

GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAYS: MYTHOLOGY VERSUS REALITY**HEJAB-I-ZAHRA SANDHU**

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Abstract

The roles and duties of men and women are taken stereotypically, generally throughout the world and specifically in the Indian Subcontinent. The observed roles of a woman are to stay confined at home, raise the parish of the man, and complete the house chores. Whereas men are perceived to go out for earning concerns, stand guard over the women, and give a peaceful environment to their families. Over time, transition into a society continued and caused improvement in some of the neglected and rigid areas. This article aims to discover how Girish Karnad, an Indian, portrays women's status in a male-dominated society through different incidents extracted from Indian mythology. The Indian society is depicted through some mythological stories which reflect India during the 21st century. Karnad, by exploring mythological stories, unwraps how miserably the women of 21st century India are living in the same ways as the women of ages ago used to live. After reading Karnad's plays, the reader instantly catches the variations in power that the creator of the characters has given to his female characters. An indirect comparison of the possession of power is part of his writing. Thus, the thought-provoking pieces of literature; which give space to a reader's critical approach and are also the key concern of this article are the plays Naga-Mandala (1988), Yayati (1961), and Hayavadana (1972).

Keywords: mythology, incompleteness, discrimination, untouchables.

Introduction

Men are usually not discouraged from breaching the social contracts in male-dominated societies compared to women. The determined social roles of women coerce them to stay quiet over man's barbarity and not respond to his viciousness. The girl's parents teach her to spend the rest of her life in her husband's house at the end of her life, whether he keeps her happy or not. They further narrate the social tradition at the time of the bride's departure that the family of a woman prefers receiving their daughter's dead body but cannot endure her return with the decision of separation.

Reading the literature of particular societies helps the one who intends to get acquainted with any of the cultures, their societal norms, traditions, and Do's and Don'ts. The visitors to different alien places are mostly suggested to read some writers of that land because writers undoubtedly represent their societies. We have not witnessed the ways Anglo-Saxons used to live, the societies of Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Hardy. Still, we enjoy being part of those societies and living there through the remarkable writings of that era that narrate many of its moral and immoral activities. Racial discrimination is an inhuman attitude by the UN charter and civilized systems. Many eminent writers like William Shakespeare, Frantz Fanon, and Toni Morrison have worked on it.

While reading any genre of literature, the reader understands a piece of literature from a specific perspective and possesses a distinct perception. For instance, the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif narrates the story of a Pakistani resident Christian woman named Alice Bhatti. To some readers, this title may suggest the connotation as Alice Bhatti is taken as a chaste woman presented in the novel, ending with some vital elements of magical realism. But some other student of literature who possesses a divergent thinking

approach can take the initial words of the title "Our Lady" as significant to the man's perception of holding sovereignty over women. The narrated story creates sympathy for the lady who is always about to be exploited by the men. Everyone hates her for being a Christian. But when it comes to fulfilling their lustful desires, the same Christian woman seems appropriate to them. However, Indian playwright Girish Karnad produces his plays with the background of Indian mythology and folktales. His writings present 20th-century India in the backdrop of Indian mythology. Karnad's artistic ways of designing his stories seem to attempt to explore how 20th century India still has effects of mythology in its traditions and everyday life. In this article, the key focus is on the three selected dramas, *Naga Mandala* (1988), *Hayavadana* (1972), and *Yayati* (1961) by Karnad.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology will be applied in this research. Textual analysis and discourse analysis are used as research methods. The primary sources for this research are *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Yayati* (1961), and *Hayavadana* (1972) by Girish Karnad. Secondary sources include books, articles, and other electronic resources on these plays. The methodology used for this piece of writing is partly critical and analytical to trace Karnad's method of giving his stories a base from mythology and then proceeding to convey his message in a way that the reader's involvement would not be disturbed in understanding both, mythology and Karnad's point of view.

Literature Review

Girish Karnad is a prolific Indian playwright. While giving an account of his style of dealing with Indian mythology, Mrs. S. Ramya's article "A Study of Hindu Mythology in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala*" opines, "He is no stranger to the world of Indian myths, including epics and Puranas. He was groomed in mythology. He grew up with a lot of myths. Like Shakespeare and Kalidasa, Karnad has mostly adopted his plots from various sources. He has also endowed his borrowed stories with a new lease of life by adding his share of myths" (312).

