

PORTRAYAL OF MYTH AND ENTANGLEMENT OF WOMAN IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *NAGA-MANDALA*

M.Karthikeyani

I M.A English Literature

P.S.G.R Krishnammal College for Women

Coimbatore- 641004

Abstract

Girish Karnad is a contemporary Indian playwright, actor and movie director in Kannada language. He was conferred the prestigious of Jnanpith award (1999) and has been honoured with Padma Bhushan (1992). Girish Karnad wrote a play Nagamandala in 1987-88, based on two oral tales from Karnataka which he first heard from his friend, guru and hero A.K Ramanujan to whom Karnad dedicates this play. It was translated by the same author.

Nagamandala revolves around the female character Rani also referred as Queen who is hated by her husband Appanna and has an illicit relationship with a woman. Rani gets disappointed with the ways of her husband who comes only for lunch to the house. Later she becomes pregnant by a cobra (Naga) which comes in the form of her husband every night unknowingly her. Appanna suspects her for adultery and so Rani proves her chastity by performing the snake ordeal and wins the heart of her husband. In Nagamandala Karnad uses folktale and myth to reveal the complexity of human relationship. It portrays the intimate relationship between a man and a woman and the social norms prevailing in Indian society. This paper is an endeavour to portray the myth and tradition in the play and analyzes the character of Rani who is a typical Indian woman, ready to suffer at the hands of her husband with an empty hope that her husband will return to her in the end.

The concern of the paper is to explore the myth theories and the difficulties of women in patriarchal society. Girish Raganath Karnad is a contemporary Indian playwright, actor and movie director in Kannada language. He is among the seven recipients of Jnanpith Award for Kannada, the highest literary honour conferred on an Indian. Girish Karnad wrote a play titled *Naga-mandala* in 1987-1988. This is based on two oral Kannada tales ("*A Story and Song*" and "*The Serpent Lover*"), which he had heard from his mentor, friend and philologist A.K Ramanujan to whom Karnad also dedicated this play. In the 'Author's Introduction', Karnad points out how this oral tale functions in the family:

"The older women in the family narrate these oral tales especially when children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. The adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore these tales, though directed to children, often serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family."

Rani, a young girl, who was the queen of her long tresses, married a man called Appanna. Her tresses got entangled in her anklets and similarly her life got entangled in the hands of her husband because he didn't show love to Rani but showered his visit to the concubine's house, which was proof of his illicit relationship. Later Rani with

the acquaintance of Kurudavva got a magical root in order to give to her husband and to have a good life. But unfortunately the cobra drinks the aphrodisiac root paste which is mixed in the curry and falls in love with Rani. Naga (cobra) visits Rani's house every night in the disguise of Appanna and so she becomes pregnant which paved way for her husband's suspecting her of having committed adultery. Finally Rani proved her chastity by performing "Snake ordeal" which is one among the myths prevailing in that village to prove a woman's purity and chastity.

Myth is a certain type of story in which some of the chief characters are Gods and other beings larger in power than humanity and stories of unascertainable origin helping to explain religious beliefs. The following are the four theories of myth and its application in the play. There are Four Theories of Myth. They are:

The Rational Myth Theory

The Functional Myth Theory

The Structural Myth Theory

The Psychological Myth Theory

The Rational Myth Theory states that myths were made to better understand of natural events and forces that occurred in the everyday lives of people.

There is a myth in the village that after the lamps are put out, the flames join together in a remote area and gossip about their own houses and masters. The dramatist or the man who comes in the prologue see and listen to the talking of the flames. This shows the occurrence of natural events in that village.

The Functional Myth Theory consists of morality and social behaviour and consequences of not having it.

The woman who comes in the prologue never said the story to anyone or sang any song, so it escaped from her and took a form of woman and saree which resulted in the family feud of suspicion on the part of her husband. This shows the consequences of not having the social behaviour of telling story to others.

The Structural Myth Theory is the myth based on human emotions and mind which shows its two sides- the good and the bad.

