her in marriage. Sarmisha agreed for that condition as she realized her mistake. Thus Devayani returned home after the pacification.

Devayani met Yayati on another occasion and repeated her request that he should marry her. But Yayati was not ready to accept her proposal and repeated his objection that could not marry her lawfully as he was a kshatriya and she was a brahmana. Finally, they decided to get married if Sukracharya would consent. Sukracharya gave his consent for that *pratiloma* marriage.

Yayati and Devayani got married and were spending many days in happiness. Sarmishtha, who remained with Devayani as an attendant, met Yayati privately and prayed to be taken also as his wife. Accordingly, Yayati married her without the knowledge of Devayani. However, Devayani came to know of their marriage and became angry naturally. She complained to her father who in rage cursed Yayati with premature old age. As a result, Yayati was stricken with an age in the very prime of his manhood. Being unable to bear the burden of premature old age, he begged Sukracharya for his forgiveness. Having considered his help in rescuing his daughter from the well, he relented at last and pronounced a remedy like this: O king, you have lost the glory which is youth. The curse can not be recalled, but if you can persuade anyone to exchange his youth for your age the exchange will take effect”.

Yayati had five sons and summoned them and informed that one of them ought to bear the burden of his old age and give his youth in return. As he desired to enjoy life in the full vigour of the youth, he also declared that he who agreed to that and bestowed his youth on him would be the ruler of his kingdom. While the first four sons refused to agree for the exchange of youth, his last son called Puru was moved by the filial love and thus agreed gladly to give him his youth and relieve him of the sorrows of old age.
and cares of State. Subsequently, when Yayati touched his son, the former became a youth and the latter an aged.

Yayati began to enjoy life for long but was not satisfied. Therefore he went to the garden of Kubera and spent many years with an *apsara* maiden. After long years of stay with her, the wisdom dawned on him that desire could not quenched by indulgence. On the contrary one could reach peace only by a mental poise beyond likes and dislikes. He suggested that such was the state of Brahman. Having spoken like that, Yayati took his old age and returned the youth to his son Puru. Subsequently Yayati made Puru the king of his vast empire and retired to the forest. He spent his time there in austerities and, in due course, attained heaven.

**III FEMINISM IN YAYATI** : Three kinds of feminism are observed in *Yayati*. They are Dalit feminism, Contextual feminism and Social feminism. The first is found in the episodes of Sahrsmistha and Devyani. The second is noticed in the reinterpretation of Yayati’s intention to marry Deuyani. The third is observed in the reaction of Chitralekhha to Yayati with regard to the exchange of his old age with Pooru’s youth.

**Dalit Feminism:** In the *Mahabharata*, Devayani is the lone daughter of Sukracharya, a great *rishi* who is the guide of *asuras*. Sarmishtha is the princess of the *asuras* king called Vrishparva. Both Devayani and Sarsmitha grow as intimate friends right from their childhood. But a quarrel erupts between them due to Devayani’s jest and sarcasm. At the end of the quarrel, the angered Sarsmitha slaps across the face of Devayani and pushes her into a dry well. When she cries for help and rescue, Yayati, the king, who happens to pass through that side hears her cry and lifts her from the well by holding her hand. On the basis of the Hindu convention that a man who holds the right hand of a woman should marry her, Devayani claims that he should marry her. Though Yayati argues that he is Shatriya and thus should not marry her because she is Brahmin, she forces him to marry her by taking her father’s consent. However she insists that Sarmishtha should work as her maid in her place. Later, Yayati pursues a liaison with
her and marries her secretly. On learning this, Devayani becomes angry and makes her father curse him that he should become old prematurely at once. He pleads with him for redemption. So Sukracharya provides an alternative. Accordingly, he can regain his youth if any youth exchanges his youth with his old age. When his first four sons refuse for the exchange, his last son Puru comes forward and accepts his father old age by giving his youth to him. Then Yayati visits various places and enjoys the pleasure of beautiful women. At the end he realizes that there is no end for pleasure through indulgence and returns the youth to his son and takes back his old age. He leaves for the forest for his last days after handing over the kingdom to Puru.

