

A BRIEF ANALYSIS ABOUT DR. RAMKUMAR VERMA AND DR. GIRISH KARNAD'S DRAMA

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Ramkumar Verma was a leading Hindi poet who published one act-plays several anthologies of his work. Life history was associated with Allahabad University. He was born in Sagar district of Prades on 15 September 1905. He was known for his style of writing. He became noted for one-act plays. In 1930, his first one-act play *badalon Ki Mrityu* was written, but diversified into essays, novels and poetry.

Thematically, his works are mostly historical. In his creations one can experience sacrifice, love, benevolence, forgiveness, service and humanity. His morals have been set by Mahatma Gandhi. His experience in theatre proved beneficial, when various of his works were published, like '*Reshma Prithviraj Ki Aankhe*', '*Kaumudi Mahotsav*' and '*Deepdan*', and the best is *nomaan Ki bulundiya*. And '*Raj Rani Sita*' awards. He was awarded Padma Bhushan in 1963 for contributions in the category of literature and Education.

Girish Raghunath Karnad (born 19 May 1938) is a contemporary writer, playwright, screenwriter, actor and movie director in Kannada language. His rise as a playwright in 1960s, marked the coming of age of Modern Indian playwriting in Kannada, just as Badal Sarkar did in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi.

He is a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India. For four decades Karnad has been composing plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He has translated his plays into English and has received acclaim.

His plays have been translated into some Indian languages and directed by directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B. V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan and Amal Allana.

He is active in the world of Indian cinema working as an actor, director, and screenwriter, in Hindi and Kannada flicks, earning awards along the way. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India and won four Filmfare Awards where three are Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada and one Filmfare Best Screenplay Award.

Introduction

The Indian dramatist Girish Karnad is one of the Indian English literary personal who has brought the idea of eco-sensitivity through a dramatic sequence in his renowned plays. Girish Karnad has acquired knowledge of history, colonial effects and cultural tensions of that time. Karnad's literary pieces always aimed at acting as a link between the past and the present, highlighting the mythical context with the social concerns, with a special reference to the Indian women's catastrophic condition in the social periphery. Despite a male writer, Karnad's plays are unbiased and always set women's issues on the front row in order to provide a social equality. Girish Karnad targeted the unjustified gender and class division of the society that prevailed since the ancient period by the patriarchal monopoly. The women characters in his plays are traditional as well as modern, believe in living on their own terms.

"Girish Karnad has explored the awakening of female consciousness often dramatized in literature" (Kosta, 1999). In the plays the author put questions on the Indian marriage system where women need to stay inside the four walls of the house, aiming to serve the family members and completing all the household chores. Whereas, men are absolutely free to roam around and fulfil their dreams. Karnad made his readers to realise the psychological trauma that women go through in their lives for the repressive behaviour of men. In '*The Fire and the Rain*', the lady characters Vishakha and Nittilai were encountered with lifelong miseries due to the societal norms set by patriarchy.

Initially inscribed in Kannada language, named as *Agni Mattu Male* (1995), *The Fire and the Rain* was published in English in the year 1998 by Karnad himself. The present play is considered as one of the highly intellectual works that explores Karnad's structured ideas on human emotions like passion, sacrifice, greed, loss, spirituality, etc. Again,

The Fire and the rain depicts some rituals from the Veda, the Hindu spiritual practices and the beliefs of connecting with Gods. Jeaneane D. Fowler has stated in Hinduism: Beliefs and Practices, "Agni is addressed in approximately one third of the hymns in the Rig Veda. He was central in sacrificial ritual because it was the fire that transformed the offerings into something accessible to the gods".

Fire stands for the symbolic representation of both positive and negative state of mind such as revenge, anger, betrayal, lust and jealousy. Whereas ‘rain’ is known as a gift from God, which nourishes the Earth and symbolises forgiveness, sacrifice, revival, re-generation and fertility. Karnad links the inner psychic of human with the nature’s elements and has projected both the positive and negative sides of human. “Agni works as anger and revenge in Raibhya, Paravasu, and Yavakri.

