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HUMAN VALUES IN THE PLAYS OF T. P. KAILASAM

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Abstract:

*Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam, a bilingual playwright and a talented actor, wrote both in English and Kannada. He was well acquainted with the rich tradition and the glorious cultural heritage of India. The great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, had a tremendous influence on him. That's why he makes use of them adroitly for the dramatic purpose. His English plays are based on the characters in the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Actually, he prefers the Mahabharata to the Ramayana because the characters in the Mahabharata are all like us. Kailasam gives importance to human values very much as these values are diminishing day by day. In order to inculcate human values among the spectators, he selects the characters like Bharata from Ramayana, Ekalavya, Keechaka and Karna from Mahabharata and presents them in the light of human values. He expects us to be altruistic like Bharata, generous like Karna and Eklavya, and a man of steady loyalties like Keechaka. His plays *Burden*, *Fulfilment*, *The Purpose*, *The Curse or Karna*, and *Keechaka* are full of human values. He compares and contrasts the men with values with the ones without them and glorifies them in the plays so that audience can imitate them.*

Keywords: *Human Values, Kailasam's English Plays, etc.*

Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam (1885-1946), a bilingual playwright and a talented actor, wrote both in English and Kannada. As he was well acquainted with the rich tradition of the Kannada theatre and the glorious cultural heritage of our country, Kailasam could make use of Ramayana and Mahabharata adroitly for the dramatic purpose. His English plays include *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *The Curse or Karna* (1946), *Keechaka* (1949), and *A Monologue* (1933). All the English plays of Kailasam are based on the various myths from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He prefers Mahabharata to Ramayana as "the characters in the Mahabharata are all like us living rooted to this world" (Iyengar, IWE 236). Though Kailasam uses various myths from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for his plays, he gives different treatment to them according to his "vision, mission, and imagination" (Nandkumar, 83). R. G. Joshi points out that "Kailasam chose the characters from the Mahabharata and tried to interpret them in the light of human values" (128). In Kailasam's mythical characters we find "quest for greatness" (Naik, Desai & Amur 1). His plays are actable that is why he gives elaborate stage directions.

The Burden, first published in *Little Lays and Plays* in 1933, handles the theme that Bhasa dramatized in his Sanskrit work "*Pratimanatakam*", but Kailasam's play is different as he exalts the character of Bharata. According to K.R.S. Iyengar Kailasam's play "has a power and beauty of its

own” (IWE, 236). Prince Bharata, while returning from the grandfather’s place to Ayodhya, gets at the terrible truth that his father Dasaratha is dead and his brother Rama has been banished for fourteen years. Bharata is so enraged that he becomes wrathful against his mother Kaikeyi and denounces her for manipulating kingship in his favour and renounces such a kingship. He even takes the Royal Priest Vasistha to task for not having saved his father. Finally, the Priest Vasistha consoles him and directs him to his duty which is actually a burden placed on the shoulders of Bharata. The play is a fine expression of tragic emotion. It highlights the greatness of prince Bharata who loves his brother Rama more than the throne.

Fulfilment (1933), a sequel to *Purpose*, is “almost the crown of Kailasam’s dramatic art” (Iyengar, IWE, 237). It adroitly presents the terrible act of Lord Krishna’s murdering Ekalavya and his mother in order to fulfil the divine purpose. Ekalavya, Drona’s unique pupil in archery, is about to join the Kauravas on the eve of the Kurukshetra war. Krishna tries to dissuade Ekalavya from joining Kauravas for the benefit of mankind. But Ekalavya’s loyalty and sincerity to his “Gurujee” and his anger and desire for vengeance upon Arjuna do not allow him to change his decision. At last Krishna, who is the destiny of Ekalavya, stabs him stealthily and then reveals him his divine nature. When asked by Ekalavya why he stabs him stealthily, Krishna justifies his action with the words: “It is the purpose of the killing, and not the manner of the killing that decides the fairness of killing”. Ekalavya realizes the truth and feels fortunate that he has been killed by Lord Krishna himself. However, while dying, Ekalavya requests Krishna to save his mother from the pangs of his death. Lord Krishna fulfils this request by killing Ekalavya’s mother before she comes to know about her son’s death. Krishna, thus, fulfils the purpose of protecting Arjuna by killing Ekalavya. By exalting the character of Ekalavya, Kailasam tries to give justice to him. Eklavya feels exalted for being killed by the auspicious hands of Lord Krishna. His love for his mother is so great that he thinks of his mother while he himself is on the brink of death.