Karnad has modified the treatment to Sarsmitha. He has introduced a new character called Swarnalata as a maid to Devayani. Through this character, the possibility of looking down upon Sarsmitha on account of her *asura* race/caste is reflected. At the opening of Act One, it shown in the dialogue between Swarnalata and Devayani thus:

DEVAYANI : Enough, Swarna. How often do I have to tell you not to pay her any attention? Get up now. There is so much to attend to yet---

SWARNALATA : That spiteful whore---I would have torn her hair out if you hadn’t stopped me. Taught the fiend a proper lesson. The rakshasi. You heard us, madam. Did I say a word against her? All those dirty insinuations. The nasty jibes. They are too horrible to think. She didn’t even spare His majesty, I .. I can’t bear it.

DEVAYANI : She has a foul tongue. I know. Just ignore her.

SWARNALATA : What have I done to her? What has she got against me?

DEVAYANI : Nothing. It is all my fault. I didn’t realize she would tear into you like that. I’ll see that you don’t have to deal with her from now on.

SWARNALATA : But why do you tolerate her? Why don’t you send her back to her tribe?
DEVAYANI : Enough, I say. Just get back to your work. There is still a lot left to do. Remember, it is an important day in my life.

SWARNALATA: Two years of it! I can’t take it any longer. How she lashed out at His Majesty yesterday. She was so vicious it took our breath away and yet you tried to reason with her. Why? Why do you put up with her? I know she was your friend once. But today she is your slave. You mustn’t let her forget that. And you mustn’t forget it either. [Act I, 7-8]

Swarnalata is also a servant in the palace. But she belongs to a higher caste. The exposition of discrimination among women on the basis of class and caste is an example of Dalit feminism. Sharmishtha is discriminated against Devayani on the basis of the status. Sharmishtha is an asura woman and Devayani is a queen. Again, Sharmishtha is discriminated against Swarnalata on the basis of caste though both of them are servants to Devayani. Sharmishtha is a tribal and Swarnalata is a higher caste woman. Swarnalata uses such terms to refer to as spiteful whore, fiend, rakshasi, dirty, nasty, foul tongue, tribe, vicious, slave etc. All these terms are abusive and they are used to used against Sharmishtha. Swarnalata uses the word ‘satanic’ to describe Sharmishtha in her dialogue with Devayani a little later. The Dalit consciousness is further exhibited in Sharmishtha’s response to Devayani’s alleging that Swarnalata is unnecessarily attacked by Sharmishtha as follows: SHARMISHTHA: I promise you, madam, I was not being deliberately nasty. It is just that I am uncouth rakshasi. And the situation here ... a kshatriya palace, ruled over by a brahmin queen! Confusing isn’t the word.[ Act I, 9]

The aspect of challenging the higher caste is also evident in Sharshmitha’s characterization the play. When Devayani reminds her that she should not cause troubles to others except her, she replies that there are not others for her. She argues that she and Devayani are the only two that matter to her. She also makes it clear that Devayani is her mistress and she is her favourite slave. Later, she tries to show that she is superior to
Devayani in all respects except the caste in which is born. It is a very appropriate example of Dalit feminism and it is illustrated here thus:

SHARMISHTHA: I opened my eyes, two years ago. Don’t you remember? I do. The precise moment. When I closed my eyes, I was the princes of the rakshas. You were the offspring of a destitute brahmin, dependent upon my father. I had everything. Beauty, education, wealth. Everything except birth --- an Arya pedigree. What was your worth? That your father knew the ‘sanjeevani’ spell. That is all. Yet I worshipped you. No, I loved you. To me, the most wondrous power I possessed seemed to be my ability to shower gifts upon you – things you hadn’t asked for but which you gracefully accepted. My personal jewellery, my mother’s diamonds, precious stones from the treasury. Some even stolen.

(Devayani has heard all this before. But she lets Sharmishtha go on since the spiel gives her a sense of power which she makes no attempt to hide.)

I opened my eyes. You had become the Queen of the Arya race. Wife of King Yayati. And I was your slave. My eyes had lids now. I live staring at you, unflinchingly. Like the fish. No, like the gods. No, more a corpse, its eyes wide open. As the King crawls into your bed night after night, I want you to remember I am there, hovering around ...

[Act I, 11]

In the Mahabharata, Sharmishtha does not argue with Devayani regarding the racial discrimination. Karnad’s Yayati is not about the mythical Devayani and Sharshmitha. It is about the probable consequence of such an event in the modern and real situation in India.