In Vishakha, it burns as lust; and in the people as hunger due to the persisting drought. In all of them, except in Vishakha, Agni burns as sacrificial fire without its accompanying grace as vision or light. However, this apparently overarching element of Agni (Fire) in the title of the play burns to convey the lessons the human being must learn about the subjugation of one’s ego to the Universal Being. Much of the agony in the lives of the major characters is played out on the canvas of human consciousness till they learn this all-essential lesson of humility”

Both ‘fire’ and ‘rain’ are worshipped as Gods in the Hindu religion and both are strong elements of nature. The tragic consequences in the lives of the learned men like Raibhya, Paravasu and Yavakri in the play occurred due to their inability in coping up with the universal power they had acquired. Karnad has shown that when human worships nature, he gains but when he breaks the rule of nature by crossing his limits of passion, he ruins himself.

The play **Nagamandala** is based on the two oral stories from Karnataka that the playwright Girish Karnad heard from his mentor, Professor A.K Ramanujan. Karnad through the play exposes the exploitation and incarceration of women that occurs through the institution of marriage and how myths display the fears of men in society and are thus inherently patriarchal and are used in order to control and restrict the actions of women. The play also mocks the idea of chastity and aims at the emancipation and empowerment of women.

The play is based on a rural setting and centred around the life of Rani, who is the everyday submissive rural Indian woman who is married off to a man by her parents, who arrange the marriage without taking into consideration her wishes. Her husband, a rich man named Appanna (which translates to any man). The name is a symbol employed by Karnad to highlight that this is the reality of most weddings that occur. It is to show how marriage is a patriarchal institution that has always been unfair to women.

‘Nagamandala’ is a two-act play written by the well-known Indian playwright and actor Girish Karnad in 1987-88 and published in 1988. Nagamandala means ‘a play with cobra’. It was basically a Kannada play, then was translated into English. The play blends history with mythical elements. The story is taken from a Kannada folklore which Karnad heard from the poet A K Ramanujan.

Girish Karnad presents the individual as well as social predicaments, resulting from the dichotomy between instinct and reason, body and mind, male and female psyche in his play like Nagamandala .

In Karnad’s plays, while the female characters search for a completeness within their partners, the men fail to achieve a harmonious existence of their body and mind. Karnad’s plays become aesthetic experiences, which release multiple connotations with their rootedness in human emotions and instinct. His drama offers a unique aesthetic approach to myths, folklore and story-telling.

The plots provide ample scope for a variety of experiments on the stage. Karnad’s detractors, however, think that Karnad is reduced to a bunch of plays, that dwell on multifarious myths and parochial ethnicity. His contemporary writers often complain that Karnad does not confront reality and his characters are not flesh and blood individuals, but broad representations of their class or ideology. But this charge is actively countered by Karnad’s legion of admirers. Mahesh Dattani almost refutes these charges on Karnad by proclaiming that Karnad has not only a historic vision but a contemporary voice, which make his plays universal.

U.R. Ananthamurthy too asserts the fact that Karnad is the poet of drama. The use of history and mythology to tackle contemporary themes gives him the psychological distance to comment on the contemporary times. Thus Nagamandala as well as The Fire and the Rain become universal, timeless plays, where myth and reality, fact and fiction get fused in order to unravel the complex, discursive demands of contemporary socio-cultural paradigm.

The denotative quality of his plays is expressed in the use of myths and history in order to manifest the spirit of contemporaneity. The various states of human condition become Karnad’s main thematic concern, and performance becomes the creative motivation of his dramatic vision.