Smita Dhantal, in her article "Women Characters in the Select Plays of Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar," expresses that "he consciously writes about the condition of women and their right to choose over accepting what is given" (688). The woman Karnad explores in his plays like *Hayavadana* (1972), *Yayati* (1961), and *Naga-Mandala* (1988) can be perceived as described by Dhantal. G. Ruba finds *Hayavadana* (1972) a play that entirely deals with the complex human relations and the search for identity and further mentions it as "Karnad exemplifies incompleteness in three levels human, animal, and celestial of creation in the world" (124).

Dr. Amara Khan, in her article "Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*: Analysis of Text and its Theatrical performance," observes as "Hayavadana is a realm of incomplete individuals, substantiated with imperfect god Ganesha and vocal dolls to present a world apathetic to the longings and frustrations, ecstasies and miseries of human beings" (151). Like G. Ruba, Khan presents three aspects of Hayavadana's personality and further illustrates his resemblance to god Ganesha due to his physical appearance. Hayavadana's animal-headed human body reminds of the god Ganesha, who holds "An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and cracked belly" (145). Dr. Lalan Kumar, in his article "Karnad's *Hayavadana*: A Study on Incomplete Individuals," emphasizes Karnad's being a traditionalist and fascinated by the "traditional theme-plays" and proposes this is the reason Karnad's production plays on the themes of mythology, history, and legendary (487).

In "Indianness in Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*," T. Pushpanathan draws on the typical mindset of the Indians in particular and of the inhabitants of the Subcontinent in general. Parents always long to locate a proposal for their daughters' matrimony where the man should be wealthy, and amusingly, in case his parents have departed, he would be the final option. Pushpanathan relates this fact with Karnad's *Nagamandala* (1988) by claiming that Rani's parents preferred Appanna for their daughter for two traditional causes; first, because he was a rich man, and secondly, because he was all alone with no parents. By doing so, they did not realize the aftermath of this marriage which Rani could bear in the absence of any other human in her husband's house (1).

Ardra Therese Joseph and Jisha Jijumon, in their article entitled "A Critical Analysis of Hypocrisies and Double Standards in Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* and *Tughlaq*," navigate the resemblance between Appanna and his doppelganger Naga. Though they were completely different from each other in terms of their physique (physically, they were alike when Naga adopted Appanna's disguise) and origin, as well as their personalities, were different, their similarity lies in the practice of subjugating Rani. Apart from Naga's being a devoted lover of Rani, he deployed several restrictions on Rani and repeatedly repeated her to do as he says (36).

Guru Charan Behera, in his work "Postcolonialism, Folk Culture, and Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*," is of the view that the culture deployed by Karnad in his *Nagamandala* is "a part of the postcolonial project of rediscovering the vitality of the Indian past and refuting the metanarrative of both the West and the East--" (163).

Again, Dr. Amara Khan, in her article "Metamorphosis of a Despondent Indian Women: A Feminist Evaluation of Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala*," builds her narrative after linking Rani's character to that of Sita. She writes, "Naga-Mandala (1988) has as its center the timeless test of anticipated female honor__ the chastity-test" and connects it to the pre-historic times of Ramayana and Sita. Like Rani, Sita also had to prove her innocence (103).

From Rani's character, *Nagamandala* (1988) also presents a distinct variety of chastity. In other words, this character seems to be challenging the spirit and actual meaning of being chaste and virtuous. Appanna was more tilted towards concubines and used to spend his prime time with other ladies. In the disguise of Appanna, Naga made his daily presence to Rani at night. Rani stayed entirely innocent of Naga's intentions and his being with her in her husband's disguise. The physical relations Rani had with Naga were pure with the sincere intentions of Rani's being with her husband, Appanna. Throughout the play, she remained faithful to her unfaithful husband, so Naga coerced her to take her matter to Naga rather than deal with it in Panchayat.

In Dr. K. M. Trivedi's opinion, "Karnad's *Yayati* comes across as merely a pleasure-monger while in the original; his character is symbolic of a higher ideal, striving for truth, and eternal happiness. *Yayati*'s long span of sensual indulgence is a symbol that indicates the futility of chasing happiness in things that have a definite end. Indulgence only increases thirst and doesn't quench it" (160). According to Malhar Jayesh, while producing *Yayati* (1961), the Playwright did not try to deconstruct the structure of the myth and very artistically constructed the whole story based on that myth (373).

This research paper intends to explore Karnad's grappling with the Indian societal issues by lying their basis on the Indian mythology and empowering the miserable women of his society. The textual analysis also endeavored to compare the current status of women in Indian society to that of the pre-historic.