Contextual feminism is also found in Karnad’s Yayati. The contextual feminism refers to the shift of mythical event to the contemporary context with a twist. In the Maharabharata Yayati marries Devayani very accidently. Devayani takes advantage of his act of holding her right while pulling from the well to save her and gets married to
him without his willingness. But it is altered in Karnad’s *Yayati*. A new interpretation of Yayati’s intention to marry Devayani is offered.

Sharmishtha coaxes Devayani to believe that Yayati has married her for the purpose of learning the ‘sanjivini mantra’ from her father. It is Kacha who visits Sukracharya and becomes his disciple for acquiring ‘sanjivani mandra’. Devayani falls in love with him and forces him to marry her. He declines because she is a daughter of his *guru*. But Karnad creates a change in showing that Yayati is selfish and has used the institution of marriage to get his desire for sanjivani mandra fulfilled. Sharmishtha also alleges that Yayati is a womanizer and seducer of women. He is full of lust for women. He wants to become immortal with sanjivani mandra to enjoy the pleasure of beautiful women eternally. This idea is evident in Sharmishtha’s interaction with Devayani as follows:

**SHARMISHTHA**: Except that he is not lusting for, you poor darling, he lusts for immortality. Your father’s art of ‘snajeevani’

**DEVAYANI**: Shut up!

**SHARMISHTHA**: Yayati. The scion of the Bharata dynasty. He is not short of women, is he? Women of his own kind. Sensuous kshatriya maidens. Virgins reared for him. But he chooses you. Why? You know the answer. You, only you, could lead him to the ultimate goal; a sanctuary beyond the reach of death. Ah! The joy of turning the funeral pyres of one’s kinsman into altars for one’s own fir sacrifice. The timeless of thrill of it.

**DEVAYANI**: Like your father, you mean, who has been fawning on mine for his favours?

**SHARMISHTHA**: ... And I see him in Yayati, who has the world in his palm. And your father, the great Shuracharya, has the means to keep it there. For eternity. That is what he lusts for.

**DEVAYANI**: I could have had your tongue slashed. But, I won’t. I want to see how long you can go on abusing it before it wears out.
SHARMISHTHA : Just think of when Yayati saw you first. You were in a well --- covered in mud and filth. Scratched. Bleeding. Your clothes in tatters. You think he fell in love with that spectacle. Fool! He would have gone away without a second thought -- except that he learnt that you were Devayani. Devayani! Daughter of Shukracharya! And Yayti’s manhood raised its head. And all he had to do to keep his banner flying over the world was to plant his flag pole into you.[Act I, 11-12]

*The Mahabharata* does depict that Yayati is obsessed with endless desire for women and thus coaxes his son to exchange his youth with his premature old age. But Yayati is never portrayed as having lusted for sanjivani art and married Devayai only for that art. Yet Karnad has altered it and shown through Sharshmitha that he has married Devayani for the sake of sanjivani art. In addition, it is stated that Yayati has been enjoying the women. Here Yayati is an oppressor of women. He uses his power as the king to seduce women endlessly. He is also selfish as he has married Devayani only for the sanjivani art. In both cases, women are vulnerable Karnad has changed the context to exposes the exploitation of Devayani by Yayati and thus this is called contextual feminism.

The elements of social feminism are observed in the depiction of Swarnalata. It is a known fact that the institution of marriage and notion of fidelity and love are patriarchal double sword to harass womankind in the Hindu society. The Hindu woman has been victim of such practice from the time immemorial. Karnad has created Swarnalata character on his own and in her woes the exploitation of woman is exposed.

