

Patriarchal System in Indian Plays: A Study of *Nagamandala* of Girish Karnad

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Abstract

India has largely been a patriarchal society for ages. The value of a man is recognized in his intelligence and strength whereas a woman is viewed as naturally weaker and reasonably deficient. This long unfairness against women draws the attention of the dramatists. Many present-day Indian playwrights have endeavoured to give power to the woes and quandaries of women. Girish Karnad has dealt with the gender issues in his *Nagamandala*. Girish Karnad's plays flourish with the elements of myth, folklore, and culture. This paper presents the treatment of women in *Nagamandala* of Girish Karnad. The aim is to find out how far dramatists have exploited the patriarchal elements to portray the socio-cultural problems and the evils of society. He is successful in bringing a drastic change in his female protagonist Rani.

Keywords: patriarchal, folklore, socio-culture, sacrifice, domination.

Girish Karnad is one of the leading playwrights in India who inscribes in Kannada and yet has moved away from the regionalist tradition to make new searches on the inarticulate. In his play '*Naga Mandala*', Karnad interlaces two Kannada folk tales together, the first one remarks on the paradoxical nature of oral tales, and the other is the story of Rani whose dilemma reflects the human need to live by fiction and half-truths. He derives the theme from two Kannada folk tales that he has heard from A.K. Ramanujan, his friend and guru. The play '*Naga-Mandala*' deals with gender disparities. It ridicules and interrogates the prejudicial values of our patriarchal society.

Nagamandala (1988) is one of the famous plays of Girish Karnad which fetched him the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the year (1989) as a most creative work. The word *Nagamandala* is a compound of two words: *naga* and *mandala*. Patriarchy defines men as the rulers, women are seen as inferior, less capable, and weaker.

Nagamandala is a feminist play that not only attacks and exposes male racism, the subjugation of women, the discrimination done to them by men and the patriarchal

culture, but also inaudibly devalues the concept of chastity. It is the play echoing the persistent quandaries of women in the Indian rural society. Apart from authenticating the women's problems, the play also presents the dissenting voice against the hard rules of patriarchal society. In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir writes, "thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (Beauvoir 25).

In his play, '*Naga Mandala*', he exposes male bigotry, the subjugation of women, the great injustice done to them by men and the patriarchal moral code. He even goes further and devalues the concept of chastity. He seems to suggest that matriarchy, the lost heaven of mankind, will come again. The play is about Rani, representing a typical Hindu wife. Appanna, a wealthy young man in the village, marries her and brings her to his house when she attains womanhood.

The play is based on the oral tales of A.K. Ramanujan. Rani is a controlling obedient girl, who becomes the victim of social order through marriage at an early age. Rani stayed with her parents till she reached

adulthood and did not have any chance to find herself and identify her potential her dominant situation gives her no time to live free in her parent's house and even in her husband's house. Early marriage is a stage where women have been exploited in a patriarchal society. Women as Mother and Daughter portrays how women as mothers sacrifice their lives and daughters are loved by their parents and are given all their needs. Kappana is a caretaking son of Kurudavva he always carries his mother on his back and offers all the information to his mother she also loves him very much and prays to God for his mother's healthy life and asks him for strength to carry his mother on his back. Rani is much loved by her family. She always thinks of her past life spent in her parent's home with love and joy where she feels safe and it was a heavenly time to her but this all turns hellish when she gets married to Appanna.

After his lunch, he locks her in and goes to his courtesan. He does not care for her feelings and considers her as a slave who is to serve him with extreme loyalty. He treats her with the disdain of a typical male bigot. She feels very secluded, terrified, and miserable. When she expresses her dread and loneliness, he callously disdains and dominates her feelings. He says to her,

"Look, I don't like idle chatter. Don't question me. Do as you are told and you won't be punished." [P-7]

She is confined in the house and it is almost a solitary confinement for her husband Appanna orders, "She won't talk to anyone. And no one need talk to her." [P-14]

She is destitute of the affection of her fellow human beings and the knowledge of the outer world. So, her character remains immature. She is just a child mentally. She daydreams that she is taken by an eagle to her parents who caress her tenderly. She sighs in her sleep for her parents. When she gets up, she weeps over her dejected life. According to Karnad, her being locked in the empty house signifies the indifference of her in-laws. This also reminds us of the chastity belt of the medieval ages.

