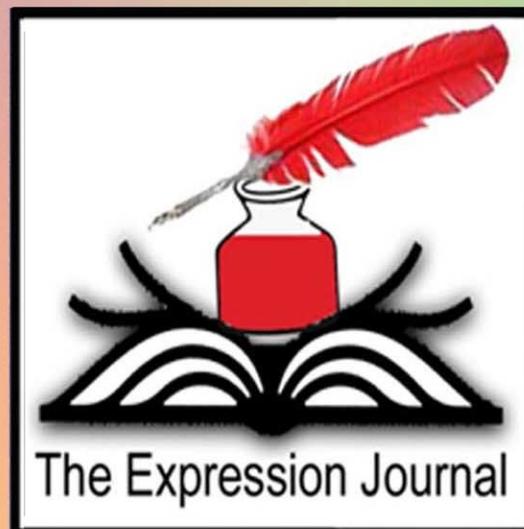


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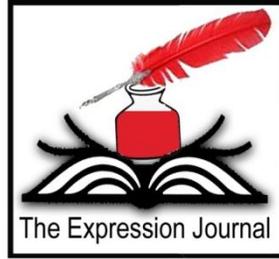
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GIRISH KARNAD'S *NAGA-MANDALA*: A FEMINISTS STUDY

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Abstract

Drama plays an important role in Indian Writing in English. Many dramatists have played a crucial role in shaping Indian Writing in English. Girish Karnad is a multifaceted Kannada writer who has translated his plays into English. He is a playwright, actor and filmmaker. He was born in Matheran near Bombay in his 1938 and grew up in Sirsi, Karnataka. He completed his bachelor's degree from Karnataka University and his master's degree from Oxford University in 1963 in 1958. His plays deal with history, mythology, folklore, and other socially significant themes. He wrote many plays such as *Maa Nishaadha* (1959), *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1972), *Anjulimallige* (1977), *Hittina Hunja* (1980), *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Taledanda* (1990), *Agni Mattu Male* (1995), *Tippuvina Kanasugalu*, *Maduve Album* (2006), *Flowers* (2012) and *Benda Kaalu on Toast* (2012). He is a person of international reputation and he has won many awards like Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1972), Padma Shri (1974), Padma Bhushan (1992), Kannada Sahitya Academy Award (1992), Sahitya Akademi Award (1997), Jananpith Award (1998), Kalidas Samman (1998), etc. He received D. Litt. from Karnatak University (1994) and honorary doctorate from University of Southern California, Los Angeles (2011). The present paper is a humble attempt to shed light on the marginalized status of women in the patriarchal society through the character of Rani in Girish Karnad's play *Naga Mandala*.

Keywords

Girish Karnad, *Naga Mandala*, Patriarchy, Gender Studies, Gender Discrimination, Indian Writing in English.

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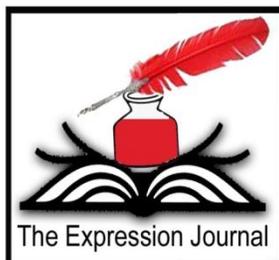
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There are many reasons for the oppression and exploitation of women. They become victims of submission from women as well as men. Since ancient times, women have become like clay in the hands of patriarchal hegemonic societies. She is considered inferior to man. She is expected to make sacrifices in every area of her life, from her birth until her death. There is no one in her house to listen to her grief, and she is confined to the shackles of her home's four walls simply because we live in a male-dominated society. Girls are considered someone else's property and live like guests in their own homes before marriage. It is a social convention that a woman is born to suffer and that even if exploited or harassed, she must maintain relationships in her in-laws' home. Girish Karnad, one of the foremost Indian playwrights, writes his plays in Kannada. In his play *Naga Mandala*, he talks about to Kannada folk tales: the first about the paradoxical nature of oral tales and the second about Rani's predicaments. Manju Joshi also writes that, "The play, *Naga-Mandala*, is based on the oral tales heard by the playwright from A. K. Ramanujan" (Joshi 76).