Swarnatala is a victim of her husband’s desertion for no fault of her. She has hidden it within her. When Chitralekha arrives in the palace, she provokes her to reveal her life. She narrates her story to Chitralekha. She is her father’s only child. Since he is not rich enough to appoint a teacher for her, he persuades a poor brahmin to give her education in return for a free meal a day. As the teacher does not want the news to spread, he chooses to teach her in the night and sleep in her house. As she is keen, she
learns well until she attains puberty. After her puberty, she is married off. Her husband is a very nice at the beginning. He pampers her which she describes as: I Couldn’t have prayed a nicer husband. All he wanted was for me to be happy. He showered me with endearments, with love, with gifts. It was ‘My Swaru—‘, ‘My darling Swaru------’ every minute.’[Act IV, 59]. But this endearment from him is short-lived. He comes to know her teacher and began to suspect her character which she narrates thus:

Then, one day, he came to know about my teacher. Misgivings sprouted in his mind. I told him there was no basis for his doubts. I begged and pleaded. If there was the slightest evidence for his apprehension, he would have forgiven me. But there was none. Doubt grew into suspicion and then slowly twisted itself into an obsession, a laceration he had no means of controlling.[Act IV, 59].

Her husband’s obsession becomes serious. He begins to toss and turn in his bed without any change in his love for her. He shows his conviction that she is innocent but is unable to escape form his suspicion. Then he attempts to take revenge on her which is the example of male chauvinism. “She describes his behaviour thus: He began to look for solutions to his torment. To revenge himself on me by indulging in woman, in drinks, in the campaigns. ... And the more I loved him, the more venomously he hated me and himself.”[ Act IV, 59]

Being unable to witness his self-suffering, she decides to tell him a lie that her teacher has seduced her. The purpose for which she tells the lie boldly is defeated in the consequence. She expects him to become normal and lead a normal conjugal life with her after her false confession. But her husband deserts her once for after her confession. Thus she has become a destitute. Both Honesty and dishonesty and truth and lie cause pain to woman in the male dominant society and Swarnalata’s story is a testimony to it. This domestic oppression on woman is a social factor and the exposition of it is an example of social feminism.
Girish Karnad has adapted the myth of Yayati in his own way to serve the purpose of problematizing such notions as filial love and the notion of Brhaman. As an innovator of drama, he has also created his own characters and this act transforms his play into a poetics of playwriting.

It is very interesting to observe that the author modified the original text with reference to the purpose of Yayati to marry Devayani. In the original tale, Yayati rescues Devani from the dry well by holding her right hand. Though Devayani forces him to marry her on the ground that he has held right hand, he declines stating that their marriage would be treated as *pratiloma*. On the next occasion he yields to her request and marry her without any vested interest. The following proves this factor:

On another occasion also Devayani came across Yayati. She repeated her request that he should take her as his wife since he had clasped her right hand. Yayati again repeated his objection that he, a kshatriya, could not lawfully marry a brahmana. Finally they both went to Sukracharya and got his assent to their marriage. This is an instance of the *pratiloma* marriage which was resorted to on exceptional occasions. The sastras, no doubt, prescribe what is right and forbid what is wrong but a marriage once effected cannot be made invalid. Yayati and Devayani spent many days in happiness.  

Karnad manipulates this theme and invests suspicion that Yayati might have married Devayani with an intention to learn the art of Sanjivini from her father Sukracharya in the dialogue between Devayani and Sarshmitha in his play. The author depicts Sarshmitha raising this issue in the play thus:

DEVAYANI : And you would see only one thing in my eyes. The reflection of His Majesty’s face …

SARSHMITHA : Really? And what would you see in His Majesty’s eyes? Have you tired to find out? Have you ever dared examine those eyes and acknowledge the lust burning there?
DEVAYANI: And why not? That’s what I am here for. To be lusted for by His Majesty.

SARSHMITHA: Except that he is not lusting for you, you poor darling. He lusts for immortality. Your father’s art of ‘sanjeevani’.

DEVAYANI: Shut up!

SARSHMITHA: Yayati. The scion of the Bharata dynasty. He is not short of women, is he? Women of his own kind. Sensuous kshatriya maidens. Virgins reared for him. But he chooses you. Why? You know the answer. You, only you, could lead him to the ultimate goal: a sanctuary beyond the reach of death. Ah! The joy of turning the funeral pyres of one’s kinsmen into altars for one’s own fire sacrifice. The timeless thrill of it.

... 

