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REALITY THAT HAS TO BE SEEN IN SO CALLED MYTHOLOGICAL PLAY
NAGAMANDALA BY GIRISH KARNAD

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad of is an eminent Anglo-Indian playwright of Post-Independence era. Besides, being a prolific playwright, his multidimensional role has rendered his versatile genius into other creative fields – as an eminent actor, Television artist, producer, script – writer and director. Based on his serious explorations of folklore, mythology and history, the concept of his plays reflect the issues and provocation of contemporary life, and endeavour to falsify a link between the past and the present. The creative intellectual that he is, he obviously views the subjects of his plays from his own panorama, constructs them in the crucible of his own mind's eye and personal experiences, and employs them as a medium to imply his own-independent and original- feelings, thoughts and interpretations. It is obvious that the tradition of Indo-English drama earned minimum critical attention. K.R.S. Iyengar states that the Indo-English drama is 'neither rich in quality nor on the whole is of high quality'. The use of folk elements is one of the reasons behind Karnad's victory as a playwright. Folk art originated in the areas where most of the people could not read and write. The Alpha of this form can be accredited to the intellectual limitations of the primitive onlookers that found certain elements like supernatural fantasy, myth and legends, the distorted beliefs associated with animals, and nature to be more absorbing. His play puts forward the concepts of virtue through the use of folk lores, myth and historical fable. The play "*Nagamandala*" has no mythical element in it. Rani is not really a goddess but she was made goddess by her second husband.

INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is renowned as one of the three notable Indian Dramatist of present day writing in English, the others being Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sirkar. Both Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sirkar concern themselves with middle class life and its troubles. On the other hand Girish Karnad deals with the prosperity of Indian folklore and myth which he uses to treat contemporary problems in a dramatic manner. He has written a number of plays dealing with various aspects of contemporary Indian society and Indian culture. He has extensively used material from Indian mythology, folklore and ancient Indian theatrical examples. Karnad's plays are written in English, in which he dreamt of earning international literary fame as a poet, nor his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannada. Initially, his command on Kannada was very poor that he often failed to distinguish between short and long vowels (laghu and deerga). When Karnad started writing plays, Kannada literature was highly influenced by the renaissance in Western literature. His plays include Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Yayati, Naga Mandala, Tale-Danda and The Fire and the

Rain. His plays effectively weave the contemporary context in their structure. The play was first staged at the University Theatre at Chicago. It is the story of an extraordinary beautiful young girl Rani.

The entire plot can be interpreted as a myth invented by Rani. As a newly married wife she must have had dreams and expectations about her marital life. When he mistreats her she is left to dream up an unreal husband who is everything her husband is not. Though she is puzzled by the binaries in her husband's character triggered with the change of hours, still she is not ready to break her illusion since it is more colourful than the hard reality. Myths and legends are rooted in the village psyche so deep that at times they substitute the reality. With the final reunion with her husband the imagined up husband can no longer exist. Therefore Naga turns up dead in her hair.

DESCRIPTION

In *Nagamandala*, the main concept is female oriented. The most important difference is that in *Nagamandala* individuals are subservient to society into family. The play begins with two couples Appanna and Rani. Appanna married Rani and took her to his home. She was forced to be isolated. He never gave his attention to her. Rani is restricted to question him. Whatever she attempts to ask, his only reply was-

“Appanna. Look, I don't like idle chatter

Don't question me. Do as you are

Told. I'll be back tomorrow for lunch”(*Nagamandala* 7).

Appanna is portrayed as cruel aggressive and inconsiderate and totally indifferent towards his wife. He neglects his duty as a husband and keeps his wife emotionally starved. Rani's isolation rooted to Kurudava's contact. Kurudava gave her a magical root and asked her to mix in Appanna's food. She got frightened when the curry's colour turned blood red. She poured it into the ant-hill. On the one hand, the real Appanna hates her. On the other hand, Nagaresembles in the form of Appanna and loves her intensely. One day she becomes pregnant and Appanna accuses her in front of the village people. The Panchayat had decided to test her chastity. They gave her two options either to hold the hot iron rod or lift the cobra from the ant-hill. The disguised Appanna had already insisted her to take the snake from the ant hill. So that he can help her in proving her chastity. She is now the wife of two husbands. She then decided to take out the snake from the ant-hill.

“Rani. This Cobra is the second(suddenly she becomes eloquent, words come torrentially). Yes, I have held only two- my husband and this Cobra. I have not touched any other of the male sex, nor have I allowed any male to touch me. If I am telling a lie, let this Cobra bite me to death”. (*Nagamandala* 66).

