

Decoding Gerard Genette's Narrative Codes in Mythical Retellings of Arun Kolatkar's *Sarpa Satra* and Girish Karnad's *Yayati*

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Abstract

Mythical tales echo the collective consciousness of the society, and so does their retelling. Arun Balakrishna Kolatkar's magnum opus, *Sarpa Satra* (2004) retells the myth of the *Mahabharata*, the myth of the great Snake Sacrifice performed by Janmejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna. Janmejaya performs this sacrifice to avenge his father's death who was killed by the snake God, Takshak. The snake God killed Janmejaya's father (Parkikshit) to avenge the killings of snakes at Khandava forest by Arjun, great-grand father of Janmejaya. Girish Raghunath Karnad's *Yayati* (2009), the second text for analysis, revolves around the mythical frame-narrative of *Yayati*, who asked his sons to sacrifice their adulthood to gain youth and enjoy the same. These tales are already told as frame and meta narratives in the *Mahabharata*, but the manner and technique are modified. The paper relates the theory of narrativity and examines the texts with the postulates identified by Gerard Genette to illustrate that within the textual parameters, the narrative techniques employed by the authors bear common elements. Veritably, these elements surface with a common chord in different genres employed for the retellings.

Keywords: Retelling, Myth, Narrativity, Narrative Codes.

One must be careful to the narrative and narrative structures of both the original myth and its retelling to analyse a retelling of a myth. The retelling of myth differs from retelling of a customary story in terms of overall design and planning of the story, plot, themes, motifs, characters, dialogues, episodes, and incidents that reconstitute the myth in its new avatar. The key pursuit of the paper is to analyse the selected texts considering Genette's six elements of narration. Gerard Genette, an authority in narratology, revealed a method to understand a narrative wherein narratology deals with stories as well as the story telling process. The selected texts *Yayati* by Girish Karnad and *Sarpa Satra* by Arun Kolatkar retell the tales from the Hindu scripture the *Mahabharata*. The texts and the application of Genette's six elements of narration becomes more interesting with the fact that both texts take on different genres: *Yayati* is a drama and *Sarpa Satra* is a poetry. Eventually the paper attempts to show that the inculcation of the narrative elements in the retelling of myth signifies an underlying structure which has a potential to

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be recognised in different narratives and genres as reiterated by Genette as narrative mode, narrative focalisation, person or the narrator, narrative time, narrative package, and narrative of words.

The Mahabharata is a sacred Hindu narrative which sustains several frame stories, stories that are embedded in each other. The texts, '*Yayati*' and '*Sarpa Satra*', deal with two events that take place before and after (respectively) the popular war between Pandavas and Kauravas; each event of the myth bears reason in the other one which provides a tiring length

to the epic. Therefore, the *Mahabharata* is an endeavour to embed several stories with hierarchy and narrative structure. In his article, 'Janmejaya's Satra and Ritual Structure', Minkowski says, "The successive embedding of stories creates a hierarchical structure in which the length of the story is not relevant, but rather its level – how many stories does it embed? In how many is it embedded?" (406) This remark finds substantial relevance as Karnad and Kolatkar have individually endeavoured to embed and mention different stories from the epic, the *Mahabharata* in their retellings. The process of embedding a story is an important key to Genette's theory of Narration for understanding narrativity of any text.

M. H. Abrams defines Narrative as "a story, whether told in prose or verse involving events, characters and what the characters say and do" (2008, 181). However, for prof. H. Porter Abbott "narrative is the representation of an event or series of events" (2008, 13). Abrams stresses on 'story' and 'telling' whereas to Prof Abbott 'event' and 'representation' are more important.

Prof. Abott's definition qualifies to be more practical and real as it defines and widens the scope of narrative to the extent that it covers play, poetry, film, and even visual aesthetics. The present research explores texts of different genres *Yayati* is a play whereas *Sarpa Satra* is a poem. And therefore, the definition that narrative is 'the representation of event/series of events' would remain one of the basic yardsticks for the analysis. In recent times the term 'narrative technique' is replaced by an equivalent term 'narrative discourse' and for critics like prof. Abbott "the difference between the event and its representation is the difference between a story (the event or sequence of events) and narrative discourse (how the story is conveyed)" (2008, 15). Similarly, the American critics have preferred using 'discourse' instead of 'plot'. Peter Barry has acknowledged this change, "this, [the use of the term] I think is sensible because it is not just plot but in the narrow sense which is at issue, but style viewpoint, pace and so on, which is to say the whole packaging of the narrative which creates the overall effect" (1995, 223).

There is widespread critical interest in the theory of narrativity as it transcends time, place and genre. French critic Gerard Genette, the celebrated narratologist, gives another set of term 'Historie' that resembles 'story' and 'reelit' for plot in his book *Narrative Discourse* (1972). Highlighting the significance of Genette's theoretical study Barry writes, "[Genette's] work has its focus, not on the tale itself so to speak, but how it is told, which is to say, the process of telling itself" (1995, 231). When it comes to the narrative concerning retelling of myth, it is observed that Genette's questions are relevant in interpreting as well as understanding the narrative which comes from the process of embedding.