SARSHMITHA: Just think of when Yayati saw you first. You were in a well—covered on mud and filth. Scratched. Bleeding. Your clothes in tatters. You think he fell in love with that spectacle? Fool! He would have gone away without a second thought—except that he learnt that you were Devayani. Devayani! Daughter of Shukracharya! And Yayati’s manhood raised its head. And all he had to do to keep his banner flying over the world was to plant his flag pole into you.5

There is a distortion of Devayani’s intention with reference to her marriage with Yayati in Karnad’s play. Devayani has loved Kacha, who became the disciple of her father only to learn the art of Sanjivini. He has gone back to the world of gods refusing to oblige to her by stating that he is like a brother to her. When Yayati holds her right hand to help her to come out of the dry well into which Sarshmitha has pushed her, she insists upon him to take her as his wife by adhering the tradition that he who holds the right hand of a maiden is like a husband to her. Besides, she feels that Yayati is qualified in respect of status. The following serves as an illustration of the above:
Devayani had not been killed by the fall into the well but was in a sad plight because she could not climb up the steep sides. Emperor Yayati of the Bharata race who was hunting in the forest by a happy chance came to this spot in search of water to slake his thirst. When he glanced into the well, he found a beautiful maiden lying in the well. He asked: “Who are you, O beautiful maiden with bright ear-rings and ruddy nails? Who is your father? What is your ancestry? How did you fall into the well. …” She told Yayati: “You have held a maiden by her right hand, and you must marry her. I feel that you are in every way worthy to be my husband.”

Karnad has distorted this factor in his play. Sarshmitha coaxes that Devayani has introduced herself to Yayati as Sukracharya’s daughter in order to impress him to marry her. Sharmishtha argues that Devayani has tried to avoid the experience of disappointment similar to the one she had with Kacha. She states “you didn’t want the Kacha experience again! So while he was locked in your embrace, you quickly told him you were Devayani, daughter of et cetera et cetera.”

Another instance of caricature of the original text is observed in the presentation of how Sarshmita has become Devayani’s slave. It is done through the device of recollection in the argument between the two at the opening of the play. Indeed it is a modification of the original because that story is narrated in first half Chapter V THE MARRIAGE OF DEVAYANI. It is portrayed that Sarshmitha feels offended by Devayani’s remark that it is improper for Sarmishtha to wear Devayani’s clothes as the latter is the daughter of the preceptor of the father of the former. As a result, she abuses Devayani like this:

Do you not know that your father humbly bows in reverence to my royal father every day? Are you not the daughter of a beggar who lives on my father’s bounty? You forgot I am of the royal race which proudly gives-while you come of a race which begs and receives-and you dare to speak thus to me. Sarmishata went on, getting angrier and angrier, she finally slapped Devayani on the cheek and pushed her into a dry well.
Yayati rescues her from the well and goes away rejecting her proposal to marry her for having held her right hand. Suffering from humiliation, she refuses to return home until Sarmishtha vows to become her handmaid in the house into which she is given in marriage. Sarmishtha obeys to this and this instance is narrated in the original text thus:

Devayani was stubborn and said: “Sarmishtha who told me that I was the daughter of a beggar, should become my handmaiden and attend on me into the house into which my father gives me in marriage.” Vrishaparva consented and asked his attendants to fetch his daughter Sarmishtha. Sarmishtha admitted her fault and bowed in submission. She said: “Let it be as my companion Devayani desires. My father shall not lose his preceptor for a fault committed by me. I will be her attendant.” Devayani was pacified and returned to her house with her father.  

While this part of episode occurs before Devayani’s marriage with Yayati in the original text, Karnad has modified the occurrence of instance in his play by presenting it after so many days of Devayani’s marriage with Yayati.

The marriage of Sarmishtha with Yayati is also modified in *Yayati*. After the marriage of Yayati and Devayani, Sarmishtha becomes Devayani’s handmaiden and attends on her in her husband’s palace as per her vow. After many years, Sarmishtha pleads with Yayati to marry her and thus they get married. It is narrated in the source text as follows: “Yayati and Devayani spent many days in happiness. Sarmishtha remained with her as an attendant. One day, Sarmishtha met Yayati in secret and earnestly prayed to him to take her as his wife. He yielded to her prayer and married her without the knowledge of Devayani.”

