



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Cruelty Rises From Greater Misery

Maleeta Angelina Goddard  
(Research Scholar)

Dr. Shikha Chatterjee  
(Supervisor)

Department of English & Foreign Language,  
Chitamber School of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences  
Allahabad-211007, U.P

**Abstract:** The paper focuses upon the misery which led a person to become a cruel or hard-hearted person towards others. As we know, no person is born bad or cruel or insensitive; it is its surroundings and upbringing that matters the most. This paper will analyze two characters from a classic novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and another is from Girish Karnad's play *Yayati*. The main focus will be analyzing the characters of Heathcliff and Sharmistha. These characters are the one who are denoted as cruel and insensitive cause of their cruel and rough behavior with others and from the kind of stunts they do to provoke or aggravate others. Such kind of behavior was not always with them, they went through a certain phase of life which made them cruel towards others and hence many dislikes them for who they are. It is not that they always wanted to be hated but they too wanted to be acknowledged and to be loved but they got the opposite of what they urged. Thus, analyzing their misery will give light to their present cruel behavior and justifying the saying from WH's "Cruelty rises from greater Misery".

**Keywords –** cruel, hard-hearted, insensitive, rough behavior, provoked.

### I. INTRODUCTION

*"I know he has a bad nature," said Catherine; "he's your son. But I'm glad I've a better, to forgive it; and I know he loves me and for that reason I love him. Mr. Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that **your cruelty rises from your greater misery!** You are miserable, aren't you? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? Nobody loves you nobody will cry for you, when you die! I wouldn't be you!"*

(*Wuthering Heights*, Ch. 29: page 273)

Heathcliff is a foundling taken in by Mr. Earnshaw and raised with his children. Of unknown descent, he seems to represent wild and natural forces which often seem amoral and dangerous for society. His almost inhuman devotion to Catherine is the moving force in his life, seconded by his vindictive hatred for all those who stand between him and his beloved. He is cruel but magnificent in his consistency, and the reader can never forget that at the heart of the grown man lies the abandoned, hungry child of the streets of Liverpool.

As far as human nature is concerned, it's quite beneficial on a resource scarce planet to have a propensity towards violent, cruel behavior. It helps us fight for resources, discourage predators, and take control of social hierarchies. In many cases the most ruthless people of our species are the ones who had once or more than once have come across any ruthless situation that made them hard hearted person. Individual environment plays a factor as well. Bullies are often times people who were mistreated by parents, friends, strangers, etc. Many people internalize the idea that cruelty is a means to gain power and wealth. People who aren't traditionally thought of as bullies exercise cruel behavior almost automatically because even a person from a relatively good and safe background has been abused by someone in some way, shape or form. If a person has been cheated on by three of its last lovers, he may decide that he'll cheat on the next one before they can cheat on him. Cruelty can be done as either a direct reaction (revenge) or an indirect way of thinking.

Because unlike the beast who instinctually hunt and kills, steals and almost does everything for survival from the pain which kills them every day with each passing moment of thoughts. Human beings are now endowed with a mind that tricks them into believing they must kill, steal, control others for survival, with a host of rationalizations that are also produced in the mind to justify it. That process has been going on for a

very long time. Experiencing cruelty which is denied becomes cruelty executioner. Even the great Genghis Kahn, in all his cruelty, was able to reform previous standards of conduct because of his remarkable insight, either conscious or unconscious, into his own tortured life. He collected and remembered the exceptions to his experience, for instance, that his own family could be cruel and unjust, and yet total strangers those from other clans who came to his rescue at times of need. Adverse experiences, even of the cruelest in nature which are remembered and pondered, as well as the exceptional saving graces, can lead to a type of emotional learning, which makes even the ruthless capable of bearing the seeds of empathy, justice and reform. The beast will never learn this, and some humans as well. Human kind is still evolving, or devolving, depending on one's perspective, some individuals ahead, some behind.