Naga's visit to Rani's house consoled her from isolation and mental distress and his way of speaking (good mind) gave her solace from her agony and anguish. Though Naga knows that Rani is not his wife, he indulges in physical contact (bad mind). Rani becomes pregnant which earned her the name of a whore.

The Psychological Myth Theory states how myths are based on human emotions and that they come from human subconscious mind as archetypes.

Rani's isolation leads her to reveries in which she questions Appanna and gets answer from an eagle. There she craves for parental affection. This shows the universal feeling for a child and Rani's quest for companionship from her subconscious mind.

The significant myth in *Naga-mandala* is "Snake ordeal" and "Holding red hot iron". When Rani is brought before the elders for chastity test she chooses snake ordeal to prove her chastity. She plunges her hand into the ant-hill and pulls out the cobra and says, "Since coming to this village, I have by this hand, only my husband and this cobra. If I lie, let this cobra bite me" (39). Holding red hot iron is another myth followed in that village. Myth is an effective tool which Karnad dexterously uses to eradicate the socio cultural events of preventing women from freedom in male dominated society.

Gender is one of the reasons that restrain a woman from achieving her identity and freedom in patriarchal society. The protagonist of the story Rani suffers due to social conditions and traditions. She is brought up in a conservative society which believes that a wife has to serve her husband howsoever depraved he may be. Karnad showed Rani's wedded life as not a bond but as bondage. Rani is told on the very first day she enters her husband's house that he will come only once in a day for lunch and she has to keep his lunch ready. He said that, "Well, then, I'll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go" (6). Thus Rani is left alone and this was

routine in her life. This shows Rani's imprisonment in her own house. When she fumbles to reveal her woeful state, he snubs her by remarking, "Look I don't like idle chatter" (7). This results in the woman's position of being under the control of her husband.

Simone de Beauvoir, the twentieth-century feminist critic, agrees with the view that, "in patriarchy the young girl does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature but; by society yet she does repudiate it completely. Thus, she is 'divided against herself'". The distress of a woman in a patriarchal society in which a man enjoys privileges is contrasted with that of a woman who has to be content, with only a few left for her. The husband is the one who torments and deserts his wife for another woman. Appanna regularly goes to the concubine's house but he doesn't have the guilty conscience; instead he wants Rani to obey him as a dumb domestic animal.

When Rani becomes pregnant, Appanna suspects her of committing adultery and beats her. He said, "I swear to you I am not my father's son, if I don't abort that bastard! Smash into dust right now" (Drags her into the street) (32). Karnad expressed the Indian mind set of a husband in the patriarchal society, wherein an Indian husband can enjoy any liberty but his wife has no right to cross the threshold of her house. Rani knows that Appanna goes to the concubine's house, but she dares not to pose questions on him because of fear and the tradition of respecting the husband. Rani is a typical Indian woman who complies with the desires and needs of her husband, adjusting his tyranny without out any objection, nonplussed or perplexed by his strange behaviour; on the whole she is a bird without wings and has been caged in her house. This play showcases the agony and anguish experienced by Rani which stands as paradox for the predicament of a young girl trapped in the net of the male dominated society.

Karnad makes an extensive use of myths to frame the plots in his play and also skillfully weaves the Psychological, Social and Cultural understanding afforded by them. The play *Naga-Mandala* combines male chauvinism, oppression of women, the great injustice done to them by patriarchal hegemony. Karnad also depicts the real life situation prevalent in a village and Rani's life is a metaphor for Indian women who face their husband as a stranger during day and as a lover during night. Myths and folk tales used not only frame the plot but also focus on the human psychology and the relationship that exists between them.

WORKS CITED

Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. trans.ed H.M.Parshley, 1st pub. in French as *Le Deuxieme Sex* in 1949 (London: Vintage, 1953) 330.

The Plays of Girish Karnad, Study in Myth and Gender by Abhishek Kosta. Atlantic Publishers. (Nice Printing Press: U.P). 2010.

Girish Karnad, "Authors Introduction", *Three plays: Naga-Mandala; Hayavadana; Tughlaq* 1stpub.1994 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) 22.