

## **Lifestyle Was A Medicine By Itself: Traditional Lifestyle Publicized in Girish Karnad's Plays**

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### **Abstract**

Covid-19 commonly called the Corona virus has shaken the whole world and the pandemic has spread like wildfire. Solution and remedy are sort throughout the world. While brainstorming and pooling in all possible solutions, one main remedy suggested by many experts is life-style changes. This research work intends to throw light on the traditional life-style of the primitive Indian societies as show in the plays of the great dramatist Girish Karnad. Recouping the traditional lifestyle would have avoided this huge a pandemic or at least helped in handling it. Karnad's plays are a perfect portrayal traditional lifestyle of Indian societies, readapting that lifestyle would be a possible solution to handle Covid Pandemic. Practices like vegetarianism, natural disinfection, exercise and meditation have been prevalent in the olden days, these practices are showcased in the most of the plays of Girish Karnad. If these practices are retrieved and brought into regular usage, there is likely a chance to handle and overcome this evil era and sojourn the bigger disaster yet to come.

### **Keywords**

Exercise and meditation, Natural Disinfection, Vegetarianism (food).

### **Introduction**

The present COVID-19 situation has become a great threat to the whole world. The pandemic has claimed millions of lives worldwide. Terms like vaccine, face mask, disinfection, social distancing, new-normal etc., have found their place in very person's common vocabulary list. All the countries in the world are in a rat-race to invent a vaccine. While the invention of a Vaccine is taking too long, scientist suggest lifestyle modifications as a stop-gap solution. However more than being a stop-gap it could even turnout to be a more permanent one.

History repeats, the present crises always have a solution in the past. If one digs deep into the past there would always be a relevance to the present. The customs and traditions followed by ancient Indian societies, if readapted could to a great extent help in limiting the spread of Corona pandemic. When talking about customs and traditions, one cannot forget the contributions made by the great playwright Girish Karnad. He has skillfully showcased the past to find solutions to the present. In this regard, D. Maya rightly states that,

“Karnad links the past and the present, the archetype and the real. Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy, reinforcing the theme.” (p. 68)

India had great traditions and customs that were followed and accepted worldwide. However, as globalization crept in, people started accepting and following convenient practices from all around the world. To quote this kind of adaptation from other countries, the lines from Karnad's *Tughlaq* may be used. When paper currency was being introduced by King Tughlaq, he suggests his subjects to accept this practise from China.

“It is a question of confidence. A question of trust! ..... in China they have paper currency paper, mind you - and yet it works because people accept it. They have faith in the Emperor's seal on the pieces of paper.” (p. 2)

Hence crawling back into past would help in overcoming the present situation. In fact there is even the convenience of amalgamating the past traditions with present technology for better inventions.

### **Methodology**

Ancient Indians considered food divine, they realized that all lives in this world are depended upon food. They regarded food as the major source of livelihood, hence they called it Prajapati or Lord of all creatures. Food of Indian cuisine is a medicine by itself. The ingredients and time of eating them have proved to be the main reason behind their long and healthy life span. Turmeric, honey, peanuts, ginger, pepper almost all ingredients used in Indian meal have one or the other medical values.

If Indians had not adopted the hug and handshake culture from the west, social distancing would have been much easier in the present. Of course, Indian society is known for too many social gatherings, however physical contact was limited in the olden days. Touching people was restricted on the pretext of age and gender

Physical fitness is considered the biggest weapon to fight infection in human body. Fitness helps in building immunity which in turn defends human from sickness. Indians had occupational patterns which were physical exercises by themselves, men did work like ploughing, farming, cattle breeding, carpentry, carving, metal bending and so on which involved quite a lot of physical activity. Women did household manually which gave them adequate stretching, bending, sit-ups, squats and many more types of exercises practised in gyms today.

Yoga and meditation which originated in India have gained international recognition. They have proven to make human body much healthier. The breathing exercise in yoga helps greatly to strengthen the lungs. As Covid-19 is known to affect the lungs severely, a healthy lungs would assure more immunity against the disease.

### **Discussion**

As discusses in the previous section the benefits of Indian traditional lifestyle are innumerable. Having realised these innumerable benefits Girish Karnad has always brought the traditions of Indian culture into the mainstream of most of his plays.

