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EXPLORING FOLK WISDOM FOR INTEGRITY AND HARMONY IN SIRI SAMPIGE

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ABSTRACT

The paper intends to explore the ability of the archetypal to understand the modern and the ability of the local to understand the global in the play. The paper analyzes the ability of a play of mythological or folk origin to take a more rational stand than modern popular discourses on certain issues. The reason is that conscience of the modern world is judged by the authority/power centers of the physical world, while the conscience of the janapadas is judged by empathy (anthakarana). The paper identifies that the play upholds the natural wisdom of the female, rejecting the cultural configurations of the male intellectual ego found in the patriarchal system. In the eyes of the folk and tribes God, man and nature are intimately related and harmonious. The paper explores in the play cultural practices metaphorically suggesting the present Indian conditions divided in the name of religious, ideological, regional dichotomy. Defying the Sanskrit/Indian poetics, which is based on the glorification of the soul and the humiliation of the body, the work identifies itself with the community-oriented philosophy of life of the Sramanadharas (sramana cults) of the desi heritage. The work poses a strong resistance to the practice of marginalizing or obliterating the experiences and memories of grassroots communities through epistemological violence, calling out the experiences of these communities as unworthy of epistemological respect. It thereby upholds native folk wisdom expressed in the play through the suggestive postcolonial resistance and asserts the totality of human life and culture, rejecting all sorts of extreme dichotomies.

Keywords: Folk Wisdom, dichotomies, integrity and harmony, postcolonial resistance

Introduction

Siri Sampige is a play by Chandrasekhar Kambar translated into english by Rowena Hill with K.P.Vasudevan and M.S Ramaswamy. It dramatises a folk myth of north Karnataka - imaginatively reconstructed by Kambar- dealing with the duality between the material and the spiritual, between the body and the mind. Folk literature is generally connected with the oral transmission of the community, collective or group ethos from generation to generation. Joseph Campbell thinks that 'myth is a system of metaphysics; it is a revelation of transcendental mysteries' (Naykar). The paper tries to examine the play as a methodology to understand today's conditions divided into extreme binaries and as a remedy for it.

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**Exploring Folk Wisdom for Integrity and Harmony in the play**

Sirisampige, confluence of beauty and composure, is a woman who has blossomed in her natural harmony with the nature at large. Awali and Shivanaga having forgotten the fact that they themselves are born through human bodies, tend to ignore the body/ the material and delve deep into the realms of God, soul, spirit, the otherworldly etc. By rejecting the body and embracing the abstract thoughts, not being aware of polymorphism of life, they insult creativity. In the words of Sivanagana's mother, "To the man who gives up his judgment for his pride- forgetting his proper destiny and his duty-to this kind of man it is difficult to discern a woman's truth." (76) The difficulty to understand the distinction between innate love which arises in alliance of two minds and delusional effects of narcissism is also the plight of many young people of our time who are seeing a tragic end in love affairs. This work upholds the natural wisdom of the female, rejecting the cultural configurations of the male intellectual ego found in the patriarchal system.

"How innocent your face is, my Lady. It is a freshly blossoming Lotus without a speck of mire on it, your face. But look at my face. As I picture the God in the water, the mire below was thrown up at it. The body is pure, my Lady, but the soul is dirty. Sins are visible to the soul." (68) The philosophy of the rural folk who deny the superiority of the doctrines of the spiritual and the otherworldly and strongly believes in the integrity/ totality of human life, has awakened Sivanaga too late. "God means a huge big fire pit of arrogance" (65). The truth that Awali eventually realizes in the preceding words is not just a joke. In the eyes of the folk and tribes God, man and nature are intimately related and harmonious. Disgust and satire at the hypocrisy of the cultural constructs of the civilized world is evident in Awali's words.

By knowing and cultivating the spirit of rationality and prudence embedded in the order of folk life, the play seeks to overcome the predicaments and dilemmas of modern life and thereby wants to build an organic life. Shifts in perception of our lives influenced by colonialism have brought about rifts. As a result, the native culture and its tradition is seen as baggage of superstitions. This does not mean that there are no imperfections in folk heritage. In spite of the evil that is basically present in folk heritage and has crept inside it under the pressure of time, the folk heritage resists it in its inner spheres and inner voices. The work that needs to be done today is to get into the inner world of the folk and critically review the ethical issues found there, and to address the dilemmas of the current folk. It is noteworthy that the elders, king's mother and the queen Sirisampige did not rely on the evidence to respond to the king's allegation on queen Sirisampige that she was pregnant by unethical relationship. "The civilized world is so occupied with matter that it does not understand the intuition found in the meditation of experience; If conscience of the modern world is judged by the authority/power centers of the physical world, then the conscience of the janapadas is judged by empathy (anthakarana)" (Mogalli,p142). These words of Mogalli Ganesh regarding the conscience of the folkworld give some insight to understand the different ways the different characters in the play perceive the queen's unethical relationship.