Genette's study is an analysis of a narrative under six questions and the answers to these questions constitute Genette's theory of narrative discourse. His first question deals with the narrative modes that could be either 'mimetic' or 'digetic'. The second question, 'how is the narrative focalized?' concerns with focalization which means 'viewpoint'. The third question, 'who is telling the story?' relates to the

author/voice that narrates the narrative. The fourth question 'how is time handled in a narrative' examines the use of time in a narrative. The fifth, 'How is the story packaged?' explores the manner of packaging of a narrative. The sixth question that Genette asks to analyse a narrative is 'how are speeches and thoughts represented?' which concerns the 'representation' of speech and thought in a narrative. The paper would analyze these texts by applying Genette's six questions and prof. Abbott's articulation of the theory of narrative. Some of the significant notions put forward by Abbott are "agon" – a Greek word for 'conflict', which could be between characters or lie in their minds. Stressing its significance, he says, "if with its immense theoretical recourses, the narrative is an instrument of power, it is often about power as well. This is because in almost every narrative of any interest is a conflict in which power is at stake. Conflict leads to 'closure', which is another important notion of Abbott's theory of narrative, he says, "when narrative resolves a conflict it achieves closure and this usually comes at the end of the narrative. We talk good and bad, satisfying and unsatisfying endings. There are, for example, stories that snapshot at the end" (2008, 56). Interestingly from 'agon' to 'closure', myth is a tremendous volume in which the paper endeavours to dive for such postulates into two streams of different genres to find a similar structure.

Karnad retells the age-old myth of Yayati that appears in the *Adiparvan* of *Mahabharata*. Yayati was the great grandfather of Devdutta, son of Ganga and Shantanu (popularly known as Bhishma) and the great grandfather of Pandavas and Kauravas. Yayati was a great king married to Devayani – daughter of the Guru of demons, Shukracharya. Devyani and princess Sharmishtha, daughter of the king of demons, Vrishparva, were best friends. However, Devayani takes Sharmishtha, the princess as her maid to the palace to revenge an old quarrel. Sharmishtha could not deny going with her for that will make Shukracharya angry which may cause great harm to the whole demon clan. Still Devyani remains in an insecure state of mind even after exacting the revenge. Karnad's *Yayati* proclaims that Devyani appears fragile whenever she comes across Sharmishtha about which Swarnalata, the imaginary maid to Devyani, identified and warned her. According to mythical records, once Sharmishtha asseverates herself to be the king's subject and demands Yayati importunately to endow her with motherhood and impressed by her repartee and wit, Yayati complies with Sharmishtha. Devayani regards this endowment with loathing of Sharmishtha and concludes that she had exacted the revenge. Devyani leaves the palace and conveys the king's perfidy to her father. The sage Shukracharya considered this endowment as perfidy to his dear daughter and in anger consequently, cursed Yayati that he shall lose his youth and become decrepitude. When the king, somehow, convinces the sage to unfetter the dreadful curse, the revered sage tells him that he could become young if someone exchanges his own youth with Yayati's decrepitude. Among his (several) sons, none but Pooru, son of Sharmishtha and the youngest among Yayati's son paved a way for his father and offered him his own youth. After thousands of years when Yayati realized that he has had enough of youthfulness and pleasure, he gave Pooru his youth back along with his authority over the throne and left the world. Thus, the story ends happily –Yayati in heaven, Pooru on the throne.

Karnad, in the play, upholds the theatrical elements and employs a traditional structure to the play through his narrator who introduces himself as the *sutradhar* in the prologue of the play. The events of

the play are in fact aftermath of previous incidents of the same myth and are conveyed through the exchange of dialogues. The incidents happen at different chambers of King Yayati's palace, commencing at day and concluding at night, following the unity of place and time. Except for Shukracharya who never appears on the stage, all other characters belong to the palace of King Yayati, which helps the author to observe the theory of unity. The adherence to the theory of unity makes it imperative for the author to compromise with the original myth of Yayati, which covers thousands of years but retold in a play that spans only a day. The representation of the episodes from the original myth is actually the author's individual interpretation that expresses his unique perspective. For instance, the representation of Sharmishtha's version of the quarrel with Devyani, her justification for pushing Devayani into well is alien to the original myth. The retelling provides enough space to Sharmishtha to express her feelings, which is, actually, the author's attempt to analyze her character; the original myth does not give her such significance. Karnad takes the liberty to add and remove incidents in his version of the retelling; addition forms a new and often different perspective about Sharmishtha's character. The interaction of Devayani and Swarnalata in the opening scene is Karnad's imagination that suggests a negative perception of Sharmishtha which is prevalent in the minds of the queen Devyani as well as other people in the palace.

