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### A Critique of Naga-Mandala as a Feminist Play

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#### Abstract

Girish Karnad is one of the renowned bilingual playwrights of India who was also an actor, a director and an activist. His play Naga-Mandala is a blend of feminist and patriarchal elements. The play is based on one of the folk-tales in Indian mythologies. The protagonist, Rani, a meek and submissive character suffers a lot in the hands of her husband. Her husband enjoys the patriarchal freedom to the extent of its height. Feminism throws light on the secondary positions and treatment given to women in society, in general. Patriarchy asserts dominance of the males over females in almost every sphere of life. The play focusses on the marital relationship between the husband and the wife. It questions the licentiousness of the male protagonist in the play. In contrast it is more about the rights of a wife in her conjugal life. His name itself has been interpreted as 'any man' and her 'princess' in meaning.

**Keywords:** Naga-mandala, feminism, feminist movement

#### Introduction

Indo-Anglian literature flourished in the hands of Indian writers during 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indian sensibility, culture and mythology started to appear on the literary scene in this way. Though English was taught by the British in order to create clerks for communication in their offices, it latter turned the language of education in India. The Colonial language has been used as a means of writing by the Indian writers. Poetic and fictional literary creations are successful attempts by them but for drama a very few notables tried their hands. Girish Karnad will be remembered forever for his dramatic contribution to Indian Writing in English.

Girish Karnad wrote a play, Naga-Mandala which is a story of a woman, Rani. The play is based on the two stories the playwright had listened to from his teacher, A.K. Ramanujan. It seems the tales are narrated by a woman, normally the older in the family. The playwright describes her a typical Indian woman of the ancient times. Rani, the protagonist has been a as victim of patriarchy. Her husband used to keep her locked every time behind the door. He would sometimes go away only to return the next day. She complains that she feels lonely and frightened in the absence of her husband. An old woman, Kurudavva comes to know the story of Rani's loneliness. She gives her the herbal root as an antidote to the indifference and negligence of her husband. Accidentally the prepared mixture of the roots has been swallowed by a Naga (Snake) in an ant-hole. Under the spell of the herbal root Naga becomes the slave to Rani. He transforms himself into her husband and visits her every night. She gets pregnant without realizing that the snake deceived her by transforming himself as her husband. Her husband makes the charge of adultery

against her. She goes through a trial by putting her hand in an ant-hole. The Naga (Snake) Come out from the ant-hole with wide open hood on the head of Rani. She successfully goes through the ordeal and has been declared as righteous woman by the panchayat. Her husband accepts her. The woman protagonist in the play has been questioned for her chastity. She has been just a representative for such women who have gone and are going through such ordeal every now and then. Sometimes either without their fault or because of their mistakes.

#### Objectives of the Paper

The principal objective of the paper is to study the play, Naga-Mandala in the light of feminism. Apart from the principal objective, the paper also investigates male and female psyche in relation to their behavior and husband-wife relationship.

#### Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that the feminist literature claims equal rights for men and women in the society. It is hypothesized that males in the fictional literary works are as it is reflection of males in society. It is again hypothesized that the females have also their own aspirations from their husbands and other family members.

#### Materials and Methodology

The primary source for the research paper is the play Naga-Mandala: Play with A Cobra (A critical Study) written by Prof. G. Vaidyanathan and published by Rama Brothers India Pvt Ltd, Fourth Edition (2020). The book consists of the

complete paraphrase of the original play. Research papers and other material has been referred for this paper. Though the play has two stories, the researchers has focused merely on the main story of Rani and Appanna. Textual and descriptive analytical methods have been used for this research paper.

### Discussion

As it apparently seems, being an Indian playwright, Girish Karnad deals with marriage institution and the place of the wives in Indian houses; the subordinate status of women, kingly love of the Indian fathers for their daughters, and marital relationship between husband and wife in this play. These are the chief concerns form the point of view of feminism. The protagonist has been named 'Rani' means queen. (Powerful woman of a kingdom, possibly next to the king in the kingdom in relation to power) Every father expects bright, prosperous and blissful future for his daughter in her conjugal life. The play comprises two female characters-Rani and Kurudavva. The former is the protagonist of the play and the later a blind but a complete woman. Appanna, Rani's husband, and Kappanna, Kurudavva's son are the two male characters. Socio-cultural-political and literary occurrences reflect the issues of contemporary society in literature. Women's movement for their rights and literature written to vindicate the movement both are qual inputs for proper outcomes. A writer has its own limitations of handling many issues in a literary work.

Rani and Appanna's story is basically about the act and its fruit. Appanna's licentious behavior never can be admitted in a healthy society which has its strong roots in morality and spirituality. His turning back towards his duties as husband; treating Rani as prisoner and limited communication with her are the problems for Rani. Women throughout the world are raising voices against injustices, exploitation n and subordination in their movements. Though the focus shifted from one issue to another, woman has been at the center every time.