The Cobra slides up her shoulders, spreads its hoods over her head, sways it gently and hangs like a garland around her neck and then slips back into ant-hill. Rani is lustily cheered by the public. Unknowing the forge play of Naga people accepted as Goddess. In fact, Naga and Appanna should be regarded as the two faces of the same person. That is why Karnad points out how in the traditional society a husband exploits double standards by behaving indifferent during the day and at night. Thus, by using a folktale, the playwright exposes the hypocrisy of the conventional society.

“Elder I. Its miracle

Elder II. She is not a woman; she is a Goddess

Elder III. She is indeed a Goddess”. (*Nagamandala* 66).

Though what she said was truth she was carrying a baby snake in her womb. She was touched by only one man but that was disguised Appanna and not her husband. So, there is no chastity in her and women without chastity cannot be called as Goddess. But the snake Appanna made her a Goddess among the people. Climax of this play is portrayed as she lives with both the snake and Appanna.

In *Ramayana*, when Sita was five months pregnant, she had also undergone the same test for chastity. It is one of the most annoying events in Ramayana. Sri Rama always revealed his great eagerness in getting back his devoted wife Sita at the earliest. At no point in time, till his meeting with Sita after the death of Ravana, he was depicted expressing his desire to give up Sita as she was residing in Ravana's house.

It is the Dhobi who suggested, that Sita needs to go through Agni Pareeksha to join Rama. Lord Sri Rama was well aware of the society and the people who would be in Kalyuga also. That is why, he just produced himself as a common man and he gave a lesson to the people by taking Agni Pareeksha of Sita. After being proved her chastity she addressed the earth, "Take me back into your womb" and vanished. This is how she proved her chastity.

Girish Karnad in his play treats Rani as a representative of Indian feminineness. Indian mythology is complete with sampling of women who had to prove their devotion to husband in front of a patriarchic society. In *Ramayana*, Sita had to undergo the fire-ordeal to prove her innocence. She had been blamed of 'sleeping in another man's house'. When she returns unharmed she is accepted by Rama and Society. Same happens to Rani. She had to risk a snake bite to prove her chastity. But in this case, she is not meant to be pure since the snake did not bite her. The concept of mythology gets vanished here. No Goddess can possess two husbands. Chastity is a sexual conduct of a person that is deemed exemplary and righteous according to the moral standards and strategy of their culture, civilization or religion. The term has become closely connected with sexual abstinence, especially before marriage and outside marriage. Women who lost her chaste cannot be a goddess definitely.

It should be noted that even while discussing mythology and using it as a device in his plays Karnad does not promote them just like that. His play exists as a continuation of the tradition as well as a critique of it. To quote him 'The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values'.

What Karnad meant is that though he uses the mode of folk theatre and myths he uses them in the way that the very devices of them enables the onlooker to have a multi-layered hallucination which indulge for an examination of age. In *Nagamandala*, Karnad does not use mythological devices to view contemporary issues; he rather examines universal human conditions. Like *Waiting for Godot*, the play is not absurd-it has connected speech and natural progression of the story by fusing myth and reality Karnad conceives a play which is fantastical and real at the same time.

This consequence of blending of reality and fantasy is further uplifted by theatrical techniques. By this blending of myth and reality dramatist guides the spectator to question old age customs and beliefs. Dramatist himself offers no opinion; he has already expressed his dilemma in the prologue itself.

Cultural policy works on the principle of shared world vision. It exploits information that persists in one culture and uses it to the finest of its ability. By using suitable cultural codes a lot of decoding is made easier for the readers. It throws light on the beliefs and superstitions that exists in that exacting culture. For instance, in that culture the snake is regarded as a holy species. It is also feared by many and there is a saying that if one talks of the snake, the snake tends to appear instantaneously. The snake mainly represents rebirth, death and mortality, due to its casting of its own skin and being symbolically "reborn".

The best culture code would be the snake ordeal that Rani performs in order to prove herself not guilty. Traditionally, in that culture it is believed that to prove oneself not guilty one would either have to hold red hot bars of iron in the hand and plead innocence or perform the snake ordeal. It is a belief in that society that if that person has said the truth then the snake would bless the person, if not, it would bite the person to death. Logically, snake does not know who is good and who is bad. Anyone who tries to touch the snake will be harmed. Practically it is not possible to test the chastity of women through snake, but Karnad played an illusionary technique over it.

CONCLUSION

The present day study makes an attempt to critically examine the way Karnad makes use of myth and fantasy in his play. After examining the play in both mythical and fantastical point of view, it attempts to draw certain conclusions. His play serves as a critique on the vices, drawbacks and limitations of contemporary Indian society. His play portrays certain existential themes like the illusionary love, the isolation, difficulty of communication, test for chastity etc. The complex psychological and emotional world of Rani in *Nagamandala* reveals the problem of women in the patriarchy. Thus, the playwright exposes the double standards of Indian patriarchal society in which the man irrespective of his deficiencies gets recognized as a significant entity, while the woman is judged in respect of her chastity and is penalized wrongly in the patriarchal society.

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