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Psychoanalytic Feminist Glance at Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*

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Abstract

Girish Karnad is an existentialist dramatist. He concerns himself with the problems of existence of self, search of identity and the problems of isolation and frustration. Existentialism implies the quest of the individual for the assertion of self despite his limitations and failures. In the play *Nagamandala*, Rani is the only daughter to her parents. She is the victim of child marriage. From the time of her marriage until she reached her womanhood, she was under the care of her parents and she abided by the rules of the patriarchal society. Her father's voice was the voice of an authoritarian. When she was brought to her husband's home, she leads a

solitary life locked behind the doors by her husband. She is left perplexed and is left without any contact with the outside world. This paper analyses the female psyche in the play *Nagamandala*.

Keywords

Patriarchal Society; Psyche; Girish Karnad; *Nagamandala*.

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Girish Karnad is an existentialist dramatist. He concerns himself with the problems of existence of self, search of identity and the problems of isolation and frustration. Existentialism implies the quest of the individual for the assertion of self despite his limitations and failures. This branch of thought upholds that man can transcend reality in his own consciousness. In fact, existentialism asserts humanism or the dignity of man. This philosophy is well exemplified in all the three plays of Girish Karnad. The major theme of these plays is that of responsibility and the search of identity.

Karnad pays adequate attention to his characters. However, his characters are from history, but they are not devoid of life and vitality. They are living characters. In fact, Karnad highlights those qualities in his characters, which aid the development of his plots. His characters and plots are co-related. For his character portrayals, Karnad uses various devices, such as dialogue, irony, contrast and parallelism.

Girish Karnad is the master of rich vocabulary. Therefore, he is capable of using appropriate words for different situations. His language suits not only the situations but also characters. His language is refined, lucid and precise. Karnad maintains decorum in his dialogues. Often his language is poetic. Karnad also makes frequent use of idioms and phrases taken from common experience in order to lend his style the charm of familiarity. But at the same time he does not sacrifice grace in his style. His style is, however,

straightforward and idiomatic. There is a typical Indianness about his style in his plays.

In the play *Nagamandala*, Rani is the only daughter to her parents. She is the victim of child marriage. From the time of her marriage until she reached her womanhood, she was under the care of her parents and she abided by the rules of the patriarchal society. Her father's voice was the voice of an authoritarian. When she was brought to her husband's home, she leads a solitary life locked behind the doors by her husband. She is left perplexed and is left without any contact with the outside world.

Rani's husband Appanna takes the place of her father as a male authoritarian. He locks her up in his house because he does not want her to speak with anyone and he wants her to remain in his house without any contact with the outside world. He does this because he wants her to remain monoandry. He has an affair with another woman. He thinks that he could not satisfy two women at a time. He develops castration phobia. Hence he leaves his wife without any marital bliss. He is afraid of her. The resulting fear is due to castration phobia. He projects himself as a sovereign being and he wants his wife to submit her will to him.

As per the expectation of Appanna, Rani submits her will to him. She acknowledges his sovereignty and his authority. She represses her desires and passions of having contact with the outside world. She abides by his rules but hates it to the fullest extent. Her repressed desires find an outlet in her dreams. Bhatia observes as such: "Those who are not very well adjusted are more likely to get away from their real situation than those succeed in their work and get along with people" (59). It is evident that the people who do not get along very well in their duties and with other people may daydream excessively. That's the case with Rani.

...So Rani asks him: 'Where are you taking me? And the Eagle answers: 'Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the

seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you.' So Rani says: 'Do they? Then please take me to them-immediately. Here I come.' So the Eagle carries her clear across the seven seas... (Act I, 7)

An eagle that has got the power of speech rescues Rani from her imprisonment and takes her to a land of fantasy, where her parents wait. Her rescuer is not a non-human entity. It is because her super-ego does not allow a human being in her dreams to be her rescuer, because it was conditioned by Appanna and his codes. The process of displacement takes place in the psyche of Rani. A man as her rescuer is displaced by an eagle which has got the power of speech.