**Feminist and Feminism:** "The terms feminist and feminism were imported from French to English in 1894 and 1895 respectively. The first wave of feminist movement came during 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It focused on primarily on women's right to vote, education, better working conditions and men's double standards of morality". (Singh) The Second wave focused on gender inequalities and the third on diverse needs of women of different races and communities. However, Feminism in literature as Anita Myles says, "is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluid position." (Myles 1) The play Naga-Mandala, that is why, can be studied in the light of literary feminism. It is a feministic play in its approach because it deals with the men's standards of morality and woman's loyalty. Mrs. Rajashri Gaikwad in her research paper entitled 'Feminism in Girish Karnad's Naga-Mandala' points out that the play "questions patriarchal moral code which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband but not the faithfulness of a husband to his wife." It presents the problem of a married woman, the position and status of a woman in her relation to her husband and home. (Rajashri) It is true to the extent that nobody is raising a question about the immoral behavior of Appanna. An unsuccessful attempt to help Rani has been done by Kurudavva. She offers her the magical roots so that she should enthrall her husband, Appanna. Day and Night she remains lonely in the house. It underlines her helplessness and her position as woman in house and in their married life.

**Rani's Dreams as Replica of her Freedom:** Rani has been kept locked behind the doors by her husband. He hardly speaks with her. A newly wedded woman expects love and care from her husband but Appanna does not offer any of these to Rani. She cries in the locked house. She has reverie in the state of loneliness in that house. She dreams of a stag with the golden antlers. He calls her but she refuses to go. The stag informs her that he is not a stag but a prince. Again she has another dream and in her dream she visits her parents; she embraces them and cries. She does not want to go back to Appanna. G. Vaidyanathan describes her pathetic condition rightly as "she fancies about a demon locking up a beautiful princess in his castle." (Vaidyanathan) The dream metaphorically stands for the thought Rani has in her mind. She fancies that the doors of the castle have been broken down due to incessant rain during day and night for a week. A big whale came to rescue her from that castle. The house wherein Rani has been locked by her husband is considered a Prison, Castle of the demon, Cage etc. by Rani. Kurudavva while talking about Appanna and his house to Kappanna says that "Appanna keeps his wife locked up like a bird in cage." (Vaidyanathan) The use of the words like prison, castle and cage symbolizes the slavery. Rani is a very beautiful woman, even the blind Kurudavva feels her beauty when she touches her. She asks Rani to allow her to touch and states that her eyes were in her finger. She gets a shock of surprise when she feels the beauty. She exclaims, "My God! You are marvelously beautiful. Your ears are as soft as flowers of hibiscus, your skin as smooth and tender as young mango leaves; your lips are as delicate as rolls of silk." (Vaidyanathan)

Rani suffers a lot mentally. Being all alone in the house in the night, she has dreams and reveries. In her dreams and reveries, she thinks of her freedom. Her dreams are the part of psyche and replica of her desires.

**Kurudavva a Blind but Complete Woman:** Kurudavva is an old blind woman in the play. She helps Rani to get rid of her life of forlorn. Her life story highlights the importance of the magical spell of the herbal roots in making her a complete woman. In Indian society the life of a woman is considered incomplete without a life partner and at least a child. Husband and wife are symbolized as two wheels of a chariot. She gets her life partner with the help of the herbal roots. She also offers the same roots to Rani to turn her uncared and unloved nights to full of her husband's love and care. It is a big question tormenting for her that when a young beautiful wife, Rani is in the house why does Appanna go after a prostitute to seek sexual pleasure? Since her puberty Rani was with Appanna but she remains unaware about marital relationship between husband and wife. Kurudavva tries to bring love and care back to her through Appanna, Rani's husband. Kurudavva is a complete woman in the sense she has lived her life fully, but Rani, being a complete woman in herself, is incomplete without her husband's love.

### Conclusion

The first hypothesis, the feminist literature claims equal rights for men and women in the society has been proved because the feminist movement shifted their focus from one problem of women to another. The second hypotheses that males in the fictional literary works are as it is reflection of the society has also proven. The writers borrow their characters from society as they are reflected in the play. The third hypothesis that the females have also their own aspirations from their husbands and other family members has also proven true. Rani, the

protagonist also expects love and care from her husband which are the duties of every husband.

The protagonist, Rani has been considered a 'Poor thing' by the Naga. The blind Kurudavva also feels the beauty of Rani by touch but the same is not felt by Appanna. Rani's story, in the play is a commentary on the challenges faced by women in traditional societies and their search for empowerment and self-reliance. Kurudavva's life in the story is opposite to Rani. She has been an old lady who lived her life fully and she has been contented. Both the characters are presented opposite to each other in relation to their life stories. Appanna accepts Rani as a deity in front of the village people. She finally proves that she is innocent by holding the Cobra in her hand. In the village panchayat Rani accepts the snake ordeal. She says, "Since coming to this village, I have held by this hand, only two..... Yes, my husband and this king Cobra. Except for these two, I have not touched any one of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me. If I lie, let Cobra bite me." (Vaidyanathan) As rightly pointed out by Smt. Seema Jaysi and Dr. U.N. Kurrey in their research paper, 'Gender Issues: A Study of Girish Karnad's Play Naga-Mandala' "the play *Naga-Mandala* deals with gender bias and subjection of women in patriarchal in Indian Society." (Jaysi and Kurrey) Truly, the play deals with the issues of women subjugation in their marital lives. It is a warning for every man that he must perform his domestic duties, otherwise the Naga may disturb his life.

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