Karnad introduces some imaginary characters who are alien to the original myth to help the objective of retelling the myth; Chitrlekha and Swarnalata are such characters who help to emphasize the author's message. The author has even excluded some original characters and incidents which are an integral part of the original myth. For example, some of the siblings and half-brothers of Pooru and other related episodes have no reference in the retelling for these characters would have made the story complex and might have taken the conclusion in different directions. The retelling revolves around those characters whose actions are significant and add to the event that takes place. There are occasions when the playwright creates a vivid image of events before the readers' or viewers' minds while sometimes describes them with a sense of flux and quickness that shows the author's intention to retell the story with his own point of view instead of telling the entire original myth.

The retelling is compressed into a one-day event and therefore, it appears obvious to be a case of fast-telling (*Digesis*) while the examples of detail narrations (*Mimetic*) are fewer. Although some of the events are skipped, removed, summarised or just mentioned, their descriptions form a vivid image as the plot is well-knit. The retelling is a blend of mimetic and *digetic* modes. While analyzing the modes of retelling the fact must not be missed that the text is not a 'telling' of a tale but 'retelling' of myth to which the readers were already acquainted through scriptures, books and is revisiting with their understandings, prejudices and notions. As a result of the episodes that are exact adaptation of the original myth, such as Kaccha incident, marriage of Devyani and Yayati, are handled through *digetic* mode, and those which have subtle additions by author to the original myth such as Swarnalata's story are either retold with 'detailed *digetic*' or 'concise *mimetic*'. The new characters witness elaborate descriptions as compare to the original legendary characters of the myth. There are instances where the descriptions of some of the events do not fall in the line with the original myth for example, in the original myth, Pooru's sacrifice of youth earns him high esteem, and he is an ideal son and philosopher-king. However, in the retelling Karnad's Pooru, although does the same sacrifice, the reason, circumstances, and consequence are

different and this is why there is a long and detailed description of the episodes. These sections are *mimetic* while those, which are verbatim to the original myth and unaltered, are represented in *digetic* mode such as Kacha incident.

Karnad provides adequate space to the legends that are retold to reveal themselves. This entails '*zero focalisation*'. The narrator (Sutradhar) provides an introduction and describes Pooru's return with his wife Chitrlekha. The narrator does not participate in the event but the text provides italicized stage directions and expressions of characters, which belong to the narrator. It also helps the author to build an image before the readers to smoothly visualize the performance. But one has to infer what the characters say and do, as there is no report of the internal feelings and therefore one can conclude that the play employs '*external focalisation*'. The anxiety and mood of terror are represented through gestures, postures and there is a lack of representation of feelings of the character. For instance, the stage directions are reproduced below at the time when Devayani sends Swarnalata to look for florists in act one; "Swarnalata exits. Devayani leans against a bed-post, exhausted, depressed. Sharmishtha enters noiselessly. Watches Devayani from a distance" (2009, 9).

Tiredness and depression are apparent on Devayani's face, but the author does not employ any device to convey her state of mind. Similarly, Sharmishtha watches Devayani from far and readers can only guess about her thoughts and feelings. Theatrical devices like aside and soliloquy would have more effective in conveying the intentions and feelings to the readers (viewers). The play has a '*heterodigetic*' narrator (Sutradhar) who is familiar with the overall situation of the play. The narrator's description of Pooru's departure establishes him as a '*heterodigetic*' narrator. The original myth lacks the description but the retelling narrates the old and decrepit appearance of Pooru as if the narrator has himself saw and felt Pooru's inabilities, which are obvious results of his acceptance of the curse. Following is an excerpt:

"...he [Pooru] is bent double. When he speaks, his voice is feeble and quivers with exhaustion" (2009, 56).

These directions intensify the feelings that are otherwise inconceivable in the original myth, wherein it is simply mentioned that Pooru accepted the old age of his father. Karnad's Pooru tells Chitrlekha: "This is no ordinary old age, *devi*. This is decrepitude. The sum total of Father's transgressions.... I feel empty. Shrivelled" (2009, 57). In the retelling, the description of the aftermath by the *heterodigetic* narrator heightens the effects before the readers.

Karnad's narrator sets the path and the narrative follows it. The narrator often becomes a mouthpiece of the author and suggests the hypothesis behind the play, making it clear that although the play deals with ancient myth, it is not a pure 'mythological' play. The narrator tries to justify the difference between mythology and its retelling as he says:

Heaven forbid! If we crush our egos and give ourselves up in surrender, divine grace will descend upon us and redeem us. There are no deaths in mythological, for no matter how hard you try, death cannot give meaning to anything that has gone before. It merely empties life of meaning (2009, 5-6).

Pointing to the practicality of the retelling, he further adds, "The play has no gods. And it deals with death" (2009, 6). In fact, the narrator (*Sutradhar*) designs the structure of the play and therefore the retelling deflects from the prototype myth, the author uses different focalizations for newer meanings of the age-old myth. The narrator describes in detail the arrangements at king Yayati's palace for welcoming prince Pooru and his bride, Chitrlekha. He narrates the arrival of various people to witness the royal couple. The details and the ambiance suggests the happy life waiting ahead for the couple but the narrator indicates the cruel time that the couple is going to see when he says, "nothing, however, ever happens as it must" (6) It clearly indicates that some impending misfortune awaits them.