Rani remains as a virgin, untouched by her husband and she is devoid of marital bliss. She yearns for human company. She longs for a man in her bed. It is evident because in her dream her parents embrace her, they kiss her and caress her. According to the laws of patriarchy only the parents of a woman and her husband got the right to touch her and kiss her. Therefore her parents displace a man in her dreams. Her parents kiss her and caress her in the place of a man in her dreams. Her parents share her bed in the place of a man. The displaced image in her dream attains sublimation in her super ego. As a result of this her super ego, conditioned by the male doctrines allows the dream. In the morning a stag with golden antlers comes and he calls out to Rani. But she refuses to go and the stag explains that it is not a stag but a prince. When the stag says that it is a prince, her dream obliterates. At the mention of a man other than husband her super-ego immediately checks the dream by stopping it.

...then Rani's parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and caress her. At night she sleeps between them. So she is not frightened any more. 'Don't worry,' they promise her. 'We won't let

you go away again ever!’ In the morning, the stag with the golden antlers comes to the door. He calls out to Rani. She refuses to go. ‘I am not a stag,’ he explains, ‘I am a prince’... (Act I, 7)

Rani reverts back to reality with a shock of dreaming about another man, other than her husband. In her dream, image of another man is displaced by the image of a stag with golden antlers by the process called displacement.

She was conditioned by the male society therefore even in her dream, when the prince in the guise of a stag comes to rescue her from her pathetic condition, her mind obliterates the dream and she reverts back to reality with a shock of thinking another man in her dream other than her husband. Since she was conditioned by male-order, she thinks that even dreaming about another man than her husband is a sin. She remains fidelity to her husband, who has no love for his wife. In spite of that she does not even think of having sexual intercourse with another man to fulfill her sexual urge. She is the typical image of a virgin shrouded in snow or a woman with ‘nun-syndrome’. She is the image of a woman kept locked in a tower by the patriarchal code. Rani’s husband Appanna is polygamous. He has a wife and he also has a mistress. He does not wish his wife to be polyandry. He wants her to be monoandry even though he does not take her to bed. The male society does not approve women to be polyandry. It is a shame.

Rani’s husband locks her up in the house. As soon as she is locked in she indulges in day-dreaming. She is back in her lonely tower. Day-dreaming is her only vault through which she gratifies her suppressed feelings.

RANI. ... So the demon locks her up in his castle. Then it rains for seven nights. It pours. The sea floods the city. The water breaks down the door of the castle. Then a big a big whale comes to Rani and says: ‘Come Rani, let us go... (Act I, 14)

In her dream, a demon locks her up in the castle. The image of her husband is displaced and associated with a demon which is cruel by the super-

ego of Rani. Then it rains for seven days and night. The rain is the displaced image of her tears. The sea floods the city. The water breaks down the door of the castle. And in the water a big whale comes to rescue her. The image of other man is displaced by the image of the whale. The image of the whale can be easily associated with the flood and sea. Hence the whale comes in rescue of Rani. The process of displacement and association are employed by super-ego of Rani to vent out her suppressed feelings.

Rani knows very well that she is a victim to the male-chauvinism, which has locked her up in the house. But she remains passive. She does not try to revolt against it. Her passivity shows that she accepts her fate, she leads an imaginary life by the side of the harsh reality, in which she could only be a spectator, watching others play an active part. On finding the door locked outside, it dawns to Kurudavva that the small root failed to have magical effect on Appanna. Therefore she gives a root which is bigger than the first one to Rani. As soon as Rani mixes the paste of the bigger root unexpected turn of event takes place.

Rani, on seeing the curry turn blood red gets terrified. Her thought runs helter-skelter. It takes some time for her to regain her senses.

RANI. Oh my god! What horrible mess is this? Blood. Perhaps poison. Shall I serve him this? That woman is blind, but he isn't. How could he possibly not see this boiling blood, this poisonous red? And then-even if he doesn't see it-how do I know it is not dangerous? Suppose something happens to my husband? What will my fate be? That little piece made him ill. Who knows....? (Act I, 16)

Rani thinks that the root which turned the curry into blood red is poisonous. And it may harm her husband. She feels that it is too dangerous to serve her husband. According to her it is a crime to cast a spell on her husband. Moreover it is a heinous act.