Karnad has changed the episode in his adaptation of it in *Yayati*. While Sarmishtha prays Yayati to marry her in the source text, she plays a mischief to attract Yayati towards her. She briefs him the story concerning how she happened to become Devayani’s slave. Then she states that she is not interested in the life of slave.
Subsequently she tries to consume poison in front of him. On witnessing her act he tries to prevent her from committing suicide by hold her right hand. Following the example of Devayani case, she claims that she should be taken to be his wife. It appears in *Yayati* as given below:

*(She is about to drink the contents of the vial when Yayati jumps forward and grabs her right hand)*

**YAYATI**: Drop it Sharmishtha. Instantly.

*(They both stand frozen. Sharmishtha drops the vial, which falls on the bed.)*

**SHARMISHTHA** (*without any emotion*): Sir, you are holding my right hand. And I am a princess. …

*(Yayati on the bed, Sharmishtha is adjusting her dress. Her hair is cascading down her shoulders. She deftly gathers it in her hand and ties it up in a knot.)*

The above illustration suggests explicitly that Yayati and Sharmishtha have copulated. Later, she creates the impression that Devayani has resolved to send her away from the place in order to provoke Yayati to accept her as his wife. It is shown in the play thus:

**YAYATI**: Quite. And Devayani will deprive me of my choice if she takes you away. So I shall have to take measures to prevent that from happening.

*(Pause)*

I am making you my queen.

**SHARMISHTHA** (*stunned*): Me? Your queen? Nonesense!

**YAYATI**: Mind your words, lady. When I say something, I mean it. I shall make you my queen.¹²

The episode of exchange Yayati’s old age with Puru’s youth has been modified in Karnad’s *Yayati*. In the original text, Yayati invites his five sons and asks one after the other to exchange his youth with his old age. While his first four sons refuse to oblige
their father, his last son, Puru, agrees and undergoes the exchange. It is narrated in C.Rajagopalchari’s *Mahabharata* as given below:

Yayati, who found himself suddenly an old man, was still haunted by the desire for sensual enjoyment. He had five beautiful sons, all virtuous and accomplished. Yayati called them and appealed piteously to their affection: “The curse of grand father Sukracharya has made me unexpectedly and prematurely old. I have not had my fill of the joys of life; for, not knowing what was in store for me, I lived a life of restraint, denying myself even lawful pleasures. One of you ought to bear the burden of my old age and give his youth in return. He who agrees to this and bestows his youth on me will be the ruler of my kingdom. I desire to enjoy life in full vigour of youth”. He asked his eldest son. That son replied: “O great king, women and servants will mock at me if I were to take upon myself your old age. I cannot do so. Ask my younger brothers who are dearer to you than myself.” When the second was approached, he gently refused with the words: “Father, you ask me to take up old age which destroys not only strength and beauty but also—as I see—wisdom. I am not strong enough to do so.” The third son replied:” An old man cannot ride a horse or an elephant. His speech will falter. What can I do in such a helpless plight? I cannot agree.” The king was angry and disappointed that his three sons had declined to do so as he wished, but he hoped for better from his fourth son, to whom he said: “You should take up my old age. If you exchange your youth with me, I shall give it back to you after some time and take back the old age with which I have been cursed.” The fourth son begged to be forgiven as this was a thing he could by no means consent to. An old man had to seek the help of others even to keep his body clean, a most pitiful plight. No, much as he loved his father he could not do it. Yayati was struck with sorrow at the refusal of the four sons. Still, hoping against hop, he supplicated his last son who had never yet opposed his wishes: “You must save me. I am afflicted with this old age with its wringles, debility and grey hairs as a result of the curse of Sukracharya. It is too hard a trial! If you will take upon yourself these
infirmities, I shall enjoy life for just a while more and then give you back your youth and resume my old age and all its sorrows. Pray, do not refuse as your elder brothers have done.” Puru, the youngest son, moved by filial love, said: “Father, I gladly give you my youth and relieve you of your sorrows of old age and cares of State. Be happy.” Hearing these words Yayati embraced him. As soon as he touched his son, Yayati became a youth, Puru, who accepted the old age of his father, ruled the kingdom and acquired great renown.13

Karnad has changed this episode in 

Yayati

and shows that Yayati hopes that his subjects to come forward to provide redemption to his problem of premature old age. It is important to note that Yayati never supplicates his son, Puru, to exchange his youth with his father’s old age at all.

POORU: No one is willing to accept the curse. Your curse.

YAYATI: No one? What do you mean by no one? My dear subjects for whose sake I have a thousand deaths?

