



LISTEN JANAMEJAYA : A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

My aim through this article is to throw light on Adya Rangacharya's play Listen Janamejaya which was originally written in Kannada language as Kelu Janamejaya delineating a mythical story of the King Janamejaya in the present context. The play Listen Janamejaya or Kelu Janamejaya was published in 1966 and translated by Padma Ramchandra Sharma in English. The play actually talks about the essence of life and revolves around the vehement conversation on the "basic principles of progress." It is a symbolical play in which mythological character Janamejaya - protector of the earth is the representative of the human race who listens to the teaching of Vidur - symbolically signifies the repartee existed in the whole play. The other characters are symbolising different aspects of life whereas leader is the representative of the society. Old Man, Young Man, Young Woman and Common Man try to establish their views on "the basic principles of progress" in their vehement vociferous conversations in the play.

Key words: Experience, Zest, Desire, Happiness, Principal Progress, Life, Death.

INTRODUCTION

Adya Rangacharya (1904-1984) who is known as Sri Ranga is one of the eminent literary personality of Karnataka. He worked on plays, novels, biography, autobiography, criticism, philosophy and essays which attack the established norms in the society. He wrote forty-seven plays and among them *Listen Janamejaya* gets a great response from readers and audiences.

The play *Listen Janamejaya* or *Kelu Janamejaya* was published in 1966 and translated by Padma Ramchandra Sharma in English. The play is written in three acts and comprises six characters - Sutradhara, Leader, Old Man, Young Man, Young Woman and Common Man.

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The first act opens in traditional Kannad style where Sutradhara of the play tries to establish a bridge between the audience and the play. He is quite philosophical in his tone when he talks about life and its four different aspects. Leader, too, tries to philosophies the nature of life but in a different way. He says:

The life on earth has gone for thousand of acons. We are fed up. Being born, growing up and dying; Being born again, growing up and dying. We are fed up. If one is born, one should never die - life must be raised to this level . . . the level of life on earth must be raised. (Listen Janamejaya and Other Plays: 130)

As the play develops the four characters - Old Man Young Man, Young Woman and Common Man presents their views on the topic that is "the basic principles of progress". Old Man asserts that "this life has established itself through the experience of lakhs of years and preserved its strength" (135) and further adds that "experience is everything." (135) On the other hand young Man is of the view that "the basic principle of progress is zest."(136) Young Woman opines that, "the progress of man depends on how a man has desired woman in an orderly way."(138) She goes on to say that, "A heart that can fly for the desire for woman is the beauty of life."(138) She states that the beauty of life exists in the fulfillment of the desire. Common Man, though he is looking very common and ordinary in appearance, tries to accumulate all these things and presents that all the virtues which are discussed previously can be assumed as "the basic principle for progress."(139)

The second act again opens with the conversation that is taking place between Sutradhara and leader. They are now talking about the purpose of life and play-writing. Leader is of the view that the sole purpose of play-writing must be entertainment. As the play progresses we find that the scene takes place in the office homed as, "Nav Samaj Nirmaan".(144) The usual and

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common conversation takes place among all the characters-Young Man, Old Man, Common Man and Young Woman. We come to know that Old Man becomes the boss of the office as he is married to Leader's sister. In spite of possessing zest, enthusiasm and degree Young Man could not get the aspired success. Young Man asserts his plight:

Would there be such injustice? Fancy becoming a clerk in an office which deals with matters I have taken a special degree in. Fortunately, our leader has only one sister. Otherwise I'd have no hopes of gaining that positing even after this Old Man died. (150)

Leader, who is the representative of the society, is of the view that "Old Man is young inside and old outside, whereas Young Man is old inside and young outside, Young Woman is a man inside and a woman outside whereas Common Man is scholar within and ordinary outside."(164) According to him, we all have our different public as well as private faces. Later on, in this act, what we actually find that Old Man desires to marry Young Woman because Old Man has money and power. Young Man becomes very puzzled and dejected because of this desire.

The Common Man with his erudite opinion says that the love we usually find in the story is false. He further state: "When a man wants a woman, you can perhaps call it love. But how can woman have love? A story man, food to fill the stomach, clothes and ornament for the body—a woman will go wherever she finds them. God himself created woman like that."(150)

Woman symbolises desire in the play and Common Man's intelligence accurately understands this, that desires can only be achieved by the person who has the power to fulfill it.

The third act opens in a house of Common Man who is the owner of the house and has the authoritative position in the house. He asserts that for a person, "food to eat, a woman for companionship, and children are enough."(171) The Young Woman also becomes his wife and tells that why she is married to him:

The earth and the sky never story apart. Each should exist for the other. They are so closely knit . . . when earth and sky are in the harmony with each other - a new world is born . . . You are earth and I am the sky. (176)

This statement clearly suggests the cycle of life. The world sky clearly suggests here the intelligence. Young Woman, who is the symbol of desire, is of the opinion that there is no one in this world who is going to die. She is clearly suggesting that all the qualities are

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essential for "the principle of progress for humanity."(176) and intelligence is above all. Now Common Man develops the idea of death in his words:

"As soon as they are born, they get ready for death." (176)

By saying this she just wants to philosophies life that death comes to all but it can never annihilate the idea of progress. We must not think of dying but we should first try to live in happiness without puzzling ourselves in the sonorous thought of dying. He says:

Let us live. Let there be four more children. Let us live! Let us live to see the happiness of our children! Let us live to see the faces of our grand children! Let us see the children that are born, play with them and become children again-become new again.(179)

In the end, Sutradhara, who is the mouthpiece of the playwright asserts that the life of the whole human race would lead in the cycle of life and death. We must live our life to attain the happiness. We must not puzzle ourselves in too much thinking that what could be the best possible way of living but attaining happiness by using our intelligence. He asserts: "I shall tell you what you are. Listen Janamejaya, protector of the earth. The blind king listened to Vidura's teaching and attained purity of the mind."(186)

Thus we can say that the play *Listen Janamejaya* is a symbolic play using mythological concept where Leader, the symbol of the whole human race gets the teaching of attaining happiness from Common Man, who is the embodiment of Vidur- the mythological character known to all for his erudite policies, illumining him to get rid off from the trivial thoughts of death. Leader, as the play begins, is too much occupied with the thoughts of life and death. But the common man with his intelligence gives all the answers one by one. Sutradhara ends the play by saying:

O blind King, you wanted everyone else to die and loved to listen to stories of death, but now these people who are determined to live are leading you to the right path. Go . . .!

WORK CITED

1. All the quotations have been derived from the text *Listen Janamejaya and Other Plays*. Delhi: Sahitya Academy. 2005 Pub.

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