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USE OF MYTH AND FOLK IN GIRISH KARNAD'S "NAGAMANDALA"

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ABSTRACT

Myth and folktales have always been a part of human civilization. Many prominent playwrights and writers have taken account of these myths and introduced us to this genre. One such playwright is Girish Karnad, who through his play *NagaMandala* has introduced us to this form of literature. *Naga-Mandala* is Karnad's third play based on two oral tales he heard from A.K.Ramanujan. He has written all his plays in his native language Kannada. Most of his works have been translated into English language and are widely read. This play deals with the condition of women Indian social community in general and in particular, the life of Rani, the devoted Hindu wife, who is suffering because of social customs and traditions.

Keywords: Supernatural humans, superstition, myth, patriarchal society

Myth is a genre consisting of stories that plays a fundamental role in a society. The main characters are usually supernatural humans. The term 'myth' is generally used to imply a story that is imaginary. Alan Dundes defines myths as: "Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past." Folklore includes the oral traditions of any society such as tales and jokes. It is a collection of fictional tales about humans or animals. Superstition and unfounded beliefs are important elements of folklore tradition.

Girish Karnad was one of the most renowned dramatists in modern English drama. His plays are rich in making use of myths and folklore. Through his plays, he focuses on the life of people of the ground level. He worked as an actor, director and screenwriter in Hindi and Kannada cinema. For his great contribution to Indian literature, he was honoured with Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour convened in India. R.K. Dhawan says: "Girish Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. He has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre. He has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English, and has played leading roles as an actor in Hindi and Kannada art films, commercial movies and television serials. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture."

The themes of his plays are modern and deal with contemporary issues of society: condition of women in Hindu society, gender discrimination, patriarchal society, sex, violence, greed. His characters highlight the implicit irony in human existence. He chooses appropriate words that reveal both character and situation.

NagaMandala, a play written by Girish Karnad, exposes the exploitation of women in Indian society. The plot is set in rural background and it revolves around the life of a newly married couple: Rani and Appanna. Rani is presented as a submissive woman and she is always kept isolated from the society. Appanna makes her life a complete hell. He is bewitched to a concubine and fails to see the beauty of her wife. On the other hand, Rani lives as a servant in her own house. She obeys all the commands of her husband. She is the image of sincerity and is deeply in love with her tyrant husband. She makes efforts to please her husband but all her efforts go in vain. Kurudava gives her love roots to help her get back the love of her husband. She remarks: "Go in. Start grinding it. Make a tasty curry. Make a paste in it. Let him taste a spoonful and he will be your slave."

The element of folklore and myth is introduced when Rani gets the love roots from Kurudava and mixes it in the curry. After she becomes unsuccessful in her first attempt, she mixes the second root and finds that the curry has turned blood-red. She pours the curry at the ant hills where the King Cobra named Naga licks it and falls in love with Rani. This is the turning point in Rani's life. Naga transforms himself into a human being and goes to Rani's house through the drain in the bathroom. This is a symbolic representation of union of two sexual organs. He assumes the shape of Appanna and enters into Rani's bedroom. Naga is passionately in love with Rani and he has a terrible fight with the dog in order to prove his love. The love of Naga transforms Rani completely.

In Indian mythology, a woman is considered as a gift of the land and when the land is in danger a snake comes to her help. There are many stories based on snakes in Hindu mythology. These creatures are believed to have power to assume human shape according to their will. "In our Hindu mythology, the Naga represents several images. In South India, many houses have their own shrine which is often a grove reserved for snakes, consisting of trees, festooned with creepers, situated in the corner of the garden."

Naga influences Rani to have sexual intercourse for which she is initially reluctant. Naga gives her a long speech on intercourse: "Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, tattlers, sharks, swallows-even the goose! The female begins to smell like the wet earth. And stung by her smell, the King Cobra starts searching for his Queen. The tiger bellows for his mate....It is there and there and there, everywhere." Thus he explains to her that sex is not a sinful act, it is natural and enjoyable. Rani submits herself to Naga and becomes mad for him. She starts feeling secure in the company of Naga. She becomes pregnant with the child of Naga due to which Appanna accuses her of adultery. To prove her innocence, her husband and all the villagers make her take an oath by holding a red-hot iron rod. Naga comes to her rescue, slides up her shoulder and spread its hood like an umbrella over her head.

Rani is proved innocent and the villagers start considering her as a goddess and Appanna is left with nothing but just to compromise with the situation. According to Hindu tradition, a man whose wife is an adulteress is a cursed man. Men always tend to control lives of women under the influence of these orthodox traditions. Though Appanna is also betraying his wife by having relationships with a concubine but he does not find it wrong. Karnad is the only Indian writer who has treated adultery normal and treated adulterous woman kind-heartedly. Adultery is considered a blunder in Indian society. Whatever be the reason behind this blunder, a woman is always a culprit. No one blames a man. The whole village and Appanna go against Rani, only Naga comes to her rescue. A woman who is initially treated as a culprit suddenly becomes a goddess for the villagers. She proves her chastity with the support of her lover Naga. The indifferent husband Appanna becomes helpless and responds: "What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I sinned so much that even nature should laugh at me? ... Let any miracle declare her a Goddess. But I know!"

Thus, in the play Naga-Mandala, socio-cultural evils have been presented with the tinge of mythological elements. The play is a glimpse of Indian conservative society where a woman is controlled by the will of a man. On the other hand, when viewed from the mythological point of view, the cobra has given Rani liberty that helps her to express herself physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually.

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