Rani, on seeing the curry turn red begins to panic. She tries to hide it by pouring out the curry near the house. Since the curry leaves a red stain, she thinks that her husband is bound to notice the red stain. Therefore she thinks of an alternative. Rani finds, the ant-hill, which is close to the house as an ideal spot. She pours the curry into it. On seeing Rani, the dog begins to howl and Appanna asks Rani to see to the dog. He gets surprised at not receiving any reply from Rani. Hence, he goes to the front door only to find out that Rani has crossed the threshold of his house without his permission. This enrages him and he asks for an explanation from Rani. But Rani remains silent. This angers him and he slaps her hard which makes her to collapse on the floor. Rani only goes to her usual corner and starts to cry. She does not question him or does not complain him of his cruel act. Instead she recoils to her bed and starts to cry. Rani does not develop any sense of anger against Appanna for ill-treating her. Rani abides by the code of the submissive wife.

When Rani emptied the curry in the ant-hill, the king Cobra eats it and the king Cobra falls in love with Rani. In Indian myth and folklore tradition there is a general belief that king Cobra can take any human form as it wishes. According to this belief the king Cobra takes the form of Rani's husband, Appanna. Girish Karnad makes the king Cobra to take the form of Appanna, because he feels that only then Rani can let him take the place of her husband. And the king Cobra thinks that Rani is a chaste wife of Appanna and she would not let any other man approach her and it would be a hard task for it to take the place of Appanna. Chastity is the first and foremost quality for a woman to be a submissive wife. The cobra taking the form of Appanna can only be the day dreaming of Rani. In her dreams animals come to rescue her. At first an eagle rescues her, then a stag turns into a prince to rescue her from her captivity and finally a whale comes to rescue her. In the similar way a King Cobra can take any form it likes. Moreover she can see the large ant-hill very close to her house from her window. Therefore the possibility of King Cobra

rescuing her in her dream is acceptable. Rani in her dream uses the defence mechanism called Displacement. The King Cobra takes the form of her husband which is acceptable by the society and even by her.

On the other plane, Naga is the alter ego or the another self of Appanna. Within every human being there dwells a being who is the exact opposite of that person. Likewise Naga is the exact opposite of Appanna. Appanna is polygamous, cruel, selfish and embodiment of evil. But Naga is monogamous, loving, gentle, unselfish and embodiment of goodness. Naga is the man of Rani's dream. She through her dream creates Naga, who is the embodiment of goodness which her husband, Appanna lacks. Naga is not just another man Her unfulfilled wishes and desires creates a fictional character Naga, who resembles her husband in every way but he is an opposite of Appanna in his relationship with Rani. She derives substitute gratification by living with Naga in her dreams. Her unfulfilled desires get gratified. Naga cares her and loves her, to the core. He is the exact opposite of her husband. Naga gets himself wounded in the process of doing a favour to Rani.

In the alternative ending, Appanna and Rani find the cobra in the thick tresses of Rani. On seeing the snake, Appanna runs to find a cudgel to kill the snake. During this interval, Rani realizes that the cobra is her child's father. She lets her hair down for the snake to climb. She gives abode to the snake in her tresses. When her husband, Appanna comes back with a cudgel she misleads him. She does not care about her chastity. The instinct within her to be polyandry emerges. She takes another husband with the knowledge of Appanna. She becomes a real woman, she wears the mask and she grabs the chance to be polyandry to fulfill her carnal desires. She takes two husbands, a husband for the day and a husband for the night.

Girish Karnad has depicted Rani as a round character, who attains transformation only in the denouement. The transformation is not a physical or a spiritual one, but it is psychological one. She is unknowingly turned out into

polyandry. When she comes to know of it, she gladly accepts it on the pretext of being grateful to Naga for giving her the life, which she yearned for.

Girish Karnad in his play *Nagamandala* has depicted strong and revolutionary female character. Girish Karnad's characterization of Rani bears witness to his dexterity. She was depicted as an ordinary woman who thinks that it is her duty to serve the patriarchy. She derived satisfaction from substitute gratification. She is a round character, who gets enlightened in course of time. Rani defiles patriarchy and mock at it by turning out as polyandry. She asserts herself as women. The psyche of women is different from men. She thinks in different plane. She breaks the patriarchal rules with her full knowledge. Rani is psychologically strong and she hates to be a puppet in the hands of a patriarchal society.

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