The frame narrative is largely concerned with Pooru and Chitrlekha, but ironically, the title of the play is *Yayati*. The narrator (*Sutradhar*) introduces his audiences to Pooru and his wife before the commencement of the play. Nevertheless, at the end of the narrative one can see a strong and connected relationship between the destinies of Pooru and Yayati. The retelling also has many other embedded narratives resulting in Meta narratives.

In this play, the Meta narratives are largely a part of previous lives of the major characters – Devayani, Sharmishtha, Yayati, Swarnalata are represented in flashbacks, for example the narration of the conversation between Yayati and Devayani regarding their marriage and the conflict between Devayani and Sharmishtha. The narration of these events is '*analeptic*' as they happened in the past. Narration of events that are predicted or anticipated is called '*prolepsis*'. The play presents *prolepsis* by the beating of the drum that suggests some impending unfortunate events. The first instance when the beating of the drums takes place in the play is in act two when Sharmishtha warns Yayati to refrain from her so that it may not upset Devayani but Yayati didnot listen. Sarmishtha says:

Sharmishtha (*calmly*): well then. I know I am doomed. If you are so keen to join me,
so be it. but don't blame me later.

(the beating of drum is heard...)

The beating of the drum suggests the arrival of the royal couple, but it also underlines the misfortune waiting ahead.

Second time the drums are played in the same act, when Devayani, full with rage, takes off her jewellery and Swarnalat tells her about Shukracharya's arrival:

Swarnalata: But Madam, your father is here. He has come to the city to greet the prince.

Devayani (*surprised*): Has he? When did he come?

(the deafening sound of drums erupt again...) (32)

The deafening sound suggests that Pooru has entered the palace and points to the approaching tragedy. The last and final time the drums are heard is when Pooru is about to enter Chitrlekha's palace: "There is a thunderous eruption of the drums and conch shells. Startled by its suddenness and ferocity, Chitrlekha runs to the window, Swarnalata bursts out crying" (2009, 55).

Thunderous eruption suggests the coming of the storm in the life of Chitrlekha as she is going to witness Pooru's decrepitude. Hence, Karnad subtly employs '*Analepsis*' and '*Prolepsis*' methods that are significant in establishing and foregrounding the flow of the narrative. This is an instance of literary

anticipation where the author is employing the notion which is yet to be defined or identified in the literary outpourings.

As far as Genette's notion of the use of Speech and Thought is concerned, the speeches are direct and tagged. The characters speak and represent their thoughts under their names as required in a play. An avid reader can identify *Hamartia* (the notion of sin or fault identified by Aristotle better known as Tragic flaw of the protagonist), *Anagnorsis* (Aristotle's term for Recognition or Realization) and *Peripeteia* (the notion of turn – round or A reversal of fortune as mentioned by Aristotle) in the play. Yayati is a subject of *Hamartia*. The tragic flaw in Yayati can be observed twice in the form of his extreme desire for leisure. Firstly, he ignores the fatal consequence of loving Sharmishtha that displeases Devayani and Shukracharya. Secondly, after being cursed with decrepitude, he is eager to transfer his curse over others, *Hamartia* is followed by *peripeteia* as Yayati faces the criticism, the legendary character is demystified and disgraced for his unwillingness to admit to a consequence of his action, which is a reversal of fortune for the king. This fall is followed by *anagnorsis* when Yayati attempts to restore his youth and takes back the old age from Pooru. However, Karnad could not provide Yayati a reversal of fortune from low to high as Chitrlekha is dead and Sharmishtha blames him for her death. It is apparent that Chitrlekha's life could have been saved if Yayati would have attempted the restoration at appropriate time or if he had not gone for exchange of curse with Pooru. Chitrlekha's death makes Yayati realize his sin and the guilt stops him to attempt to regain his previous status of a legend. In Sharmishtha's case, the *peripeteia* happens twice. In the previous acts, she is seen as satanic and rebellious who is determined to take revenge from Devayani, since the beginning of the play, appears as a fallen character. Later she warns Yayati to stay away from her to refrain from the doom, she also advises Pooru not to take the curse over himself. She is outspoken, honest and candid in her opinion. She even challenges and criticise the king over his unreasonable decision of undoing the curse but joins him in his exile and therefore she undergoes a reversal of fortune, rising from low to higher estate by accompanying Yayati in his challenging days.