POORU: They say they have seen you enjoy the glory you thereby earned.

(Pause)

Actually, some even pointed out that they had paid taxes and tributes for services. YAYATI: … They are trained to lay down their lives for me.

POORU: I suppose it would have been easier if I were offering them death, rather than decrepitude.14

On hearing it, Yayati feels miserable and disillusioned. He is unable to control his anguish and begins to sob due to the overwhelming sense of helplessness. On witnessing his father’s plight, Puru hints that he is ready to help him out. But Yayati does not like this idea and leaves the place indicating that he is not ready to exchange his premature old age with Pooru’s youth. It is very important to observe that it is out of filial love but out of his desire to succeed his father as the ruler of Bharata dynasty.
Pooru agrees for the exchange. It is revealed in the dialogue between Sharmishtha and Pooru as follows:

POORU (slowly): There is a person willing—indeed keen—to accept his curse. But father was not ready to hear the name. In point of fact, I didn’t need to mention the name.

SHARMISHTHA: Who is it?

POORU: Me.

SHARMISHTHA: No, no, no, you can’t. That is utter stupidity! Pooru, the desire of self-sacrifice is a rank perversion.

POORU: I want to root myself back in my family. I want to realize the vision that drove my ancestors.¹⁵

Yayati’s departure to the forest after returning Puru’s youth to himself and accepting his old age from him is also modified. In the original story, Yayati returns to Puru from the garden of Kubera after living for many years with an apsara. He is disillusioned about the notion of sensuous joy by indulgence. He sets out for the forest to spend his remaining life in penance which is narrated in the two paragraphs at the end of the tale in Mahabharata entitled Yayati thus:

Dear son, sensual desire is never quenched by indulgence any more than fire is by pouring ghee in it. I had heard and read this, but till now I had not realized it. No object of desire—corn, gold, cattle or women—nothing can ever satisfy the desire of man. We can reach peace only by a mental poise beyond likes and dislikes. Such is the state of Brahman. Take back your youth and rule the kingdom wisely and well.

With these words Yayati took his old age. Puru who regained his youth, was made king by Yayati who retired to the forest. He spent his time there in austerities and, in due course, attained heaven.¹⁶

In Karnad’s Yayati, Yayati does not feel young after he has got his old age exchanged with Pooru’s youth. He has gained the appearance of a youth but his spirit
remains that of old age only. He feels that his body is “decaying, deliquescing, turning rancid”.\(^{17}\) Thus he experiences disillusionment in this state and decides to accept his old age from his son. Then he leaves his kingdom and sets out to go to the forest accompanied by Sharmishtha: His departure is shown as follows:

YAYTI : Take back your youth, Pooru. Rule well. Let me go and face my destiny in the wilds.

(He embraces the Pooru. When they part, Pooru has become young again and Yayati is bent with age.)

POORU(looks around): It is still dark, Father. Why don’t you wait till dawn to leave?

YAYATI : We have a long way to go, Pooru. Come Sharmishtha …

(Pooru touches the feet of Yayti and Sharmishtha. Sharmishayha embraces him as she might a son. They leave. …)\(^{18}\)

Karnad has created two characters of his own in \textit{Yayati} i.e., Chitralekha and Swarnalata. Besides the incorporation of two new women characters in \textit{Yayati}, which is an adaptation of the myth of Yayati, exemplifies the author’s passion for innovation, it is used as a means of addressing the plight of women in the patriarchal set up.

Chitralekha is portrayed as Pooru’s wife in \textit{Yayati}. It must be noted that there is mention of Puru’s wife in the myth in the \textit{Mahabharata}. It seems that it was unnecessary in the tale of Yayati as the main focus of the tale was to testify that the doctrine of Brahman does not lie in indulgence to quench the sensual desire, but lies in attaining mental poise between likes and dislikes. The author of the myth had not thought of the other implications of the exchange of old age of father with the youth of son. When father takes the youth of his son, he is bound to become that person. And if Yayati becomes Puru, it affects the whole chain of relations. Karnad has raised these implications in adhering to the myth of Yayati in his play in very skillful manner.
At the beginning, Chitralekha feels proud that her has husband has sacrificed his youth for the sake of his father. Being overwhelmed with this feeling, she goes to the extent of performing the arthi to welcome and honour her husband. Her heroic tendency is shattered when she sees him in the old age with decrepitude. Her shock is depicted like this:

