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Folklore, Tradition, and Woman's Virtue in Girish Karnad's *Naga Mandala*

Dr. Baljeet
Assistant Professor
K.D.R.T. S. PG College, Balendrapuri Dumari Khas, Gorakhpur

ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad is a front-rank dramatist in Indian English literature. Literature is a picture of society drawn on a large canvas by persons of higher sensibilities to show people their feelings and foibles and inspire them to take remedial steps. He has written several plays dealing with contemporary Indian society and culture. He has extensively used material from Indian mythology folklore and ancient Indian theatrical examples. In the play, the playwright raises a question on the concept of chastity and tradition, which is such a value invented by patriarchal culture and accepted by women. It is one of the most powerful cultures that have enslaved women for ages since the dawn of patriarchy, the *Ramayana* in which Sita undergoes the fire to prove her chastity to Rama. Every mother along with the father enslaves her daughter to patriarchy by teaching them verbally and non-verbally which brings an unbearable social stigma. *Naga Mandala* uses Tradition and folktale to reveal the complexity of human relationships. It portrays the intimacy between a man and a woman and the social norms prevailing in Indian – society. This paper is an endeavour to explore the Tradition and Folklore and woman's chastity in the play and analyse the character of Rani, a typical Indian woman.

Keywords: Mythology, Chastity, Tradition, Hallucinations, Prohibitions, Ostracism, Patriarchal, Psychological Suffering.

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INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is a contemporary Indian playwright actor and movie director in Kannada Language. He has written several plays dealing with various aspects of contemporary Indian society and culture. He has extensively used material from Indian mythology folklore and ancient Indian theatrical examples. He developed an interest in the film media and accepted quite a few roles in Hindi films. His plays include *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *yayati*, *Naga-*

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Mandlala, *Tale-Danda*, and *The Fire and the Rain*. His plays effectively weave the contemporary context in their structure. Karnad wrote a play *Naga-Mandala* 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 dedicated this play. It was translated by the same author. Karnad was bestowed the prestigious Jnanpith award (1999) and has been honoured with Padma Bhushan (1992)

Literature is a picture of society drawn on a large canvas by persons of higher sensibilities to show people their feelings and foibles and also to inspire them to take remedial steps. *Naga-Mandala* is the story of a young girl Rani (queen) newly married Appanna and a gradual understanding of the role, function, and responsibilities of the institution of marriage. Rani also suffers due to social conditions and tradition. She is brought up in a conservative society, which believes that a wife has to serve her husband however depraved he may be, and that marriage is not a bond but a bondage. Like Jean Anouilh, Girish Karnad makes use of myths and folk forms in his plays to expel social and Cultural evils.

He Says:

The Energy of folk thane comes from
the fact that although it seems in
upheld traditional values, it also the
means of questioning these values, of
making theme literary stand on their head. (*The Plays of Girish Karnad*, 251)

In the play, the playwright raises a question on the concept of chastity and tradition, which is such a value invented by patriarchal culture and accepted by women. It is one of the most powerful cultures that have enslaved women for ages since the dawn of patriarchy, the Ramayana in which Sita undergoes the fire to prove her chastity to Rama Every mother along with the father enslaves her daughter to patriarchy by teaching them verbally and non-verbally which brings an unbearable social stigma. In the play, Rani is told on the very day she enters her husband's house that he will come only once a day for lunch and she has to keep his lunch ready. He said "Well, then, I'll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my Lunch ready, I shall eat and go", she is thus left to languish in a solitary cell and to slave for her husband. When she tries to speak to Appanna about her woeful state he snubs her" Look I don't like idle chatter.



Do as you are told, you understand. I'll be back tomorrow for lunch. " (6-7) Loneliness coupled with the apathetic attitude of her husband tells heavily upon her mind.