Karnad's use of language and linguistic units such as satire, irony and diction helps to gain the desired impact on the readers. The mythical setting of the retelling is replete with modern elements, which, by providing contrary view, satirizes the traditional beliefs such as holding a maiden by right hand and other astrological conventions etc. The play employs subtle plot fuses many modern tactics in the traditional theatre- however parallel to it the author allows the narrator to understand to the conventions of Sanskrit drama, however (he himself deflects as he portrays death over stage) and the play ends as a tragedy whereas in Sanskrit convention that it is necessary to provide a happy conclusion to the play. The author successfully defamiliarizes the myth and the play turns up to be a tragedy, and its viewer are believed to accept that "Pooru rules long and wisely and was hailed as a philosopher king" (2009, 70). Thus, the author makes deliberate attempt to de-familiarise the myth in the retelling. This intensifies the agitation within readers over the authority of the myth (where everything is ideal) and instigates the reader to question the original myth to explore the possibilities of new meanings.

Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004) did not allow the publication of *Sarpa Satra* (2004) until he came to know that he is going to end his life's journey. Kolatkar, as claimed by many, was not enthusiastic about

publication, in fact, he was reluctant. The credit for making his works available to readers goes to his friends who convinced him and collected his manuscripts for publication. There are many remarks about Kolatkar's writing and some are very interesting including a few of his own remarks. In one of his interviews at his favourite restaurant Gawri Ramnarayan asked,

“Why did you start writing then?” he replied: “Found it [writing] more interesting. Fortunately, I'm not writing War and Peace. Or blockbusting fiction. That would be terrible, tied down for years, nose to the grind. And trying to get out your novel...My God! I write just poems and things, small-time stuff. I'm not all that productive either. Why? Natural laziness I suppose. There is a lot to be said for regular writing. I don't (do that)” (‘No Easy Answers’ 4).

This rather brave statement exhibits his cheerful attitude and his focus and honesty to his works. Kolatkar wrote ‘just poems’ and never tried his hand over any other genre.

In *Sarpa Satra*, Kolatkar retells a myth from *Mahabharata* and modernises it so that the contemporary readers can apprehend the tale for whom the translations are difficult to follow. On the backdrop of the myth, the narrative bears influence of the cotemporary social and political situations. The author pervades rich images in the retelling with the sense of flux, which results in successful fusion of *mimetic*, and *digetic* modes of narration.

Kolatkar's use of *mimesis*, for instance, is the description of the situation of animals while burning of Khandava, he writes:

“The taste of honey
Still on its tongue,
A bear bursts into flames,
Falls from a tree
With a burning branch between its legs
To roll in the flaming grass below” (2004, 46)

The example of fast telling (Genette's term) is the assassination of Parikshita by Takshaka:

“who [Takshaka] had had smuggled in,
Disguised as a tiny worm in a fruit bowl
And had grown before the unbelieving eyes
Of all king's men who fled in terror
To coil himself around my [Janmejaya] father
And sting him into a searing flame
Of pure pain...” (2004, 20)

The imagery and allegory in the above lines are thought-provoking and appropriate for the *mimesis* and *digesis* modes. The use of visual, gustatory and tactile imageries in the first quotation to detail a death of a bear makes the narration mimetic and enhances the impact of the event to the reader's mind. However, the second quotation – the assassination of Parikshita for whose death the entire *Sarpa Satra*

was organised— the narration is digetic and fast telling. Here we may notice that the author has deliberately avoided the use of any imagery.

Similar to *Yayati*, the packaging of the events in the *Sarpa Satra* witnesses the introduction of some minor characters and incidents. However, unlike *Yayati* they are not detailed, for instance, the introduction of Marutta, who a mighty king was and had organised the similar snake sacrifice. Apparently, one can say that the purpose of Marutta's introduction is to undermine the character of Janmejaya in the narration. Unlike the simple snake sacrifice performed by Marutta Janmejaya does the same with the help of many sages and makes the entire affair grand and majestic. Marutta's character is summarised in a *digetic* manner. He is compared with Janmejaya based on his sensibility towards the crime he planned. The narrator tells:

Marutta, I know,
Had tried it before
—the wholesale destruction of snakes —
But not like this.
He never dignified his slaughter
With the high-sounding name
Of sacrifice..." (2004, 55)

The significance of Marutta's character lies in the fact that it highlights the unsatisfactory attitude of Janmejaya and belittles not only the great king but also the descendants of great warriors. The poem is divided into sections that are set in their chronic occurrence, the first section, '*Janmejaya*', reveals the resolution of Janmejaya and the reason behind his resolution. The second section, '*Jartkuru Speaks to her Son Astika*', presents Jaratkuru's explanation to Astika about *Sarpa Satra*. This section has three subsections: the first criticises the great priests Vyasas for he could not stop Janmejaya to commit the heinous crime. The second sub-section portrays the Khanadava forest burning and the third represents the snake's facing death and are about to die in the fire of Janmejaya's yagna. The last section, '*The Ritual Bath*' suggests that Astika was successful in convincing Janmejaya and his apparatchiks and that *Sarpa Satra* has ended. The structure of the poem bears the 'analeptic' and 'proleptic' modes of time management in the retelling. The death of Parikshit and Khanadava forest massacre are past events and hence are analeptic. The *prolepsis* lies in the prophesy in the last section of the poem "*Ritual Bath*". This section is narrated by an anonymous narrator who is telling that such massacre will continue to take place in the coming years and will be repeated till the end of humanity because:

"The fire —the fire lit for purpose —
Can never be put out" (2004, 83).