The plot of Nagamanda is drawn from myths and folk tales. Karnad here recreates, adapts and relates these mythic as well as the folkloric tales in order to relate them to the predicament of split personality of modern man. This play also latently manifests Karnad’s concern with the issue of gender identity. Karnad’s plays are, thus, not mere imitations of life, but are representations of existential predicament and concretizations of philosophical abstractions. He deploys this twin-facetedness of the folkloric tradition in order to communicate the aesthetic experiences, which release multiple connotations with their rootedness in human emotions and instinct. Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman.

It is a Chinese box story with two folktales transformed into one fabric where myth and superstition, fact and fantasy, instinct and reason, the particular and the general blend to produce a drama with universal evocations. Nagamandala: Play with a Cobra is, as Karnad says in his note to the play, based on two oral Kannada tales, he had heard from his mentor-friend and well-known poet A.K. Ramanujan, to whom Karnad also dedicates the play. In fact, a comparative reading will reveal that, as with the plots of much Greek drama, the plot of Nagamandala is a reworking into the dramatic medium of the “folk-mythologies”, whose stories Ramanujan retells.

Two plots make up Nagamandala. The framing plot of the male playwright and his curse is a re-telling of the story that Ramanujan calls “A Story and a Song”, while the plot that deals with the story of Rani is based on “**The Serpent Lover**”. Karnad also makes use of myths and folk forms in his plays to exorcise socio-cultural evils.

He says in his Introduction to the play, “The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning those values, of making them literally stand on their head”. Fusing two folktales into one, it becomes a tale of love, yearnings and psychological manifestations. The play is about a couple and how the wife Rani failing to win her husband Appana's affection, eventually falls in love with the metamorphosed Naga.

There is an evident use of magic realism in the portrayal of the character Naga, who serves as the emotional and physical resort for Rani, when her husband is away out of continuous resentment. The character of Naga is borrowed from the concept of King Cobra of Kannada folklore, which can assume human dimensions. Naga has often been interpreted as the manifestation of the repressed urges and the needs of a neglected wife. Rani's predicament is about a life, lived by fiction and half truth. In Nagamandala Karnad not only exposes male chauvinism, the oppression on women, the great injustice done to them by patriarchal culture and men, but also overtly deflates the concept of chastity, that undergirds the patriarchal mythic imagination across religion, language and folktales.

Nagamandala begins with a Prologue, depicting the predicament of the Man, who is caught between a limbo-like situation of sleep and wakefulness, life and death. As the Man says in the Prologue, the audience, like the wedding guest of “The Ancient Mariner” can not but enter into the make-believe world of fantasy, created by the narrator.

A “**mandala**” consists of a triangle .Similarly the zeitgeist of the play is the mandala. The three points of the triangle are **Rani**, **Appanna** and **Naga**, which illustrates the eternal triangle of an adulterous situation presenting the wife, the husband and the lover. In Nagamandala, Naga assumes the form of the husband Appanna during the night and becomes an embodiment of love, passion and concern, unlike Appanna of the daytime who is indifferent, harsh and callous. Appanna, as a typical representative of the patriarchal mindset, is unfaithful to his wife and spends most of his time with his concubine.

He comes home only to bathe, eat and impose restrictions on Rani. It is at the behest of Kurudavva and with the hope of changing her husband that Rani is willing to try the love potion. The redness of the extract frightens her and in a moment of confusion she throws the extract upon the anthill. Naga internalises it and immediately falls in love with Rani. Now he takes the form of her husband to approach Rani. Then life starts to grow into a dream for Rani, who undergoes almost a trance-like state, when only instinct works. Even as she suspects Naga, she refuses to wake up to reality. Rani's experience with Naga borders on a dream-like situation . Naga comes in the guise of her husband, but he cannot change what he is. This is brilliantly manifested by the dramatist:

Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, Crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows-even the geese! The female begins to smell like wet earth. And stung by her smell, the king Cobra starts searching for his queen. The tiger bellows for his mate. When the flame-of-forest blossoms into a fountain of red and earth cracks open at the touch of the aerial roots of the banyan, it moves in the hollow of the cottonwood in the flow of the estuary, the dark Netherlands, within everything that sprouts, grows, stretches, creaks and blooms- everywhere, those who come together, cling, fall apart lazily! It is there and there and there, everywhere.