She starts having hallucinations and dreams of her parents who in contrast were loving and caring. She moans "Oh mother! 'Father' in her sleep. She is so much upset mentally that she talks to herself even while cooking food" (6) Then Rani's parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and care's her. At night she sleeps between them so she is not frightened anymore. "Don't worry they promise her, we won't let you go away against ever!" Her Shattered dreams visit her to make her miserable So Rani asks him where, are you taking me?" and The Eagle answers, 'Beyond the seven seas and seven isles" On the seventh island is a magic garden. And in the Garden stands a tree of emeralds. Under that tree your parents wait for you.' the gap between her dream and the present state torments her.

She is a prisoner within the four walls of her house, literally clapped under lock and Key-But the Hindu customs and beliefs force her to submit herself to the tyrannies inflicted by her So-called husband. A wife is not to cross the threshold of her house, the Lakshman Rekha of social inhibitions and prohibitions, and if she does on the pain of social ostracism. Everybody knows that Appanna goes to a concubine but none dares ask him to desist from going there and Hindu wives have no voice in anything. She is exhorted to follow the dictates of her husband. She is further told that Lucky is the wife whose dead body is carried to the pyre by her husband, implying that she has to live and die in her husband's house irrespective of the treatment she receives from her husband and in-laws. Rani suffers due to social conditions and traditions. She bears all the sufferings without speaking a word of revolt.

Appanna main male character of the play, has nobody to take care of him. His parents are already dead. He has money to spend and spare. It is natural for an unguided youth to be wayward more so in a society in which women and available for pay. Appanna therefore starts going. To a concubine who has held him fast in her trap. The question of whether Appanna is guilty or the society confronts the readers. Even Today Indian society does not take responsibility for unguided or misguided youth. Naturally, such youth become drug addicts adulterers, or criminals. It is not the society worth the name which leaves the youth to their care. Bernard Shaw *Candida* has a case in point. Candida saves the boy who has become a drug addict because he was neglected by his family if Appanna had met Candida he would not have strayed from the path of righteousness Appanna is not responsible for his lapses because there



is none to guide him. In Indian society, people look for a rich boy with a status for the match of their daughters and marry them away without the consent of the bride and bridegroom - Such marriage results in the laceration of women many a time it so happens that the rich boy is found poor in Morality. Rani is a victim of such a concept. Bernard Shaw has dealt with such a problem in his play *Arms and the Man* in which the young woman, Raina, rejects her betrothed fiancé who is selected by her parents on the considerations of his riches and status, to marry her.

The chocolate cream soldier, who is a fugitive, is pursued by the enemy and forms with hunger. She chooses him because she has found him a better man: The Direct Message that Shaw gives is that the character of a man should be the primary consideration not his wealth and status in matrimonial matters. But Indian society is too orthodox and reactionary to accept such a message. That is the main cause of Rani's suffering. Rani would have gone beyond Seven Seas and Seven Isles if she had been married to a man with Moral values.

One day Kurudavva and her son Kappanna come to her. She talks to Rani and she learns that Appanna still visits his concubine though he has a beautiful wife. So she gives Rani a piece of aphrodisiac root and instructs her to grind the root and mix it in Appanna's food thus, the problem will be solved. When Appanna comes Kurudavva and Kappanna express her wish to talk to Rani. He says: She won't take to anyone. And no need talk to her "(14) It is clear that Appanna does not want Rani to come into contact with other people and to know more. While he enjoys, extramarital sex. This Solitary confinement of Rani by Appanna in the house symbolizes the chastity felt Middle Ages. Rani mixes the paste of the aphrodisiac root in the curry. As the curry turns red she throws it on the anthill in front of her house. A King cobra, called Naga, consumes the aphrodisiac Paste and falls in love with Rani. He assumes the form of Appanna and visits Rani at Night. He takes pity on Rani for her pathetic condition and shows parental affection for her. All her pent-up sorrow bursts out.