The reason why old Earnshaw brings Heathcliff to wuthering heights, because of his compassions, for the miserable slum orphan. However, Old Earnshaw seems to prefer Heathcliff to his very own son. There in the house Heathcliff is looked upon with the eyes of disgust and despise. At the Wuthering heights, everyone, except the old Earnshaw and Cathy, loathes him. After the Earnshaw dies, Heathcliff is beaten, barbarically by Hindley and is treated savagely, by the other members of the family. Even in the midst of this entire hustle bustle, Heathcliff and Catherine's hearts grow fonder of each other. The love between them is not the erotic kind but spiritual in nature and it is highlighted when Cathy tells Nelly:

*"My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being."*

(Wuthering Heights, Ch. 9: page 81)

After being separated from Catherine it was brutal but natural for Heathcliff. His soul died the day Catherine physically died and for the rest of his life that he spent in the wuthering heights, he sat planting vengeance, on the Earnshaw and the Linton's family. Heathcliff is not a bad person; he is just the product of bad circumstances. His love for Catherine is unfathomable, and separating him from his own soul, as he likes to express it, has had transformed him into a beast. The terror he observed as a child, made him cruel as an adult, and since he was an orphan, there were none to teach him right and wrong. So much so, he feels for Catherine that not even for a second, he thinks of anything else. He never had anybody to call his own except for Cathy and the mere utterance of her name makes his heart grow warm and kind. He rightly feels offended, when Catherine simply for the love of glitter chooses Linton over him, and he puts his grief in these words:

*"You loved me - what right had you to leave me? What right - answer me - for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will did it. I have no broken your heart - you have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. So much the worse for me that I am strong. Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you - Oh, God! would you like to lie with your soul in the grave?"*

(Wuthering Heights, Ch. 15: page 155)

In the beginning of the novel, the tenant, who visits Wuthering heights, happens to meet the ghost of Catherine. Her spirit, which hounds the place, comes in the form of a child and why she chooses to move around in the apparition of a child is because before she died, she longed desperately to turn around the time and go to the moors with Heathcliff, as they used to do as kids. One can imagine the pang of separation they both suffered. Heathcliff's actions sure bend more on the side of villainy, but he is still written as being extremely human. He is flawed, he is loving, he has clear anger issues, he is kind to some, he is violent to others, he has desires and fears. He isn't a villain because he was shown from the beginning to have loved someone else more than his own person. It's obviously a mystery whether he loved Catherine or saw himself in her, but at the end of the day, his love and his conceptual rise makes him so human that it's difficult to see him as frightening or even charismatic. A villain would be a character of whom we know nothing and who embodies the term 'evil'. But Heathcliff is as 'grey' as the other characters: we know things about him, we know his weaknesses, his strengths, we've witnessed his transformation. We are aware to be afraid of him. This isn't how readers usually feel towards a villain. To most, Heathcliff as well as the other main characters of Wuthering Heights, are primarily a bunch of brats with a few redeeming interesting threads.

