

MYTHICAL REFLECTIONS IN THE GIRISH KARNAD'S NAGAMANDALA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

(Girish Karnad's Nagamandala is an important play that underlines the mythical reality of Indian traditional society. It makes a critical comment on the exploitative nature of the society, established traditional norms of the society are unfair towards women. In this research paper, how Girish Karnad used this traditional myth to highlight the positivity of the established norms. Newly married Rani comes into her husband's house full of expectations that she would get showers of comforts from her husband but on the contrary, that husband has had illicit relations with a mistress. He locks her in the house and only comes for lunch. Despite that Rani beseeches that and makes a full-blown attempt to attract her husband towards her. This research paper argues that in the traditional society woman has been glorified therefore with that pseudo glorification women do not dare to go against the established flow of the society.)

Key Words: *Myths, Patriarchal society, exploitation, ordeal test, folktale*

Girish Karnad is a well-acclaimed playwright, an actor, a director, a poet, and a compere of television talk show, leading playwright, and a very skillful practitioner of the performing art in contemporary India. He has authored many Plays; he enjoys a very respected position in Indian English Literature. He used very unique techniques by giving room for limited characters in his plays.

“Karnad's Nagamandala (1990) is a mythological play based on a folk tale and the snake myth. The play through using the element of folklore questions the patriarchal codes of society and deals with modern concepts of repression and psychology. It depicts the pitiable condition of Rani, who can't be said to be representing most of the young girls, who, just after their marriage, fall victim to the ill-treatment and atrocities of their husbands.

Rani is the protagonist character in the play Nagmandala, she is a victim of a patriarchal society where male dominance is prevalent. She is a beautiful and shy girl born and

brought up in a traditional society. As she married a boy named Appanna, who is a typical husband who never bothers about his wife. He continues to torture physically, mentally, and sexually. Like every girl, she comes to her husband's house with lots of expectations that she would have a beautiful life with her husband, her dreams completely shattered when she realized that her husband has been having extramarital relations. On contrary her husband, Appanna kept her in the locked house and every night goes to his mistress.

He considers Rani as an inanimate object, without understanding the newly married woman's emotions, he preferred to keep her in the locked house as an individual kept gold or diamond in a safe place. It reflects the heinous mentality of a man to consider a woman as an object. A woman has been objectified in every term; this play highlights the issue in a vivid manner. He locks her in the room as he wants to conceal his illicit relations. Appanna neglects his young, beautiful wife and keeps on visiting his concubine. On the very first day of their marriage, Appanna very angrily told Rani :

Look, I don't like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand? (finishes his meal, gets up.) I'll be back tomorrow, for lunch. (Karnad)

It is the hypocrisy of Appanna who keeps communication with outside the world, he mixes up with society, he enjoys social relations but in case of his wife Rani, he is very strict and he does not allow his wife to keep communication other than he. It is the natural tendency of the traditional husband and he fears that she should not break the threshold of the home and should not come in contact with another person.

The situation forces Rani to remain there in a locked house, her dreams have been squelching badly. This drama underlines the limited and abandoned role of the society towards women, even there is no sign where Rani expresses anger against her husband on the contrary she tries to beseech him and makes full-blown attempts to attract her estranged husband towards her. Rani was completely shrouded by helplessness, despair, and lonely life. She does not remain an option except to accept the present plight. Season of love affection and enjoyment has been spending alone, situation prevailed completely, Rani has to stay alone for the whole day and night. She feels scared being alone in the house and obsessed by the feelings of fear and insecurity. Appanna's behavior is completely whimsical, he produces very rudeness and insincere

in front of Rani. His insensitivity heightens when he just comes in his home for lunch it reveals the super exploitative nature of his personality.

Appanna brings a brutal dog and then a mongoose to prevent Rani from talking with outsiders, he becomes a tyrant oppressor to prevent Rani from any possible communication to other than him. He tries to cover up illicit relations in the eyes of his wife. He does calculated steps and every possible act to suppress Rani. He betrays his wife but does not want to be questioned by her. From the very first day of her marriage, Rani becomes a victim in the hands of her husband. Rani represents a typical Indian woman who attempts to win the heart of her husband by using a different mechanism, she was desperately searching for any tricks or remedies to attract her husband towards her. Kurudavva, an old lady came in her contact and that old lady suggested some type of herbal medicine after consumption of the herbal medicine husband attracts towards the wife. Kurudavva came into her life like an oasis which created hope in Rani. Kurudavva feels sorry for Rani's plight, so she gives Rani two pieces of aphrodisiac root and informs her to mix it in Appanna's food. She gives Rani a magical root as a remedy to attract her husband attention towards her. Kurudavva assured Rani that her husband would come from the clutches of mistress and live with her. Kurudavva tells Rani:

...feed it to your husband and watch the results. Once he smells you, he won't go sniffing after that bitch. He will make you a wife instantly. (Karnad)

Karnad used myths to explain the plight of a credulous woman who wants her husband back, even at this juncture she does not think about any sort of revolt. She tries to find out solutions through the myths this is a typical situation of Indian women. At the initial stage, out of fear, she mixed a very limited amount of herbal medicine in the food but it did not show any promising result, therefore, she mixed a large amount in the food and the curry turned red like blood. Out of fear, she pours the entire liquid into the anthill and that magic liquid drunk by king cobra and fascinated towards Rani. That was a turning point in her life, Naga changed his personality as a Appanna and started a physical relationship with Rani. The Cobra used to enter the house through the drain of the bathroom with his magical powers assumes the shape of Appanna, as a Rani's husband.