*Chitralekha takes the lamp to his face and moves it in a circle in front of it. The flame casts its light upon his face. His withered features look even more terrifying in the dim light. Chitralekha screams and drops the lamp to the floor.*

POORU: Devi, devi …

CHITRALEKHA *(Screaming)*: Please don’t come near me. Go out. Please, please. Don’t touch me …

POORU: But you said …

CHITRALEKHA: I don’t know anything. Don’t ask me. Forgive me, but please … please, get out of here.¹⁹

Then Yayati approaches her to persuade her to accept Pooru. But she is firm in her decision and informs him that she would not let her husband step back into her bedroom unless he returned a young man. In the ensuing argument between them, the author throws light on absurdity of the filial love thus:

CHITRALEKHA : I did not know Prince Pooru when married him. I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost the potency now. He doesn’t possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But you do.

YAYATI *(flabbergast)*: Chitralekha!

CHITRALEKHA : You have taken over your son’s youth. It follows that you should accept everything that comes attached to it.
YAYATI: Whore! Are you inviting me to fornication?

CHITRALEKHA: Oh, come, sir. These are trite considerations. We have to rise above such trivialities. We have to be superhuman. Nothing like this has ever happened before. Nothing like this is likely to …

YAYATI: Where did you learn such filth, you beast? …

CHITRALEKHA: Foolish? What else is there for me to do? You have your youth. Prince Pooru has old age. Where do I fit in?²⁰

Chitralekha represents a new woman who protests against the deprivation of her rights. She throws light on the fact that the likes and dislikes of woman are ignored in the patriarchal system. This suggests that the women given the status of periphery and other. Though she fails in her struggle by committing suicide, her questions create awareness in the society.

Karnad evinces another plight of woman in the creation of Swarnalata in his play. She is a maiden in Yayati’s palace attending on Devayani. She instigates Devayani against Sharmishtha at the beginning of the play. When Devayani leaves the palace, she becomes close to Chitralekha to who she reveals the sad story of married life. Her story evinces that she is a scapegoat of the patriarchal system.

She was the only daughter of her father. Since he was not very affluent, he could engage a proper teacher to tutor his daughter. Therefore he persuaded a poor Brahmin to teach her for which he was given a free meal a day. Since he was apprehensive about unnecessary gossip about his teaching her, he chose to visit her for giving lessons. She learnt well and was married off when she attained the age.

Her husband too was a good man and very affectionate towards her. Unfortunately, he happened to learn that his wife had a teacher and started nursing suspicion about her. When he could not find any evidence to support his suspicion, his suffering increased. He was caught between his suspicion about and love for his wife.
She felt that the solution to his sickness lies in her admittance falsely admit that her teacher had seduced her. Thus she admitted her seduction and described it to him convincingly. It bore fruit that he recovered from his sickness but disappeared from her once for all. It is assumed now that he is no more and yet she conducts herself as a married woman.

The tale of Swarnalata throws light on two important factors. Firstly, it suggests that the society is indignant towards the education to women. Through creating suspicion between the male teacher and girl disciple, the male chauvinist society discourages education to woman. Secondly, women are forced to admit falsely that they are unchaste and are thus deserted. It is a conspiracy to legitimize enslavement of womankind.

However he volunteers himself to do. The author adapts this episode to problematize several implications involved in the exchange of old age with youth and vice versa in his play.

**IV CONCLUSION** : The study of the first mythical play shows feminism in the episodes of Sharshmita and Chitralekha. Sharshmita protests against Deviyani and marries Yayati. Chitrlekha is the creation of Karnad and she questions the authority of Yayati in asking Pooru for the exchange of youth.
Notes


3. Rajagopalchari, Mahabharata, 36.

4. Rajagopalchari, Mahabharata, 35.


8. Karnad, Yayati, 32.

9. Rajagopalchari, Mahabharata, 35.

10. Rajagopalchari, Mahabharata, 36.

11. Karnad, Yayati, 21-23.

12. Karnad, Yayati, 25-26


14. Karnad, Yayati, 47.

15. Karnad, Yayati, 50.


17. Karnad, Yayati, 68.