*Yayati* a play demonstrates about the struggle of two women, Sharmishtha and Devayani, who fight to achieve their rights by defying the norms of gender discourse and the cultural tradition thus challenging the dictates of patriarchy and the bloodshot eyes of society. Sharmishtha fight against the artificial constructs of gender and culture to establish her natural desires and rights. Class plays an important role in highlighting the individual's conflict with the stereotypical concepts of gender and cultural constructs and locating the individual's actual space of existence within society. Karnad's *Yayati* is also based on the responsibility of a person. It is based on the sentiments of a person. Class-distinction and the caste distinction take the society to violence. Sharmishtha, being disturbed by the comments of Devayani, pulls her with her long hair, takes her to a well and throws her inside. Sharmishtha's behavior is violent whereas Devayani's words are violent. In order to take revenge on Devayani, Sharmishtha seduces Yayati. The conflict of *Yayati* starts with the revenge taken by Sharmishtha, an Asura (Demon) princess, against her friend Devayani, a Brahmin and the Queen of King Yayati. Class difference and the cultural orientation lie at the centre of this conflict. Sharmishtha seduces King Yayati and compels him to indulge in physical relationship with her. The source of the conflict lies in the class and gender discriminations. Being a representative of the male narrative Yayati betrays his wife Queen Devayani. Patriarchal gender constructs project the woman as a suffering soul who sacrifices her life for the male thus becoming an object of exploitation. Sharmishtha exploits these gender constructs to challenge the class discrimination that she faced for being a low class Rakshasha princess. But, in doing so she indirectly makes Devayani a victim of the patriarchal constructs of gender and culture that Sharmishtha intends to subvert. Being emotionally troubled by Sharmishtha's behavior Devayani goes to her father and makes him to curse Yayati. Words like 'Asura' and 'Rakshasi' (both meaning 'devil'), abound in the play. Sharmishtha, the 'Asura-Kanya', the daughter of the devil, is portrayed as 'Chandalin' (the witch) or 'Pishaach' (devil) or "Bhoot" (ghost). She is compared to Devyani, the 'Arya Stri' (Aryan Woman), and 'Brahman-Kanya' (the daughter of Brahmin). The contrasting of both characters makes the tussle between them very poignant. While Devayani achieves her right to become the queen through dharma, Sharmishtha also claims her right in the same way though belonging to the lower class. Thus, she replaces Devayani, challenges the superiority of Devayani's class and subverts patriarchy. If Yayati can indulge in several physical affairs as a man then Sharmishtha also stands justified in her act of seducing another married man. To acquire her social right Sharmishtha challenges the norms of patriarchy and gender narratives and indulges in forbidden love relationship. She reacts from the margin and moves towards the center by becoming the Queen of King Yayati. But we cannot consider Sharmishtha as the person responsible for Devayani's misfortune. It is the network of power and her yearn for a listener to her part of the story (as everyone blames her and sees Devyani as a victim), which propels Sharmishtha towards achieving her right as a woman in the male dominated society. Sharmishtha carves out her own space as a woman by discarding the norms of chastity and morality that are imposed on a woman by the constructs of Indian culture. Class and culture implicate the existential condition of the woman in favour of the male discourse.

The Indian culture that is largely dictated by and meant for the male is used as an instrument by Sharmishtha to replace the phallic centre. In that sense Sharmishtha has achieved her right as a woman and has succeeded in exterminating the class differences. This act of Sharmishtha is against the Indian Hindu tradition. But if we consider the point of individual right then Sharmishtha's act stands justified, and King Yayati seems to be doing no wrong in rendering her with her womanly right. Class is made up of various stereotypical concepts and praxes that are largely associated with and highly influenced by the concepts of gender and culture. In *Yayati* the conflict between Sharmishtha and Devayani is governed by their class orientations that are influenced by the gender and culture concepts. By deconstructing the class, we can understand the interplay of gender and culture that transfers the concerned individual from centre to the margin. Apart from having their feminine identities Sharmishtha and Devayani also have their respective class and cultural orientations. But, while Sharmishtha moves from the margin to the centre Devayani becomes the marginalized within the centre. While Devayani becomes the suffering female figure, Sharmishtha emerges as a bold woman who defies the norms of patriarchal society by indulging in physical relationship with King Yayati, Devayani's husband, and that too before marriage to establish her rights. Sharmishtha is not an escapist. While fighting for her right she is ready to accept any consequence occurring due to her action.

*"Swarnalata: That spiteful whore –I would have torn her hair out if you hadn't stopped me. Taught that fiend a proper lesson. The rakshasi. You heard us, madam. Did I say a word against her? All those dirty insinuations."*

(Yayati Act I, page1)

The play starts on a quiet note, with Swarnalata complaining to Devayani against Sharmistha. Though, Devayani defends Sharmistha, we soon learn of the on-going conflict between the two. Sharmistha does not accord proper respect to Devayani, because she knows too well that Yayati married Devayani since she was the daughter of Shukracharya who could bless him with immortality. Being very angry, Swarnalata abuses Sharmistha. Devayani as well as Swarnalata are disturbed by the way of talking and behavior of Sharmistha. Sharmistha was once upon a time Devayani's friend but now she is her slave. From their dialogues the audience/readers know that Pooru is coming with his bride. When Swarnalata exists Sharmistha enters. When Sharmistha and Devayani have an argument, she tells Devayani, that King Yayati is not lusting for her, but he lusts for immortality that is her father's art of 'Sanjeevani'. Despite the on-going conflict between Devayani and Sharmistha, Devayani does not order Sharmistha to go away from the palace. Thus, she is the one who is responsible for Sharmistha being in the palace. Sharmistha is born in a 'Rakshasa family' and she is aware of it. She all the time mentions that she is an uncouth 'rakshasi' in a Kshatriya palace ruled over by a Brahmin queen.