Analysis

Karnad narrates the stories of a male-dominated society that successfully tries to overwhelm fragile women. This situation is accurately illustrated through the dialogues of Rani to Appanna (Naga) in *Naga-Mandala* (1988) as "Yes, I shall. Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you. Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you. No, I won't ask questions. I shall do what you tell me. Scowls in the day. Embraces at night. The face in the morning is unrelated to the touch at night. But day or night, one motto does not change: Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you." It presents the reality that though Appanna and Naga are not only two different personalities but belong to two different species, they share the same manhood elements by not letting a female ask questions. But the other side of the coin shows Rani as a little empowered woman who denies accepting the tradition of Panchayat and decides to swear off King Cobra. While; in *Yayati* (1961), males also dominate females by having a lot of concubines and cheating on their wives. Apart from being a queen, a woman does not have the command to make decisions for herself, but Karnad gives that power to that woman, so she chooses her fate by leaving the kingdom or palace.

On the other hand, the women portrayed in his plays are mostly empowered. For instance, in *Yayati* (1961), when King Yayati shouts at Chitrlekha while entering her room without knocking or getting permission, it makes her furious. She daringly replies, "Sir! This is my chamber. Only my husband has the right to come in here without my permission. Or to shout out my name when he pleases. I am not aware I have allowed anyone else that freedom." The text also quotes Chitrlekha's blunt dialogues with King Yayati: "I did not know Prince Pooru when I married

him. I married him for his youth. For his potential to plant the seed of the Bharatas in my womb. He has lost that potency now. He doesn't possess any of the qualities for which I married him. But you do" (65). This is quite a challenging situation in which a weak creature is seen encountering the King and demands something incredible.

Yayati (1961) is among his many other remarkable pieces of art, which is based on a mythological incident, presenting the story of King Yayati. Being a sensitive mind, Karnad explores many objectionable aspects of his society, giving an account of the traditions and values of the respective society the writer represents. The caste system is the most prominent aspect he pointed out as an Indian. Characters are discriminated against and humiliated based on caste. Due to the division of Indian society into the severe caste discrimination atmosphere, the creative Playwright depicts a similar but challenging situation. Sharmishtha praises Devayani before King Yayati as "she was unlike any woman I had met. She seemed completely unconscious of the fact that she belonged to a superior race" (19).

She further yearns to become like Queen Devayani in all respects. This play challenges caste discrimination by quoting the precedent of Devayani, a Brahman Queen who has been very kind and generous to the untouchables. They become boon companions due to Devayani's calm and composed behavior toward the untouchables.

Besides the caste system, Karnad points out certain matters of his society in the play. When Sharmishtha tries to tease Devayani by pointing out the lust in Yayati's eyes for the queen, Devayani replies, "that's what I am here for. To be lusted for by His Majesty." It portrays women as nothing but a source of pleasure and fulfillment for men's lust. However, *as a play, Yayati (1961)* certainly challenges the accepted social ethics of the time. For instance, being a representative of the new and young generation, Pooru denies the so-called traditions and history of the barbarity of his descendants by declaring that "I had not the slightest inclination to follow in the steps of my illustrious forefathers. I found their deeds pompous." It points to the revolution in the manners of thinking and perceiving the things of the new generation and the ancestors, and thus; encounters a somewhat rebellious attitude of the coming generation. Where the youth is shown as the stronger one who dares challenge the steps of its ancestors, at the same place, the character of a woman is presented as feeble. Irrespective of her status and position, Devayani begs before her husband, King Yayati, to leave Sharmishtha (the untouchable young servant) as she pleads, "Sir, I have never asked any favour of you in these two years. I implore you now. I too can bare my fangs. I too can draw blood. Don't provoke me on account of this woman" (30). "Frailty, thy name is a woman," a famous and most quoted dialogue by William Shakespeare appeared in *Hamlet* (1603), proves to be accurate here. Though Devayani is a Queen and belongs to a Brahmin family, she still sacrifices her dignity by begging before a lustful man instead of taking action to gain her right. Besides, when Yayati calls his wife Devayani, "what has upset my little pet?" (Karnad 14), it instantly reminds Henrik John Ibsen. In his *A Doll's House* (1879), Ibsen uses almost the same tone for the female character Nora as her husband calls her "my little skylark."

Likewise, in *Naga-Mandala* (1988), Garish Karnad sheds light on the status of women in an almost similar way. The position of women is presented at the time when Naga asks Rani not to ask about his mysterious comings of day and night, and she replies, "No. I won't. The pig, the whale, the eagle__ none ask why. So, I won't either." And Rani elaborates her miserable condition to Appanna (Naga), "I'll die like your dog and your mongoose." It seems like what Frantz Fanon says in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) that the colonizers, who had supreme power over the colonized, called the colonized by zoological terms. Similarly, writers like Ibsen and Karnad have shown how women are colonized by the men who act as colonizers, considering females fragile, and thus are being called the names of those animals that are minute in their nature and physique.