Combining the folktales with myth, the play foregrounds the vision of organic life. Levistras says that "myths think themselves through humans". Seeing in the light of this insight, highly intellectual and abstract thoughts being perceived as concrete events/ characters in the story must be understood as the faith shown by the common folk in the integrity of life. According to Chenni "Myth is a kind of knowledge/ understanding of the folk. it is embedded in the memories at the base of the community's consciousness, a way of realizing the reality of life embedded in the symbolic structure" (p30). The community consciousness seen in the play brings to mind the strangeness of post- modern life. The story can be seen as a psychoanalytical narrative of the nightmare of desi communities losing their identity due to cultural alienation under the influence of colonialism. It can also be seen as a reaction to individual uniqueness upheld in modernist literature and excessive western-inspired rationality.

This work engages in the search for a different terminology, a new cultural metaphysics, new strategies to overcome the current crises. It seems that the natural awareness of the folk traditions (that the play foregrounds) is mocking the body politics that is being carried out on women under the veil of culture by a class of society in our own times. The play strongly confronts the potential work of cultural colonialism that brings to the fore, under the guise of native culture, the sophisticated lifestyles and views that have nothing to do with

the common masses of the land. Defying the Sanskrit/Indian poetics, which is based on the glorification of the soul and the humiliation of the body, the work identifies itself with the community-oriented philosophy of life of the Sramanadharas (sramana cults) of the desi heritage.

The line of wisdom that the play echoes is that female fertility exists for the continuation of the creative process of nature but not for the demonstration of masculinity and its power centers. This seems to be an echo of the philosophy of Body Respect of female narratives that one comes across in Sankamma episode of Malemadeshwara folk epic, Janapada and Tatva Padas. The work poses a strong resistance to the practice of marginalizing or obliterating the experiences and memories of grassroots communities through epistemological violence, calling out the experiences of these communities as unworthy of epistemological respect. It is also necessary to be careful that the female voice of wisdom in this work should not make us hide the angst of contemporary women's communities.

In the history of the ancestors of King Shivanaga, many have lost their lives splitting themselves into two halves; the tragedy seems to be a metaphor for tragedy of an incomplete Indian life throughout the country's historical conflicts between the Vedic and the Aavidik, the Aryan and the Dravidian, the Sanskrit and the Desi dialects etc.

The ghastly tragedy of Shivanaga's life running after the soul/the spiritual, - tearing himself apart in the duality of body and soul, the tangible and the intangible, -gives us a moral and philosophical warning about the tragedies that the various dualities of human life can bring. Such a reading convinces us that the world of rationality and beliefs, the classical and the folklore, spirituality and worldliness, the written and the oral are not two opposite poles. The result of misunderstanding that these two cannot approach each other and mistaking the former as superior and the latter as inferior can lead to dire tragedies in our society. Our ideal is not to live torn between these two; but to achieve an ideological harmony between the two. The play warns that the cultural colonializers/hegemony and its ancillary interests, who are directing the common masses to get lost in romantic abstractions while hiding the problems of the harsh reality in the present, have their existence in the peace of common people's life and the survival of the indigenous culture.

Kalinga can understand the love of a woman, her angst, feeling of fraternity; but, Shivanaga who is trapped in the arrogant mud of cultural configurations can not. Kalinga is a participant in the act of creation as part of nature; Shivanaga and Awali are involved in discrediting creation and nature by killing and torturing in the name of culture and honour. Destruction of the body leads to destruction of soul / mind.

## Conclusion

The work highlights the desire for an organic life of collective consciousness, integrity and harmony while acknowledging nature, its creation and the order of life of the common folk born of their natural wisdom. As in the post-modern Indian life, the past, present and future have to be approached simultaneously. Having forgotten socialist idea that hunger and the dignity of life is same for all, which is close to natural wisdom, the present society seems to have accepted the cunning capitalist philosophy that some people are more talented/ eligible than all others. The tragedy of our time is that we, as Shivanaga's descendants, have once again ignored his warning for us not to split ourselves in the future.

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