Rani cannot comprehend the situation since Appanna cannot be so affectionate and compassionate. Yet she willingly suspends her disbelief and enjoys the concern and affection of Naga who is in the guise of Appanna. She feels happy and secure in his. Company. She becomes bold enough to talk to him and falls asleep in his embrace. Naga is happy about his success. Appanna comes in the morning the next day. He unlocks the door and steps in, Rani, comes out running and laughing, obviously thinking that hardship has ended as Appanna

changed for the better. But she learns that she is wrong. She says “But when did you go away. I am -- [freezes when she sees the expression of distastes on his face” (21) thus She becomes frigid again. As usual, after lunch, Appanna leaves. It gets dark. Naga comes out of the anthill and fights with the dog. He kills the dog to stop the disturbance to Rani’s sleep. But he gets injured in that fight. Then he enters the house through the drain and assumes the form of Appanna. He sees Rani, Smiles, and sits on her bed. She is not sure whether she is dreaming. The gentleness and warmth of Naga (Appanna to her) is incomprehensible to her. Then Naga assures her that what she sees is real, not a figment of her imagination. She says" You talk so nicely at night. but during the day only have to open my mouth and you hiss Like Stupid snake?" (22). She beds sorrowful and says that she can say nothing if he spins riddles like this Naga knows that his identity will be revealed unless he suppresses her reason and intuition by ringing patriarchal authority. Naga: I am afraid "that is how it is going to be like! that during the day like that at night Don't ask me why? Rani: I won't." (23)This shows how the men of patriarchal culture suppress the intellect of women and how their ignorance gives men the freedom of doing whatever they like. Thus male chauvinists can prove that women are foolish and ignorant. This injection of Naga is so powerful that Rani does not know the real Identity of Naga until Appanna sleeps with her.

Rani moves into Naga's Arms as a child meaning he invites her to Sleep in his lap she sees wounds on his cheeks and so she brings the mirror box for ointment. She sees an image of a cobra instead of her husband in the mirror and screams with fright. She says by miming that she has seen a cobra in the mirror. Then she touches his wounds and finds his blood peculiarly cold. Rani in her happiness forgets everything. She does not realize, what Naga is doing to her until he completes lovemaking at once she goes to the corner away from him and starts weeping. She feels that sex is mean and sinful. Naga is astonished at her erotic ignorance. He takes her and explains to her that sex is natural and enjoyable she should not ask why his behaviour at night is different from that during the day. She cannot suspect Naga's identity in the bed because Appanna has never made love to her. Naga functions as a male sex surrogate incurring Rani of frigidity. Rani starts enjoying erotic pleasure. After five months one day, she says that she is happy because she has concrete evidence that her happiness is not a fantasy, I have definite evidence to prove I was not fantasizing. Naga: what evidence? Rani. I am pregnant?" Naga is not happy because her pregnancy can reveal his identity. He does not know



what to do. He just asks her to keep it secret from him as long as possible. She must have thought that the man was a mystery. The next day, Appanna discovers that Rani is pregnant since he has never slept with her he knows that. She has committed adultery. This infuriates him and he pushes Kicks and curses her." Aren't you ashamed admit It you harlot ?locked you in And yet you mangier to find a loves" tell me who did you go to with your sari off ? Rani? Swear to you I haven't done anything wrong" (33) Appanna does not accept her innocence. He drags her out and tries to throw a huge stone at her to smash her illegitimate child to be born. At the moment the cobra (Naga). Comes out and hisses loudly. Appanna throws the stone at the snake which escapes into the anthill. Rani is a simple innocent and ignorant girl. She has grown physically. But not mature mentally.

Rani is typical of deserted wives of Indians who craves for love of men and in the intensity of their passion they accept any men that come into their lives. In most cases, people exploit Such women for physical pleasure, but Rani is lucky to have a sincere lover. But Indian ethics does not permit a woman to have extra-marital relations even if the woman is a deserted wife Naturally Rani is shocked when she realise that she has copulated with a man other than her wedded husband. The author puts her case plainly- "No two men love alike and that night of the village court, when her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realise it was someone new? Even if she hadn't known must have spread its hood out at her. Don't you think she must have cried out in anguish to Know the answer" She is not a whore that should accept the desecration of marriage bonds?