The Purpose (1944), a play in two acts, is “one of the greatest contributions made by Kailasam to Indian drama in English” (Bhatta, Kailasam’s English Plays 89). It “unfolds Ekalavya’s youthful idealism during his discipleship in archery” (Iyengar, IWE, 237). When Acharya Drona refuses to accept Ekalavya as his pupil with an intention to make Arjuna a great archer, he returns to his forest, makes a clay-image of Acharya Drona and starts practicing archery. With his sincerity and deep faith in his “Guru” and dogged perseverance, Ekalavya becomes an outstanding archer. He is so devoted to his Gurujee that when Arjuna blames Acharya Drana for teaching Ekalavya secretly and making him the great archer, Ekalavya immediately cuts his right thumb and offers it to Drona as his “Gurudakshina” (fee). This act of Ekalavya exalts his character. Kailasam contrasts the character of Ekalavya with that of Arjuna and shows how Ekalavya’s purpose of learning archery was selfless and Arjuna’s selfish. While commenting on the purpose of *The Purpose* Nand Kumar says:

Bheesma’s purpose of placing his house on a permanent plinth seems to be shattered when the Kauravas and the Pandavas frequently fall out with each other. The purpose of Drona is defeated when Ekalavya appears before him as the supreme archer. Arjuna’s purpose of being an excellent archer is defeated again by Ekalavya, who by virtue of his penance and perseverance excels his opponent. Ekalavya, in spite of his gaining excellence in archery, is rendered incapable to protect his animals (Kumar, 95).

Karna: The Brahmin's Curse, known as *The Curse or Karna* (1946), is Kailasam's "more sustained dramatic adventure" (Iyengar, IWE 237). The playwright describes it as "an impression of Sophocles in five acts". In *The Curse or Karna*, by distorting the facts of the Mahabharata, Kailasam has glorified the character of Karna. Like Oedipus, Karna suffers only because of his fate. When Bheema springs like a panther on Karna to tear him to pieces for not using his "brahmastra" to finish the house of Kuru, Karna requests for pity and states his helplessness in the following manner:

Bear with me, Vrikodara!

What stayed my hand from slaying thee on the day
Of pariksha; what numb'd mine arm on the day
Of Panchali's Swayamvara; what paralyz'd
Mine arm and did stop m from rescuing her
From clutch of human brute was but relentless curse
Of dread Rama! Pity me, the helpless victim of a Brahmin's curse!

(The Curse...73-74).

According to K.R.S. Iyengar, there is something of an Oedipus fatality and glow in Kailasam's Karna. He is "caught in the meshes, checkmated at every turn, thwarted and defeated again and again ...but also purified and glorified in the process"(IWE 237). Kailasam's digression and innovations, though bold and iconoclastic, raise no storms among the readers of Mahabharata.

In *Keechaka* (1949) Kailasam presents Keechaka as "a brave hero genuinely in love with Draupadi" (Naik, DIEL 160). The play is Kailasam's boldest stride in the direction of iconoclasm. Unlike the Vyasa's Keechaka, Kailasam's Keechaka is a tragic hero with all good qualities arousing the feelings of pity and fear. While commenting on the play K.R.S. Iyengar observes:

Kailasam almost transforms Keechaka into a hero in his own right, a man of steady loyalties, a fighter and a man of honour; and the driving force behind his actions is love rather than lust. He is like a man tragically fated, and he is content to go down fighting before a truly worthy opponent like Bheema (IWE, 239).

G.S. Amur has a very high opinion of T.P. Kailasam. He, in his article "Kailasam's Quest for Greatness" justly remarks, "A talented actor who appeared in the amateur as well as the professional stage, he brought to the writing of drama an intimate knowledge of the theatre. It is for this reason that his plays whether in Kannada or English have a uniform technical excellence" (186). Kailasam's plays dramatise human values which are diminishing in the modern world. Love, self-sacrifice, brotherhood, self-less service, loyalty, generosity are the human values that have been presented in the plays of Kailasam.

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