Kappana's character is to love and care for his family and others. On the other hand, Appanna is not loyal to his wife and has an affair with Chelvi (a prostitute) Appanna does not want to spend his time with Rani without giving any reason every night he goes out and comes back the morning and again goes back later this became a daily

routine for Rani. By looking at Rani she feels sorry for her caged life and thinks to help her and gives her a root to add to the food so that Appanna would show love to her when Rani mixes the root in the curry it turns red, she is scared and threw it on the ant hill where it affected the Naga (cobra). In Indian culture, naga is worshipped as a god. Naga treats Rani with love and affection and the fact is that she was completely ignored by her husband and longs for love. When Appanna leaves home at night it is chosen night for its arrival in the form of Appanna as she could allow him. Rani is pregnant she was asked to attend panchayat for her infidelity as Appanna did not have any physical relation with his wife and doubted her.

Chastity is a patriarchal concept that has been used to tyrannize and weaken women for ages. The assaulted women and the women deceived by their lovers commit suicide while the men's perpetrators go with impunity. Appanna's vehement response to his wife's 'infidelity' does not make him consider a moment of his infidelity towards her. The villagers also snub this lapse on his part but they emphasise the institution of marriage and the reproductive function of the couple.

Her pregnancy invites a bunch of troubles for her. Appanna turns furious with anger when he comes to know of her pregnancy. He mistreats her and even kicks her. He heaves malice from his mouth against her and speaks,

"Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off" (33).

He further says,

"I swear to you I am not my father's son if I don't about that bastard! Smash it into dust! (33).

Rani, thinking that she has not committed any crime, swears to him about her guiltlessness,

"I swear to you I haven't done anything wrong" (33).

But Appanna reports the matter to the village elders who pass orders that she must undergo a chastity test either by putting a red-hot iron on her palm or putting her hands into the hole of a cobra.

This shows how male-dominated society is –when Appanna is having relations with prostitutes the society does not take it very seriously on the other side poor Rani is proved to be wrong. When Rani was in poor condition elders put two options to prove herself. Rani caught the

snake in her hand people were shocked by her reaction and thought of her as a goddess. The people who treated her wrong fell to her feet and asked her sorry for their behaviour and Appanna also fell to her feet and asked to forgive him. Finally, Rani is acclaimed as Pativrata who got everything that she wished for. In India, girls are brought up in such a way that they should not question their husbands and elders irrespective of torture, same condition Rani was tuned in and she waited for her husband with good deeds and the wait was fruitful. Karnad gives a clear picture of the traditions and culture the Indian society. The same naga could not bear Appanna sleeping next to Rani after their life was settled and thought of killing Rani as it was jealous of Appanna but it could not do any injustice to Rani as it loved her more. Later naga retires from that idea.

Therefore, Karnad has been successful in portraying the evils of society. First comes male domination how shamefully Appanna has a concubine and marries a young girl rani, he does not care for any customs, culture, or tradition no one questions him when he locks his wife and spends time with Chelvi but the same people raise questions when Appanna stood against her and doubted. Men suppress intellectual women, if Rani had known the originality of naga she would have not allowed him to enter her room. Nagamandala has both magic and religious effects where the snake is worshipped as God of Fertility. Naga has magical powers it is folk drama but if Nagais her lover, then it creates a critical image and questions on both man and woman equality also Karnad brings out directly or indirectly that all three characters Naga, Appanna, and Rani have lost their chastity. It also brings out the female narrative story in the patriarchal society.

The creation of female protagonists in fundamental manners is the most substantial feature of Girish Karnad's plays. '*Naga-Mandala*' is no exception to it. In this play, Girish Karnad has created the character of Rani, the female central character, unusually and eccentrically. This character is the creation of the post-colonial, post-modern world who wishes to attain what she lacks, upheavals against the patriarchy and male dominance, endeavours for survival and ends traditional notions forestalling change in the stance of the male-dominated society. In other words, Girish Karnad shows how women experience a survival of subjugation and compliance in a patriarchal society. The men use domestic violence as an armament to control and discriminate against their wives and their female counterparts docilely endure all the pains and anguishes.

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