The passage recalls the myth of union of Heaven and Earth and of the first male and female. It is this law of life that Rani is ignorant of. The above mentioned passage is replete with erotic images. Rani enjoys Naga's company so much that she wants the night to last forever. Naga employs the myth of life to educate her about physicality.

Naga as the phallic symbol initiates her into sex. Appanna is here symbolic of the reasonable side of man , while the Naga with all its phallic connotations typifies the primitive instinct of a man. Naga has often been interpreted as the manifestation of the repressed urges and the needs of a neglected wife. Rani's predicament is that she can not attain both of the qualities in the single person.

Hence failing to accept the harsh realities of life, she chooses to live her life, by fictions and half truths, ignoring the reality. The predicament of Rani is that she can not gain both of the qualities within the single person

Appanna accuses Rani of infidelity when he comes to know about her pregnancy. Naga ultimately solves the problem and helps her to win not only her husband's love, but also the reverence of the entire village. To the play's explicitly feminist vision, the ironies inherent in Rani's success in the snake-trial are vital. As a test of her chastity, the trial defeats the purpose for which it was devised in the first place.

The snake ordeal mocks the classic Hindu mythic chastity test, the test of truth. In the Ramayana, Sita comes through the ordeal of fire because she is truly chaste and faithful. In Karnad's play, the woman comes successful through the ordeal of handling a venomous snake only because the snake is her lover and eventually her confession that she has not touched any other male bodies than her husband and the Naga, becomes true. Hence "it is her very infidelity that comes to her aid in proving that she is a faithful wife"

The solution also puts an end to Naga's love affair with Rani. Now the Naga suffers from the pangs of separation like a human lover. Realizing too well that he could no longer assume Appanna's form and as a snake could not have a human mistress, he decides to end his life so that his lover might live in happiness. Ultimately, in Nagamandala Rani realises gradually the distinction between her husband and the snake-lover and gains the knowledge that two men do not love alike :

When her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realize it was someone new? Even if she hadn't known earlier? When did the split take place?(60)

Thus, throughout this play Karnad problematises the concept of 'identity' as well as the notion of the split personality. Besides, Karnad also highlights the irony that lies between the concept of personal chastity and public reputation as it is manifested through Rani's 'snake ordeal', which eventually proves to be a facade to eyewash the public. Within this dichotomy between the lover and the husband, the instinct and the reason, it is the instinct that seems to win.

Thus the male characters, in the plays of Karnad, can utter only in a mood of frustration like Robert Browning's character, Andrea Del Sarto that "And thus we half-men struggle . . ." . Karnad presents in these plays the individual as well as the universal predicaments highlighting the gulf between instinct and reason. So the beloved's aspiration for an amalgamation of both of the qualities within her partner remains unfulfilled for ever like John Keats's "Ode on a Gracian Urn", where Keats too vainly seeks to unite the warmth of life and the permanence of art

Within the ambit of this play Karnad highlights the oppressive as well as the claustrophobic notions of the Indian society, where an Indian woman has to justify always her chastity in the public in spite of her husband's open infidelity. Their lives are guided by the decision of the 'other'.

Thus, they become objects to the will of the patriarchs of the society. Due this process of 'othering' of the female self, Gayatri Spivak addresses the humiliated female figure as the 'gendered subaltern'. In the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak writes that women because of the "ideological construction of gender" within patriarchy, are replaced from the socio-cultural sites as 'subjects'. Spivak argues that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow".

On the female subjugation by the patriarchy she further writes, Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is double effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant.