In his first play *Yayati* Karnad illustrates the power of meditation and the benefits of having a healthy body. In *Nagamandala* it is noticeable the though Appanna spends most of

his time with his concubine, for every meal he returns home. Hayavadhana again is a perfect example the love of a strong and healthy body.

*Bali- Sacrifice* is a play which insists on resisting bloodshed and being vegetarian. In the preface of the play Karnad highlights why dummy animals replaced for sacrifice are made out of dough and not mud or chalk. He explains that food is divine

“Although no animals were slaughtered and no meat consumed, these figures of dough mimicking the forms of real animals, clearly carried the original violent impulse within them. And why dough rather than, say mud or chalk? Because an offering makes sense only if it is meant as food for gods and is, therefore, cooked and consumed by devotees.” (preface)

The Kings mother insists on slaughtering animal to commemorate the Queen’s pregnancy where the Queen is totally against the idea. The queen is a Jain who believes in vegetarianism and non-violence. On her instructions the King makes his mother promise that there would be no bloodshed. “King: I want you to promise me that here will be no blood sacrifices in honour of our child” (p. 97). This even leads to the mother of the King leaving the Palace, still the King does not budge. At one point in time the King is convinced that the slaughtered sacrifice would purify the Queen from the sin of adultery and insists on doing it. Still the queen is stern against it “Queen: All right. Go ahead. Believe what you like. But I’ll not agree to the sacrifice. I’ll never” (p.144).

Even in the play *Nagamandala* food plays a vital role. Appanna who spends most of his time with his concubine comes home just to eat home made food made by Rani his wife. Even when Kurudavva and Rani plan to drug Appanna with some herbs they choose to mix it with his food because returns home for every meal indefinitely. In Karnads plays there is a repeated mentioning of the usage of neem, turmeric, sandal, oils and other items. These items act as natural disinfectants. In the Karnads *Two Monologues -Flowers*, when the temple priest mentions of the beauty of Chandravati he describes her traditional way of dressing “She moved nearer to the flowers. And I could see that she had carefully made herself up with kohl in the eyes, and sandal paste and turmeric on her cheeks.” (p. 248). All the ingredients mentioned here are in one way or the other more of disinfectants more that cosmetics.

Exercise, meditation and yoga are being used as keywords during this pandemic period. However it is visible from the plays of Karnad that ancient Indians though did not spend hours together in the gym building their bodies, they still remained fit. The work pattern, meditation, and lifestyle itself kept them fit. In Karnad’s *Yayati* it is visible that King Yayati is not ready to give-up his healthy body and accept old age even if it costs his sons future.

“Yayati: I am trying to recapture my youth. Moments when I handed out pain, moments which I slaughtered enemies, gazed hostile cities to the ground. Made my queens writhe in pain and demanded that they laugh and make love t me in gratitude.” (p. 45)

Pooru says that nobody the kingdom is willing to take the curse of old age, Yayati is ready to offer any amount of riches but still nobody is ready to give up a healthy body. Is seen in the

lines “Yayati: No one? What do you mean by no one? My dear subjects for whose sake I have faced a thousand deaths?” (p.49). In the play Hayavadana too, the love for a healthy physic is visible.

The power of meditation is visible in the play *The Fire and The Rain*. Yavakri has meditate for ten long years and attained Universal Knowledge. Meditation has give him supernatural powers. Even in the play Yayati, Suklacharya has attained the ‘Sangeevani’ vidya that is the power of eternal life by doing deep meditation. The lines of Yavakri show the power of meditation

“You perform austerities in the name of some god. You stand in a circle of fire the pressure of your austerities forces the gods to grant you your wish. And you get ‘Universal knowledge’ Victory!” (p.119)

The power of meditation if brought back to usage would be a possible solution to many psychological and stress related ailments

### **Conclusion**

The traditional Indian practices like vegetarian meal, yoga and meditation, natural disinfectants etc could be brought into usage to handle the covid situation. Though scientist around the world are in the verge of inventing a vaccine at the earliest, still the safety of people is in their own hands. Returning to the past and adapting our old traditions will to a great extent help in avoiding the spread of such infections in the future.

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