Say that the trial by the elders cannot be avoided and he advises her to take the snake's order. He assures her that everything will be all right. Naga says:

don't worry, your husband will
Become your slave tomorrow
you will get all you have ever
Wanted. (35)

When she is brought before the Elders she is asked to hold a red hot iron bar in her hand to prove her chastity. The Naga reliving her predicament, advises her to hold the King Cobra instead of viewing it as an equally convincing broad the elders agree to her proposal on the appointed day, "She plunges her hand in the ant-hill and pulls out the cobra. The Cobra slides up her shoulder and spreads its hand like an umbrella over her head the round gaps. The cobra



says its hood gently for a while, then becomes docile and moves over her shoulder like a garland." (36) The crowd is enchanted by this miracle and elevates Rani to the position of Goddess – the crowd surges forward to prostrate itself before her.

Appanna is admonished " Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate....." (40) The Elder II exhorted him "Spend the rest of your life in her service, you need merit in ten past lives to be chosen for such holy duty" (39) Thus Rani becomes a goddess too high to be the companion even of her husband. The snake is also disconcerted to see his beloved lying in the arms of some other man. It thinks it should kill the woman for she gets entangled in infidelity, But he finds that cannot kill him in her tresses and dies Rani persuades Appanna to agree to cremate the cobras according to the rite. She also makes Appanna agree to her, proposal that her son should perform the rituals every year on this day to commemorate the death of the cobra.

The question that arises before the Indian readers is whether Rani is a chaste woman despite getting a child from the lover-snake. The religious bigots will condemn her as depraved Even Ahilya was an outcast for a similar offence. She considers herself chaste and pure because she had no hand in it and was not aware of her fraud being done on her, but this Ahilya gets do not Rama to free her from self-reproach and Social Stigma. Hardy has tackled this question judiciously in his Novel "Tess"! Tess becomes a victim of the prurient employers the world changes overnight for her. But this is achieved after upsetting the male egoism and exaggerated sense of power over women. The play combines male chauvinism oppression of women, the great injustice of patriarchal society the male assumption of keeping full control over the body, sexuality, and virtue of women through the institution of family, and values like chastity one mocked in the play. The play mocks at the question and questions the unjust values of our patriarchal society The myth and folk tales used not only from the plot but also focus on human Psychology and the relationship that exists between them. The play reflects the Indian Social milieu and the role of Individual characters or groups of characters in play for individual or social development.

Naga-Mandala uses Tradition and folktale to reveal the complexity of human relationships. It portrays the intimacy between a man and a woman and the social norms prevailing in Indian - society. This paper is an endeavour to explore the Tradition and Folklore and woman's chastity in the play and analyse the character of Rani, a typical Indian woman! Ready to suffer at the

hands of her husband with an employ hope that her husband will return her in the end An Indian Hamlet would say "suffering thy name is woman". But the suffering does not break them. The accept the challenges and keep on fighting till the end.

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". (22) 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 guilt. Conscience, instead he wants Rani to obey him as a dumb domestic animal.

The concept of chastity is gender-based and women care more for chastity than men. In Ben Jonson's Valpone there is an ancient similar to that in Naga - Mandala Carvion has a very beautiful wife called Celia He locks her in when he goes out when he sends her to sleep with Valpone To inherit his property, Celia refuses to do so. This shows that the concept of chastity proves to be more powerful than the strongest lock. Kanads *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* prove that chastity is a myth if chastity is spiritual or psychological. Roni has not lost it though she sleeps with Naga before the judgement day. In *Haayavadana* Padmini enjoys marital life with Devadatta who gets Kapila's body after the trans potion of the heads. In addition, chastity is a patriarchal concept that has been used to oppress and weaken women for ages. " Karnad has used, folklore and Indian Tradition to solve the socio-political and Psychological Problems of Indian society. We want to explore how Karnad has used the past for the Present and turned it for the benefit of the future.

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