Moreover, *Yayati* (1961) also deals with the mindset of politicians or rulers. The text of the play quotes the words of King Yayati, "The only death real to me is that of someone else. Not mine, I never think of my death. This is not for me a possibility at all. When I ride out into combat, I know I shall return alive" (Karnad 24). Though these dialogues convey the humans' perception of their death to some extent, they represent the traditional mentality of the rulers and politicians to a vast extent that how ridiculously they think of themselves as an absolute authority who can challenge their coming death and downfall when they gain temporary power and authority. Yet, these are some incidents that perhaps make *Yayati* (1961) a controversial and a challenge to accept the social ethics of the time.

Daniyal Mueenuddin writes the prologue to his short stories, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009), as "Three things for which we kill__ Land, women and gold." This famous quotation portrays women as the bone of contention. Girish Karnad, too presents his woman as an apple of discord on certain occasions. For example, in his play *Hayavadana* (1972), the monologue of Padmini paves the way to consider the proverb as mentioned above somehow valid. She says about the death of Devadatta and Kapila, "If I'd said, 'Yes, I'll live with both,' perhaps they would have been alive yet." In this play, the female is shown some way corrupted as Padmini does have a generous, loving, and caring husband. However, she is still tilted towards Devadatta's friend Kapila. She sings, "Why should love stick to the sap of a single body?" She is attracted to the mind of Devadatta. At the same time, the body of Kapila fascinates her too, as she says, "No woman could resist him." and that "what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back--- like an ocean with muscles rippling across it--- and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless."

Kapila also knows Padmini's intentions and thus, says, "I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong body." Even at the end, Padmini asks Devadatta not to use the sandal oil he has used since childhood. Padmini utters, "Your body had that strong, male smell before --- I liked it..." and that "when we came back from the temple of Kali --- you used to smell so manly..." (pointing towards the incident of mixing the bodies of both the dearest friends) Devadatta replies "You mean that unwashed, sweaty smell Kapila had? (Incredulous) You liked that?" Padmini cares more for Kapila as compared to her husband.

Consequently, Devadatta feels jealous. She frequently compares Devadatta with Kapila. In fact, in the middle of the play *Hayavadana*, when the bodies of both the friends (Devadatta and Kapila) get mixed, Padmini's desire to have Kapila's body gets fulfilled. She eagerly asks to go with the man who possesses Kapila's body and Devadatta's head. The flirty nature of the men depicted in the play is evident from Kapila's dialogue with Devadatta "My dear friend, I have seen you fall in love fifteen times in the last two years. How could I not guess?" In his plays, Girish Karnad explores a man and woman relationship. But the artistic way Karnad writes distinguishes his portrayed women from the traditional ones. It seems as if the Playwright has challenged his tradition of always sacrificing women.

In all the plays, man has seemed to overpower and suppress the female. But the unique representation of women by Karnad has given some authority to women too. Nonetheless, the dialogues of Kapila to Padmini, "What do you want now? Another head? Another suicide?" and "What does it matter now whether you stay or go? You've done the damage" (125) instantaneously remind the fall of Adam caused by Eve and thus, that is how a female can destroy the lives of generations as is evident in our culture. If a woman elopes or commits adultery, that does not remain with her personality. Instead, her coming generations will also have to suffer for that act. Every immoral activity is acceptable for men, and most morally acceptable norms are prohibited for women.

In almost all of his mentioned plays, Karnad discovers sex as an outlawed thing, particularly in *Hayavadana* (1972) and *Naga-Mandela* (1988). In his exploration of sex as an outlawed thing, he mockingly reveals the characters of Rani, Naga, and Appanna in *Naga-Mandela* (1988), while the characters of Devadatta, Padmini, Kapila, and *Hayavadana's* mother. The characters of Naga or King Cobra and *Hayavadana's* mother are exceptional. The socially accepted concept illustrates that a woman should be chaste. She should not have extra-marital affairs.

Similarly, a man should not have illicit romantic affairs, but men keep fulfilling their desires due to dual standards. However, in *Naga-Mandela* (1988), Appanna's character represents the traditional man of an Indian male-dominated society, who locks his newly-wed wife and spends his whole time with his concubine. His daily routine is "I'll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go" (Karnad 27). He only comes in the afternoon to bathe and have lunch, then locks Rani up and returns to his lover. That is how the days and nights are passed. Later on, when he finds Kurudavva and Kappanna around his house, he senses that their presence around unlocked Rani can cause something unusual and brings a dog to keep an eye on Rani in his absence. Naga kills that dog due to its annoying barking, and Appanna brings a mongoose after the dog's death.