Like Karnad, Kolatkar also skips a few important events of the original myth in his retelling. The play, *Yayati*, does not describe the event of Yayati being cursed by Shukracharya; further, the retelling has displacement (inversion) of events of the original myth. For instance, in the retelling Pooru comes to know about Shukracharya's curse and then informs Yayati whereas in the original myth Yayati himself knows about the curse of Shukracharya. Kolatkar skips the conversation between Astika and Janmejaya

and in the last section, 'The Ritual Bath' the readers presume that Astika was successful in stopping Janmejaya. It was a difficult task and even Jaratkuru was not sure if his son would qualify her aspiration, she says:

“Go there and do
–what?”
I should have asked myself.....
They will stop you at the gate and turn you away.
Or worse:
insult you.
Janmejaya's goons will beat you up
And throw you out” (2004, 68).

Kolatkár does not narrate how Astika convinces Janmejaya and his assistants to discontinue the sacrifice. The author simply skips to the next section. This section instead of being a mythical retelling appears to be a practical and contemporary interpretation and warns, “do not be deceived” (2004, 82) because these massacres and ritual of hatred would never cease to happen. However, the reason for its continuance is also traced in mythical episodes. The narrator tells that the fire that was lit for the purpose of destruction could never be put off. The narrative revolves around the negative emotion of urge to take revenge. Takshak avenges the death of his family and community killed by Arjuna and Krishna. He could not gratify his grudge with mighty Arjuna but kills his grandson Parikshita to satisfy the urge of revenge. After this incident Parikshit's son Janmejaya falls a prey to the same negative emotion of revenge and vows to kill not only Takshaka but every single snake on the earth. Kolatkár contemporises the myth and relates it remotely with present day communal violence. He makes the readers to understand that once a soul is subjected to the feeling of hatred or revenge it can never be purged off. Kolatkár substantiates this point by saying that the fire that was lit to revenge the murderers of Bhrigu by Aurva as well as the fire, which, was produced by Parashara for the destruction of rakshasas, did not cease to burn. Kolatkár seems to metaphorise the vengeance and hatred to the fire, which was the weapon of destruction: Khandava forest was burnt, Parikshita's chamber was turned into a funeral pyre, snakes were burnt into the fire of yagna, all the three incidents had fire as an element of destruction. However, the narrator pities the sacrificial fire, Agni and says that the Sarpa Satra is an insult to him. He says:

“the sacred sacrificial fire,
Whose pleasant duty it is to carry
Gifts, oblations,
Supplications and praise
Offered lovingly by man
To God (or the gods concerned) and
Bring back the blessings,
Then to give him the dirty job
Of a common
Assassin, butcher or a mass murderer...” (2004, 59)

While retelling Kolatkar takes the liberty to mould the myth to suit his objective. he expresses his sympathy towards Agni, the fire god and thus intensifies the crime of Janmejaya. However, the myth establishes the Agni as the sole reason behind burning Khandava forest. As Smith writes,

One hot day, Arjuna suggests a river trip to Krishna, and the two of them set out... While they are all enjoying themselves, Arjuna and Krishna are approached by a Brahmin with a blazing appearance. The strange Brahmin requests food for his insatiable appetite; when they ask him what sort of food he eats, he explains that he is Fire. He wishes to devour the Khandava forest, but Indra always showers it with rain to protect his friend Takshaka, king of the serpents. Arjuna tells the Fire that he is willing to help to overcome Indra ...they call on the Fire to begin consuming the forest, and he does so. Thousands of the creatures perish in the conflagration, and Arjuna and Krishna pursue any that attempt to flee... Indra leads a force of gods against the two warriors, but to no avail;...the killing continues. A voice from the air announces to Indra... he should let the forest burn, for this is ordained... the Fire continues to consume the inhabitants of the forest, while the two warriors kill all who attempt to flee" (82).

As far as narration and focalisation are concerned, the poet uses both covert and overt voices in the retelling. It could easily be analysed that the first two sections are narrated by Janmejaya and Jaratkuru, the title of the section suggests (titles of first and second sections are '*Janmejaya*' and '*Jaratkuru speaks to her son Astika*' respectively). However, the title of the third section is '*The Ritual Bath*', the section has an anonymous narrator, and it is not easy to identify who is narrating this part of the poem unlike the prior sections. This section has a covert voice for narration. Therefore, one can infer that the poem as a whole exhibit '*zero focalisation*' because its own narrator with their individual focalization narrates each section (as a *focaliser*, Janmejaya, Jaratkuru as well as the anonymous voice reflect their own *focalization*). However, the poet did not grant the internal *focalization* to the *focalisers* and they are limited to reflect their dissatisfaction only through gesture. What really lies at their heart or how they feel is not explored. Their voices successfully imply towards the desperate and sad feelings to what they are going through. Janmejaya and Jaratkuru are *homodiegetic* narrators as they are characters of the tale, which is being told, but the anonymous narrator of the third section is *heterodiegetic* as it stands outside and reviews the entire event without participating in it. Kolatkar represents his subtle sense of narration as he grants multi voice, narrators and focalisation but keeps the pace with reader's understanding of it.