The play *Naga-Mandala* tells the story of a woman named Rani who is kept entrapped by her husband in his house. Simone de Beauvoir rightly opines that "One is not born a woman, but rather, becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 351). The play *Naga-Mandala* is a beautiful story about the mental and physical suffering of a woman named Rani. She was born into a family where a woman was considered private property and her place in the house was second only to her husband. She only stays at home because of the social norms of marriage. The play tells the poignant story of Rani who marries Appanna, a symbol of a male-dominated society. Rani becomes the prototype of her submission in her new home, where there is no one but her husband who does not care for her. She should see her world the way her husband wants it. Appanna always "locked up like a caged bird" (10). She lives a miserable life under the male-hegemonic social system. They are not given equal opportunities like other males. It can be noticed in many other texts also. Dr. Somveer also writes in this context:

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“Deprived of decent and dignified life as human beings, their position is analogous to that of slaves and animals in the contemporary democratic and civilized world where the constitutional bodies like Human Rights Commission operate on various levels with a view to ensure justice to those who are meted out injustice.” (Somveer 1)

Appanna and Rani’s marriage is by no means a celebration of joy and love. Appanna does not want to listen to Rani’s complaints. He wants to keep her silent so that she may not intervene in his personal affairs. He orders her, “Look, I don’t like idle chatter. Don’t question me. Do as you are told and you won’t be punished” (Karnad 7). She was literally imprisoned in her husband’s house and it can be called a solitary confinement. Appanna decides everything for her. He says, “She won’t talk to anyone. And no one need talk to her” (Karnad 14). Right after the wedding, her husband is reluctant to spend time with her. Here is the conversation:

Appanna: Have we brought in all the bundles?

Rani: Yes.

Appanna: Well, then, I’ll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go. (Rani looks at him nonplussed. He pays no attention to her, goes out, shuts the door, locks it from outside and goes away. She runs to the door, pushes it, finds it locked, peers out of the barred window. He is gone). (Karnad 28)

It is seen from this play that Appanna does not want anything from his wife except food. The beginning of the play suggests that Appanna had married with Rani only for food. He does not give her equal status a wife deserves. The below conversation show it:

Kurrudeva: Appanna in his concubine’s courtyard. He has got himself a bride and is still goes after that harlot? (Karnad 29)

Kurrudeva: You don’t think he could have sent his wife back to her parents already. Do you? (Karnad 29)

Kappanna: Mother, what does it mean when a man locks his wife in?

Kurrudeva: You tell me.

Kappanna: It means he does not want anyone to talk to his wife.

Kurrudeva: ... He keeps his wife locked up like a caged bird? I must talk to her. (Karnad 30)

It has been seen noticed many times that women are not given equal opportunity in our society. They are always kept in control by men. Rani’s husband goes to concubine and does not give attention to his wife. In this play, eagle has been taken as a symbol of liberation. Dr. Somveer rightly comments, “The eagle symbolizes flight and freedom which represents Rani’s yearning for release from the cruel clutches of Appanna. She yearns to fly away from the dark and dreadful world of Appanna, but to no avail” (Somveer 2). Women are made to realize that they are women. When Rani complains about it, her husband tells her to remain silent, “What is there to be afraid of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you. Give me some rice now” (Karnad 28). He comes only for lunch and locks her, “Appanna washes his hands, locks her in and leaves. Rani keeps on watching him through the window” (Karnad 28). Sharma remarks, “Marriage for her becomes loss of the secure world of childhood and parental love, and she has to re-imagine that world in her fantasies merely to keep herself from psychic collapse” (Sharma 1).