Dhanavel says in reference to this play:

“Karnad’s humanism, derived mainly from his profound concern for the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘downtrodden’, his compulsive return to and reinterpretation of the mythical past and oral tradition. And his “determined demystification of the dominant beliefs and practices’. Other Indian critics, in their analysis of contemporary Indian theatre focus on its ambivalent relationship both to its classical and colonial past”. (Dhanavel)

When the first night gets over Naga goes to the bathroom, turns into his original form, and goes away. In the morning, Rani finds no trace of Naga visiting her and the door is still locked. The next afternoon when her husband comes for lunch Rani asks him:

**But when did you go
away? I’m... (Freezes when
she sees the expression
of distaste on his face.)**

Appanna : Yes?

Rani : Oh ! Nothing. (Karnad)

She realized something has been happening weird but she preferred to keep mum and extended that secret affair with a snake. Cobra visits in her house guise as a Appanna. She realizes careless, cruel, and senseless Appanna during the daytime and sensitive, caring, and loving Appanna during the nighttime. She was astonished by finding differences between the two personalities of Appanna, but she is innocent to understand, being a simple natured she preferred to go with the flow what she expected before the marriage as it has been happening in the night time, therefore she preferred to keep calm.

Though she realizes the difference, she doesn’t ask any question nor does she express any doubt about it. She feels nervous when Naga goes out. The days roll by and after five months she realizes yet another transformation. She remains pregnant. Her joy knows no bounds. She tells Naga:

**...now I am a woman, a wife, and I am
going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. (Karnad)**

when Appanna came to know about Rani’s pregnancy he accuses Rani:

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? (Karnad)

He roars poignantly:

You shame me in front of the whole village, you darken my face, you slut! (Karnad)

With a furious approach, he appeals to all the village elders to deliver a judgment on his wife's adultery. He pleaded argument that his wife is treacherous and unholy and stubborn to undergo the chastity test to prove her innocence. A person who had illicit relations with mistress still with open-heartedly asking ordeal test of his innocent wife. Villagers decided on an ordeal test, Rani has to touch cobra, if cobra bites, she will not innocent, if cobra does not bite, she would be innocent. In that situation, Naga helped to come out from the sticky situation. She has been warned that if she tells a lie, the cobra would bite her. So, she has to tell truth. Finally, Rani accepts the cobra trial and puts her hands into the ant-hill, takes out the cobra, and vows, "Since coming to this village. I have held by this hand, only two.... My husband.... And this Cobra" (38). Cobra, instead of biting her, makes an umbrella with his hood over her head and moves over her shoulder to make a garland. It proves her innocence and chastity. Rani is acclaimed as a Goddess, and all the village elders tell Appanna:

Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman.

She is a goddess incarnate... You were the chosen instrument for revealing her divinity. (Karnad)

Appanna was astonished by the unexpected result of the ordeal test. He falls at her feet and begs her pardon; he makes up his mind to become a devoted husband and even his concubine feels happy to serve Rani. Karnad used myth brilliantly to define the wrong practices of the society in a positive way, even it makes a very critical comment on the wrong practices of the society. Karnad comments on mythical things and the patriarchal order of the society, therefore this is not only to compel the things positively but makes to understand mythical things in the new dimensions. Appanna's long aside reveals his delusion. He utters pathetically:

What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I sinned so much that even Nature

**should laugh at me? I know I haven't slept
with my wife. Let the world say what it likes.
Let any miracle declare her a goddess. But I
know! What sense am I to make of my life if
that's worth nothing? (Karnad)**

Appanna was shocked about the ordeal test, he was surprised how the cobra did not bite Rani. He was sure that he had not touched his wife at all, still how she got pregnant. But the miracle came ahead cobra had not bitten Rani on the contrary cobra made umbrella by its hood and Rani emerged as a goddess in the views of the villagers. She proved her chastity test. It is the contradiction of the society where there is no active role of society to control the men on their misbehavior, there is no specific test available to be proven the conscience of the men but for testing of women's misbehavior society is proactive. In this drama Karnad explicitly highlights the issue of male dominance brilliantly.

“The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various conventions – the chorus, the masks, and the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds –permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem” (Karnad, Specification of Nagmandala: Play With A Cobra)

He accepts Rani's and Naga's child. Appanna has to allow her son to perform the ritual to commemorate the death of Naga, his biological father. All his patriarchal authority is paralyzed at the end. He has full confidence in the village court but his expectation is also frustrated by the strange decision. Appanna has to accept his wife with all her unchastity and impurity.

As per Naga's advice, Rani undergoes the snake trial and is considered a goddess. Rani gets back her reformed husband, a maidservant, and a beautiful child. She is declared as a goddess by the villagers. The Naga's promise:

**Your husband will become your slave tomorrow.
You will get all you have ever wanted. (Karnad)**

Rani is considered a goddess after the snake- ordeal is fulfilled. Naga thus brings happiness and glory to Rani. He restores her with happiness. In this way, Rani's transformation from a poor, timid, voiceless, oppressed wife to a dominant, powerful lady of the house who controls the whole family and takes all important decisions in the family is one of the important themes of this play. She challenged this male-dominated society and proved that although a woman is kept in the lock-up, she can do anything to fulfill her desire and breaks the shackle of men dominated society.

Appanna represent male-dominated Indian society and never think about Rani's emotions, feelings, and desires and from the very first day of their marriage made her spend lonely, painful, humiliating life has got punishment as he has to accept Naga's and Rani's son as his own and allow her son to do annual rituals of dead Naga every year. Now Appanna has no power, no voice in the family. Rani proves her superiority over the male-dominated section of society.

Tutun Mukherjee comments that

“Karnad has made available the rich resources of both the Great and the little tradition, the classical and the folk elements of Indian literature” (Tripathi)

Thus, Rani who spends a neglected and painful life at the beginning of the play has declared as a goddess and all villagers including her husband and his mistress accept her purity and chastity and give her respect, glory in the whole society at the end of the play.

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