For the representation of speech and thought in the narrative one can observe that the narrators of the first two sections uses first person narration. For example, in the first section '*Janmejaya*' the narrator says:

"My vengeance will be swift and terrible.

I will not rest

Until I've exterminated them all" (2004, 21).

While in the second section, '*Jaratkuru speaks to her Son Astika*' says:

"And I think it's your job,

Aastika

I mean who else is there to do it?" (2004, 64)

The three narrators of different sections in *Sarpa Satra* have chosen the method of '*narratised speech*'. However, the instances of '*direct*' and '*untagged speech*' are present but are rare, here is one:

Look, Arjuna!
See that lioness
With her mane in flames?
Don't let her go away
Just because she has a cub in her mouth.
Oh, god!
You got them both
With a single shaft (2004, 48).

The above lines are untagged and the readers have to infer the possible speaker themselves.

The play is in three sections. Every section is a significant contribution to the entire narrative. The frame narrative revolves around the commitment of Janmejaya to revenge his father's death, the ritual of Sarpa Satra and the speech of Jaratkuru to Astika to attempt to put a stop to it. However, the description of the tale of burning the Khanadava forest by Jaratkuru appears to be a '*Meta narrative*'. It is worth noting that Kolatkar's objects (characters in poetry) are the neglected and weaker sections of society. He makes Jaratkuru a *focaliser* and allows her to speak from the point of view of the oppressed. Though Kolatkar's narrator is angry, terrified and sad for what her king is doing, she attempts to convince Astika, her son with the motif to stop the ritual of vengeance. Kolatkar's Jaratkuru, who belong to snake sub-caste does not instigate Astika for vengeance and become the part of the cycle of revenge and hatred instead asks him to break it, unlike the elite crowd around king Janmejaya who provoked him for vengeance by telling the reason of Parikshita's death and hailed his commitment of extermination of snakes. Jaratkuru attempts to save the earth and possesses a wider view and wisdom than the great sages assisting the sacrifice. She is afraid of the reaction of Shesha, the mighty snake, upon whose hood

This
Planet itself, this sphere, our whole earth
is resting,
balanced precariously...(2004, 62)
She is afraid of his anger and wonders if he comes to know about the cynical
sacrifice, which is a cycle of revenge, would take a final turn and doom the whole
earth. She says:
And that surely, will be THE END.
Of not just nagas, or any one species,
But of everything and everybody...
Khatam.
That's what I'm really worried about (2004, 63).

Jaratkuru refers Astika very often in the poem as 'you', 'your' and 'my son' which makes his presence omnipresent in the play. In the retelling, Astika did not share his thoughts and silently listens what his mother tells him. However, how does he make Janmejaya to stop the sacrifice is not clear.

Jaratkuru's speech is confined to Astika's ears and to every reader reading the text. It is worth mentioning here that the discourse of Jaratkuru and Astika leads to the resolution to the hitherto unstoppable of sequence of hatred and revenge around which the meta narrative of the myth revolves. Therefore, in the third (last) section, *'The Ritual Bath'* suggests that the sacrifice has stopped, but Astika and Jaratkuru are not mentioned. It is an anonymous voice telling the readers about the deception of conclusion of the sacrifice. It warns the readers to be attentive and not to be deceived by the occasional peace. Interestingly, to suggest the continuance of the destruction, Kolatkar did not put a full stop at the end of the poem to suggest that the fire of hatred and vengeance continues to consume its victims. It is also worth mentioning that in the last lines instead of men he claims rakshasa, rocks and trees –marginalised sections on the earth to lose their lives.

Kolatkar refers to the sages from mythology such as Atreya, Uddalaka, Shvetketu, Somashrava and snakes who burnt in the sacrifice viz. Kakshak, Pishang, Chakra, Purna, Prahas, Paila, Mandalaka, Kaladanta, Manas etc. However, certain alterations or skipping of the mythical content could be noticed as in the description of Khandava burning; these attempts of skipping and alterations by the poet help the author to achieve his objectives. The fulfilment of his aim depends on highlighting the crimes of the higher strata of the society (the king, and the great sages) to successfully demystifying them. Kolatkar suggests that the people of the higher strata have earned name and fame over the centuries but *Sarpa Satra* proved *peripetia* (reversal of fortune) for them (Janmejaya and the sages). Kolatkar in this poem represents the great king as cynical and obsessed with hatred and vengeance underlining *hamartia* – the tragic flaw. Since the character is very popular in mythological telling in Indian society, Kolatkar's retelling doesn't provide him opportunity to regain his lost grace and skips the details of his realisation of the flaw and stops the sacrifice and therefore he denies to let Janmejaya undergo *anagnorisis*.