So the figure of woman, whether in social atmosphere or in literary discourse, is ultimately erased and Spivak reflects on this issue, Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman'

In this essay Spivak compares these 'gendered subaltern' to a medium like 'palimpsest', written over with the text of 'other' desires. Thus woman is formulated as the passive self, devoid of subjectivity. Same thing happens to the life of Rani .

But one point is very significant here as Rani who was gradually losing their identity as well as their subjectivity being turned into an object of patriarchal desire, start to regain their lost identity, when she steps out of her 'home'. Agency, Karnad suggests in Nagamandala like the agency in women's tales in general, is intimately connected with their being able to control their 'body' at their own pleasure, and to tell their own stories from their point-of-view.

Here through her extra-marital affairs, by regaining the power to control their 'body' at her own pleasure, Rani achieves the form of female 'agency', that was denied to her within the family. Thus Rani becomes the weaver, as well as the dilator of the plots of seduction. In many ways, Nagamandala is a feminist play, and within the rubric of folk-mythology it fuses the oft-used themes of fate, chastity, women's social role and the feminist perspectives of

a woman's desire of 'jouissance' within the matrix of her wedlock, and her aspiration for a sense of completeness within herself as well as within the splitted self of her counterpart.

Rani goes to Appanna's house with the hopes of living a quiet, domestic life that she has been conditioned to expect but the reality she faces is horrendous. On the first day of their marriage, Appanna locks her in the house and goes to visit his mistress. This goes on every day as Appanna's treatment of Rani is sub-human and he neglects her needs. She is kept isolated from society and due to the conditioning, she has undergone in her patriarchal set-up, she does not have the courage to question Appanna and better her condition. This stands to show that women in society lose the agency to question but when they violate the prescribed patriarchal norms, they are questioned immediately. The same is not the case for men who are free to do as they please.

We find that Karnad's play is full of symbolism that represents the unequal nature of our society and how the women feel. As Rani's emotional and sexual needs are not being met, she suppresses her urges and this suppression is meant to display how women are not able to claim their needs. She dreams of an eagle coming taking her far away from Appanna's world, which is another symbol of the repression of her desires. Her repressed desire to be loved and to be free gets expression in her fantasy where an eagle wants to take her away. Being a victim of extreme isolation and subjugation, her dreams function to fulfill her emotional needs.

As the story progresses, Rani comes across Kurudava who offers her a mystical root which if she feeds Appanna, will lead to him forgetting about his mistress and being completely devoted to her. Upon cooking the root, the potion takes a horrible red color and she disposes of it in a nearby ant hill where a Naga(snake) drinks it. The snake falls in love with Rani due to the potion and takes the form of Appanna at night, praises her long hair and talks a lot about her parents and listens to her attentively. He also fulfills Rani's sexual needs and soon she falls in love with the Appanna.

She however gets confused with the discrepancy in behaviour between the Appanna she sees at noon, who disregards her and leaves for his mistress and the Appanna at night, who treats her with care and is a sensual lover. However, she can't question her husband. She must obey whatever she was told by her husband or any other male. Here nobody permits Rani to question anybody Naga because of his deep passionate love for her and Appanna for his egoistic, male chauvinistic dominance. The women are seen as an object and not as a human being with an agency of her own.

Soon, Rani becomes pregnant which angers Appanna who calls her a harlot when she says that the child is his and she has done nothing wrong. She is taken to the village panchayat, where she must undergo a chastity test in order to prove her innocence. Nobody brings forth the question of Appanna being questioned for his misdeeds which again shows the two-faced notion of patriarchal justice that the panchayat was going to employ. Her test consists of her having to put her hand in a snake pit if deemed pure, the snake would not bite her and if guilty of adultery, she would be poisoned by the very snake.

The Naga goes into the pit and makes an umbrella with his hood over her head and moves over her shoulder to make a garland. In an ironic situation, her infidelity comes to her aid in proving that she is a faithful wife. The panchayat declares that Rani is not only equal to a righteous man but is beyond human beings and is, in fact, a Goddess. Appanna too 'realises' this and begs for forgiveness and attempts to reconcile with Rani. Thus, the anxious, scared woman finds within herself, courage and confidence and gains social respectability as she emerges victorious from the public trial, by the same public trial that was meant to condemn her.