On the other hand, the immoral relationship with Rani is also explained in the text. Kurudavva, an old and blind lady who has been the best friend of Appanna's mother, comes to know about Rani's problem. She presents her as a root used to create affection and love in someone's heart. Kurudavva asks Rani to use that in the milk or curry of Appanna. Rani uses a small piece of the root, which does not work. On the suggestion of Kurudavva, she uses the

big piece, which comes in the shape of red flames. Frightened, Rani pours that in the ant-hill where King Cobra is. As the story proceeds, the love root affects King Cobra.

When Appanna is busy making love with the concubine, Naga comes at night in the guise of Appanna and makes love with Rani. The elements of outlawed sex are evident from the narration of the story. Although Naga and Rani have romantic affairs, Rani has always been unaware of the presence of Naga. Her relationship with the worm is not intentional. On the other hand, how Appanna behaves with poor Rani and his immoral relations with other women prove him guilty. By getting the privilege of being a man, he uses his male authority to suppress his legal wife. The different behaviour of the night's Appanna and the day's Appanna confuse Rani. Though Rani doubts her husband's weird attitude on various occasions, this does not lead her to the reality she has been suffering from.

Karnad created confusion in his elaboration of outlawed sex, leading to the fusion at the end of the plays *Naga-Mandala* (1988) and *Hayavadana* (1972). As discussed above, Rani unconsciously spends nights with the worm "Naga." In this way, apart from Appanna's illicit relations with other women, the writer amalgamates two unnatural beings, a human and a worm, in *Naga-Mandala* (1988). However, an approximately similar situation is depicted in *Hayavadana* (1972).

The concept of identity crisis is also discussed in *Hayavadana* (1972). Hayavadana had severely gone through this identity crisis. He was the result of the fusion of a woman and horse. His mother got an absurd idea to set her relationship with a horse instead of marrying a man. Despite the disagreement of her parents and society, she got indulged with a horse who, after fifteen years, was shaped into a human being. Hayavadana was their son who lived with the head of a horse and the body of a human as a result of his father's curse on his (Hayavadana) mother. He was continuously searching for his identity, either a horse or a human being which he finds at the end of the play.

Conclusion

Men and women can rarely practice against their expected role in society. This article was a mere attempt to show how the India of the 21st century is still stuck in the mythological times under the shadow of the selected writings of Indian playwright Girish Karnad. The writer has significantly challenged the traditions, customs, and status of women and even religious beliefs of his society. The character of Kali (Hindu deity) in *Hayavadana* (1972) is presented mockingly. His defiant writing style can leave the effects of amazement in the readers how bravely and independently he portrays his social and religious customs so challengingly that the reader cannot wholly believe in it. The Playwright empowers Rani in *Naga-Mandala* (1988) to take her decision after Appanna alleged her loss of virtue and chaste, the characters of Chitralkha and Devayani in *Yayati* (1961), while Hayavadana's mother in the play *Hayavadana* (1972) have appeared powerful women in certain occasions according to the need of the hour.

Karnad artistically presents his stories which are based on mythological background. With the proceeding of the stories, he surprisingly links those mythological incidents with his current society with such a slight transition that it instantly affects the senses of the deep reader. With the mythological background, he takes the start of his story. Then presents the female characters as he might have observed in his respective society and concludes that particular piece of art in his manners, like how the writer himself wants to see these women to be treated or in what ways he intends to give liberty to females in his surroundings.

Moreover, the unexpected end of Rani's character in *Nagamandala* (1988) also proposes various connotations. For example, like Mohammad Hanif's character of Alice Bhatti, this character of Karnad too reaches a different and unanticipated fate. Alice Bhatti's husband takes her life by throwing acid on her face because he doubts her character and sincerity. At first, all and sundry cursed Alice Bhatti, but as soon as they witnessed some holy spirit who came to receive Alice, they all (including her father Joseph) started considering her goddess or the one accompanying the Holy Mother. Likewise, when Rani swears at Naga and Naga proves her innocence by shadowing Rani, everyone in the Panchayat considers her the goddess. Even her husband, Appanna, bows before her and accepts Rani and Naga's child without frowning. This is how the standards of social change that at one moment, the woman is accused of severe allegations. At another moment, if something spiritually unusual happens to that lady, the superstitious minds start taking her as a deity or goddess.



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