The narrative portrays the modern condition, which is full of killings, corruption, terrorism, vengeance; the poet traces these elements in the legends of the myth by retelling it in his unique style. In this way, the retelling is de-familiarised to the indigenous reader and allows the author to correlate the myth and the modernity in his retelling. The narrative of Kolatkar narrows the distance between narrator and reader making the narrator more reliable by employing certain techniques in the poem. The predominant technique regarding this is the use of humour. For example, Jaratkuru tells the heinous decision of extermination of the whole species of snakes by Janmejaya to Astika with a humorous example; she says that after realising that the man is not joking about extermination:

“that he's completely serious,
You may look at him closely, perhaps,
Trying to remember the name of a good shrink.
Or tell him about your plan
To cleanse the earth of all ants
Because one bit your mum” (2004, 28).

The humour applied is not only for the sake of creating laughter, it also serves the author's purpose. Through this humour, Kolatkar implies towards things that are more serious. He suggests how illogical

the decision of Janmejaya is and demystifies the legend, described by Rajagopalachari as “a king who conducted a great sacrifice for the well-being of the human race” (458). Kolatkar concludes the decision that if the king reflects these decisions, he might be a danger to whole humanity:

And, if the person voicing such sentiments
Should happen to be
The king of sizeable country,
It should be cause of concern indeed
For the future
Of the country in question... (2004, 29)

He has also employed irony and satire; in fact, the narrative is replete with them and it helped the author to portray the tiny and neglected things of the society. Kolatkar comes up with a new *focalization* as well as *focaliser* with Jaratkuru and allows her to speak her mind about the snake sacrifice. As Zechinni observes:

“...between the innumerable versions of this story, the so called original or authorized narrative of Vyasa is the one who “quietly set out / to put down the whole wretched chronicle / in black and white / and in polished verse / for the eternal shame of posterity” (36). But Kolatkar proposes an alternative version: the heterodox, minor, and subaltern voice of a victim and woman comes forward” (2010, 134).

In *SarpaSatra* the abundant use of humour and satire demystifies its author and de-familiarises the myth. Kolatkar satirises the epic *Mahabharata* boldly as Jaratkuru says:

I mean 24000 verses, Lord have mercy!
What it badly needs
Is a good editor (2004, 35).

The process of de-familiarisation is an attempt to make the retelling fresh and interesting to the readers. The selected texts represent the use of satire and humour. The texts are in English; the occasional use of Hindi words and phrases makes the narrative indigenous and corresponds to the requirements of the subject matter of the retelling. For example, Karnad’s *Yayati* refers his queen as ‘Devi’ that is a Hindi word and traditionally used to refer wife. Kolatkar makes an important warning about the ending of the world due to vengeance and hatred and writes, “that surely will be The End” (2004, 63). However, he does not seem satisfied with the warning in English capital letters and ads: “*Khatam*” (2004, 63). A retelling needs a master artisan who could shape and alter the design of his narrative according to the need. They alter and appropriate the myth according to their own need and use their own narrative techniques as devices to stress and emphasise their messages. This implies that there is no divine or unique narrative technique to retell the well-known myth. The unique narrative skill of each author helps him to stress his point and connect his characters with the world he belongs to.

فك رموز السرد عند جيرارد جينيت في الروايات الأسطورية لرواية (ساربا ساترا) لآرون وكولاتكار و(ياياتي)
لجيريش كارناد

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الملخص

تعكس الحكايات الأسطورية الوعي الجماعي للمجتمع، كما تفعل روايات آرون بالاكريشنا كولاتكار، وهو أعظم ما أبدع ساربا ساترا (2004)، إذ يعيد سرد أسطورة ماهابهاراتا، وهي أسطورة تضحية الأفعى العظيمة التي قام بها جانميغايا، حفيد أرجونا، يقوم Janmejaya بهذه التضحية للانتقام لمقتل والده الذي قتل على يد إله الثعبان (تاكشاك)، الذي قتل باريكشيت - والد جانميغايا - للانتقام لمقتل الثعابين في غابة خاندافا على يد أرجونا، وهو جد باريكشيت، وأما جيريش راغونات كارناد (ياياتي) (2009)، وهو النص الثاني للتحليل، فيدور حول الإطار السردية الأسطورية لياياتي، الذي طلب من أبنائه التضحية ببلوغهم للحصول على نفس الشيء والتمتع به، لقد سُرِدَت هذه الحكايات بالفعل كإطار وروايات وصفية في المهابهاراتا، ولكن عُدلت الطريقة والتقنية، ويربط البحث نظرية السرد ويفحص النصوص مع البديهيات التي حددها جيرارد جينيت ليبيّن أنه ضمن المعايير النصية، فإن تقنيات السرد التي يستخدمها المؤلفون لها عناصر مشتركة، ومن المؤكد أن هذه العناصر تظهر بصورة مشتركة في الأنواع المختلفة المستخدمة في إعادة الرواية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إعادة السرد، الأسطورة، السرد، رموز السرد.

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