She now has more control of her life and, more importantly, respect. There are multiple ends given by Karnad that talk of the fate of the snake. The most accepted is the case where the snake strangles himself to death upon seeing Rani reconcile with Appanna.

Through the play, we can see that women can only be on par with men through attaining a god-like status, but this is only the case if the status quo of the society is maintained. In Rani's case, society is still patriarchal and exploitative in nature. However, she gains respect due to events that unfold during the trial. Her material reality has not changed. Hence, Girish Karnad implies that as long as the existing material reality of women is not changed, where they are forced to be reliant on the closest patriarch in their life, they can only attain freedom and respect by becoming god-like.

Sigmund Freud defined normal human as only 'male', not female, and females "as weaker in their instincts than men". These assumed philosophies placed women second to men culturally.

The institutionalisation of patriarchal power become the accepted social hierarchy that obstruct the growth of women both in social and economic sectors. The male autocracy automated the thinking process of women too.

Again, in the literary texts, women were projected either docile or submissive and this devaluation of women led them to remain subordinated until it was challenged by the female authors and feminist activists. Feminism that started consciously and unconsciously as a prospect for the women empowerment was voiced not only by the female writers, but also by countless male writers.

Feminists perceived that equality only can be brought by giving equal status and rights to both the genders, not by controlling one over another. However, from the last few decades feminist critics have also brought the concern for ecology with the women liberation. This has given birth to ecological feminism or ecofeminism.

CONCLUSION:

The paper has reflected the consciousness of Girish Karnad towards the freedom of women from the clutches of patriarchal domination. His stories are no doubt based on ancient historical plot of India, but his literary arrows ever point out towards the post-modernist ethics.

The ecological consciousness of Karnad's women characters have encouraged the patriarchal world to realise the power and value of nature, as well as how to give value to the subalterns present in the social background. By using myth and drama, Karnad successfully presented his ideas of the supremacy of nature over human. The men of this play were intelligent, but failed to live a blissful life as indulged with the instincts of anger, lust, revenge, jealousy and greed. Charlene Spretnak termed this problem as 'androcentrism' (male-centeredness) rather than 'anthropocentrism' (human-centeredness).

He points out that "...the problem is androcentrism (male-centeredness) and not anthropocentrism (humancenteredness). Patriarchal society, in which the male definition of reality is normative and in which fear of women and nature set the stage for biocide, must be named as the problem. The term anthropocentrism deflects our attention from the real problem and hence the real solution to the ecological crisis we face. Ecofeminism becomes, then, of inestimable value."

Girish Karnad gives a morale that when dominance persists for a longer period of time, it automatically explodes. In this paper, both of the lady fronts challenged the patriarch dominance and choose to live on their own term, at the other hand the patriarch itself churned before the nature's supreme identity.

Developed on the platform of eco-consciousness and women centric issues, 'The fire and the Rain' beautifully depicts the Ecofeminist ideas. Without directing towards any ecological movements, this present play brings a close look to the spiritual consciousness of human with nature. By giving 'voice' to both of the women characters and to the 'nature', Karnad has established the position of the duo which is either harshly reinterpreted or severely ignored in this patriarchal dominance.

The power dominance created havoc and negativity in the lives of Paravasu, Raibhya and Yavakri. Vishakha and Nittilai led them free from the male oriented cultural norms and lived their life on their own desires with graciousness and righteousness. At the end both fire and rain regain life to the 'drought gripped land'. The Rain Lord showers his blessings through the regenerating 'rain'. Thus, a close look to the characters and their life sequences with the natural world in 'The Fire and the Rain' eventually induces Girish Karnad's approach towards Ecofeminism.

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