Rani’s life becomes miserable as it is not easy to remain alone. Her old and blind neighbour

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Kurudavva takes pity on her. She gives her a root and tells her to feed her husband by grinding it. She says that her husband will start loving her. She says to Rani, "Take it! Grind it into a nice paste and feed it to your husband and watch the result. Once he smells you he won't go sniffing after that bitch. He will make you a wife instantly" (Karnad 34). A. Jaganmohana Chari also writes about this play, "The dichotomy of lover and husband is in the tradition she has inherited." (Chari 152)

When she mixes the paste of root into curry, its colour turns red like blood. She gets terribly afraid and has doubt about her husband's health. She thinks, "Oh my god! What horrible mess is this? Blood. Perhaps poison. Shall I serve him this?" (Karnad 37). She thinks that this drink may be dangerous for her husband and she thinks it just like a crime. She thinks, "Suppose something happens to my husband? What will my fate be? That little piece made him ill...No. No. Forgive me God. This is evil. I was about to commit a crime" (Karnad 37). She pours this mixture in a hole of her husband in which a cobra lived. He falls in love with Rani by drinking this mixture. He was an 'ichchhadhari nag' who could assume any shape. When Rani's husband is not there, the cobra comes in Appana's form and makes love with Rani.

On the other side, Rani becomes nonplussed to see the changed behaviour of her husband who remained indifferent towards her during the day and makes love with her very passionately at night. But she remains quiet and after some time, when she conceives, she shares this news with her husband. When Appanna comes to know about it, he becomes angry because he had not slept even for a single night with her. He calls her a harlot, "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 52).

Rani tries to convince her that she has done nothing wrong or immoral because she has slept only with her husband but her husband does not rely on her. He calls it an act of adultery. He says angrily, "You haven't and yet you have a bloated tummy. Just pumped air into it, did you? And you think I'll let you get away with that? You shame me in front of the whole village, you darken my face, you slut! (He beats her)" (Karnad 52). Janardan Roy comments about it:

Appanna's violent reaction to his wife's 'infidelity' does not make him consider a moment his own infidelity towards her. The other villagers also ignore this lapse on his part but they emphasise the institution of marriage and the procreative function of the couple. (Roy 645)

Appanna takes this matter into the village panchayat. The panchayat tells Rani for the snake or fire ordeal and Rani gets ready for the snake ordeal. One man warns her for the snake ordeal saying, "Listen to us even now. If something goes wrong and the Cobra bites you, not just your life but the life of the child you carry will be in jeopardy. We risk the sin of killing your unborn child" (Karnad 55). She takes the oath by putting her hand in the cobra hole:

Since coming into this village, I have held by this had, only two.....my husband and this Cobra. Yes, my husband and this King Cobra. Except for these two I have not touched any one of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me. If I lie, let the Cobra bite me. (Karnad 58)

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In fact, it was the same cobra who had made love to her. He does not bite her because Rani had not touched anyone else except this cobra and her husband. When the cobra does not bite her, the panchayat adores and worships her like a queen. The cobra slips back into the anthills and all the people gets surprised to see this miracle. The village people elevate her to the level of a goddess. One of the village men appreciates Rani in the following words:

Elder I: Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate. Don't grieve that you judged her wrongly and treated her badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were the chosen instrument for revealing her divinity. (Karnad 59)

Another aspect that comes to the forefront is Appanna's nonchalant and liberated attitude. When he goes to meet the concubine, nobody raises question on it. It is only Rani who is questioned. This incident reminds the readers of Sita's fire ordeal when she returns from Ravana's kingdom. She has to give fire ordeal to prove her chastity. Rakesh Joshi remarks about the real position of Indian women, "Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* presents the deplorable state of women in Indian society. The playwright wants to say in the prologue that man is a bundle of weakness, but he is either not aware of them, or he cannot get rid of them" (Joshi 143).

Thus, Girish Karnad's play *Naga-Mandala* sheds light on the life of a woman who remains marginalized due to her husband's arbitrary attitude. He just marries her and uses her as a maid servant who does all the work for him. He fulfills all his needs from his concubine and when his wife gets pregnant, he beats her saying her a harlot. Beena Mahida remarks about Rani, "Thus, in the end Rani emerges as a round character as she emerges from a very weak, frail Indian woman to an extremely bold person who knows the ways of the world" (Mahida 3). Alkesh Dalal writes about this play:

Naga-Mandala is not only an excellent example of Girish Karnad's great craft work but also a living tool to estimate the attitude of society towards women. The story deals with the dilemma of women and her true place in the society. (Dalal 368)

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