*"No, sir, but you have helped. Perhaps during these two years all I needed was someone to listen to me. You have done that and that is enough for me. I am grateful. I shall not torment you any further."*

(Yayati Act I, page 20)

Sharmistha brings turmoil into the life of Yayati. It is because of her that Devayani falls into the well and Yayati appears on the scene and saves her. He knows that his problems are due to Sharmistha's presence in the palace, but he does not have the heart to tell her to go away. Even Devayani does not do so and Yayati is conscious of the fact of life. The crisis in the life of Yayati is precipitated by his refusal to part with Sharmistha. When a crisis comes in the life of Yayati, instead of owning up her responsibility, Devayani leaves the palace. She refuses to yield and the result is the curse of premature old age on Yayati. When Yayati learns that Shukracharya has cursed him with old age, he does not accept the responsibility of what he has done. He accuses Sharmistha for this. Sharmistha tries to pacify Yayati by asking him to accept what has come his way. Yayati gets violent, adamant and refuses to accept old age. He has great inclinations toward the world of beauties and bounties, when Sharmistha, the rakshasa kanya asks him for solitude. Yayati is jubilant. He fails to understand the seriousness of his actions and accuses Sharmistha and Pooru of not being happy in his happiness. Again, when Pooru informs him that nobody is ready to accept old age, Yayati cannot believe his ears. He dreads old age and the decrepitude it brings. He feels very hurt when nobody comes forward to take upon himself the curse of the old age. It is Sharmistha who brings him to his senses:

*"Why should they? Why should they take upon themselves the scourge you have brought upon yourself? Please, sir. Let us not look around for the fool or the yogi who is seeking holy martyrdom. Let us go..."*

(Yayati Act IV, page 46).

When Yayati sees the dead body of Chitrlekha, he repents and he feels very sorry. Sharmistha sarcastically calls Chitrlekha's death as *"the first victory of Yayati's new life"*. Chitrlekha's suicide that brings Yayati to his senses and he owns up responsibility for his actions. He suggests to Sharmistha to accompany him to the forest. When Chitrlekha dies, Pooru is stunned but does not cry. It is only when he regains his youth that he repents for what he has done. Yayati deals with the theme of responsibilities. Almost every character except Sharmistha is irresponsible. Each and every individual, whether he is an old man in search of lost youth or a saint lost in the wilderness or whoever he may be, must have a sense of responsibility in his journey of life.

The 'lovers of forgiving' confuse the concepts of anger, cruelty and revenge and that's why they reject it immediately. Anger is an emotion which happens to us in a certain situation. Cruelty, from a moral perspective, can be considered as a vice which is a kind of extreme harming. An angry and/or a cruel person tend to cause a huge destruction, which we can accept. However, the feeling of revenge is a passionate impulse for justice. From this point of view, revenge can be taken into account as a punishment for an unjust act. You cannot turn your other cheek when you are slapped in the face so hard unjustly because of two things: it would be a betrayal to yourself, and it would mean turning a blind eye to injustice. Revenge as a concept, cannot be denied directly without taking time to think about it. Every person can take the desire to be intentionally cruel and transform it into something egoistic which cannot even touch, let alone understand. Heathcliff and Sharmistha were the victims of wreck life which transformed them. Their misery of being unjustified brought the cruel nature out in them and thus they wholly were not responsible for what they had become and what they did.

**References:**

Budholia, Om Prakash. *Girish Karnad- History and Folklore*. New Delhi: B.R. Publications, 2011.

Behera, Guru Charan. *Appropriating Folk Culture: A study of the Post Independence Indian Drama*. Delhi: Authors Press, 2008.

Barnard, Robert. *Emily Bronte*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. 2009.

Ruth M. Adams. "Wuthering Heights: The Land East of Eden". *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol.13 No.1.1958.

Bloom, Harold. *Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights Bloom's Guides*. Infobase Publishing, 2008

Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *The de-moralization of society: from Victorian virtues to modern values*. Vintage Books, 1996.

