



## ARTICULATING FEMALE VOICES IN GIRISH KARNAD'S NAGA-MANDALA

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### Abstract

In the field of Indian English drama, Karnad has profoundly manifested unvoiced female voice through his drama. The present paper focuses on the plight and predicament of female characters who endeavour to arrive at authentic selfhood. Karnad has artistically depicted the issue of gender sensitization in Indian patriarchal society. The present paper aims at examining hidden world of women desire to unleash social taboos. The analytical study of the play *Naga-Mandala* examines the ability and inability of female character to articulate their inner expectations and desire. The protagonist Rani on one hand thrives in reverie of freedom and indulges in her own world. On the other hand, some of the characters articulate their life story but their articulation leads them to nowhere. Through the portrayal of various women characters in the play *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad has created a gallery of female unvoiced characters struggling to express their inner pain. Karnad has portrayed his protagonist Rani as an innocent woman who is living under the custody of her husband. Thus, the focusing point here is to unveil the patriarchal dominancy and imprisonment of innocence.

Drama as a literary form in Indian literary tradition, since ancient time serves the purpose 'to teach and delight'. In the history of Indian drama, *Vedas* and *Puranas* have insistently catered the possibilities of varied dramatic themes and techniques. In the ancient time of Indian drama history, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and other religious script and text had stronghold in providing significant literary materials for exploration. Then in the medieval time, the father of Indian drama, *Bharatmuni* with his groundbreaking work *Natyashastra* had systematically provided the formation of drama.

Starting from the definition of drama, types of characters, chorus, theme, and ultimate goal of drama, (Rasanipatti-emergence of Rasa) Bharatmuni had left nothing to remain unclear about drama. Gradually, the text *Natyashastra* attained a landmark work of dramatic art not only in the field of Indian Sanskrit literature but world literature in general.

In the recent trends of Indian English Drama, Girish Karnad has established himself as a man of drama. His art of blending traditional citadels of mythic nuances with modern art of drama appropriately justifies T. S.

Eliot's remark in his article 'Traditional and Individual Talent'. As he remarks that;

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. (Eliot, 4)

Girish Karnad born in 1938 has predominantly acknowledged in the field of Indian English Drama. His dramatic technique in many of his plays has been internationally recognized and that is why he is probably the first Indian playwright to be the Ambassador of World Theater Institute Paris. Karnad and his plays have been awarded innumerable prestigious awards. But what most importantly brings him international recognition is his plays have been staged by many World Theatre Groups and translated in many foreign languages. The play *Naga-Mandala* was premiered 1993 in America by the Guthrie Theater Minneapolis as part of its Thirtieth Anniversary Celebrations. While Michael Patterson in the edited volume titled *The Oxford Dictionary of Plays*, (2005), included *Naga-Mandala* among the 'most significant plays of world theatre'. This shows Karnad's international reputation as a playwright, director and actor.

Karnad's contribution in the field of Indian English drama is the most remarkable one in terms of experimental theatrical techniques. Though his play, Karnad has profoundly manifested unvoiced female voice through his drama. The present paper focuses

on the plight and predicament of female characters who endeavor to arrive at authentic selfhood. Karnad has artistically depicted the issue of gender sensitization in Indian patriarchal society. The present paper aims at examining hidden world of women desire to unleash social taboos. The analytical study of the paper examines the ability and inability of female character to articulate their inner expectations and desire. The protagonist Rani thrives in reverie of freedom and indulges in her own world.

In *Naga-Mandala* the protagonist Rani is a very sensible and obedient girl who is badly abandoned by patriarchal society. She is emotionally, identically and sexually rejected. She is treated as a mere 'second sex' and not as a human being or a wife by her husband Appanna. Here Rani's presentation in the play as a wife, mother and house wife is the manifestation of plight and predicament of typical Indian women.

It is such a pathetic situation to live in this kind of male-dominated society which cannot lead women anywhere but in sort of custody of pain and dilemma. Here the name of the female protagonist Rani is ironically and tragically applied to real condition in the play. Rani is not the 'queen' but mere a slave and servant. She is not a wife but only a poor prisoner, she is not a house wife or home maker but a faithful servant of Appanna's house. She is not even mother but a harlot or criminal in Appanna's perspective.

Traditionally, in Indian marriage system it is believed that marriage works as a conduit to help and understand each other. It is an amalgamation of two of minds and hearts in traditional Indian marriage system. It harmonizes two separated mind and body. It is the lake of love, emotion and feelings. It is the sweet obligation of husband and wife. The obligation that gives them strength, passion, courage, cordiality towards their journey of life. But here in the play, Girish Karnad explores

prejudiced concept of marriage in typical Indian society. And Rani becomes the victim of this sort of marriage system. Appanna is more a master of Rani than a husband to her. He is the controller of home in general and Rani in special. Instead of happiness, love, care, pleasure, and selfhood she gains only depression, despair and pessimism from her marriage with Appanna. She finds her as an unimportant creature in the patriarchal world. Girish Karna examines her as a caged creature in the family or society of male-domination. It is the cage of suppression, anxiety, fear and trouble. She cannot liberate herself from this cage because the key of this cage is in the hands of her master, a typical biased master or husband in Indian society.

Liberation is a very pleasant and blissful feeling and everyone desires for it. It is the basic and natural demand of humans. How can anyone have absolute control over others? Nobody has right to govern someone because humans are not controllable even to their own self. In the play *Naga-Mandala* Rani is a puppet of Appanna's hand. Home is place of security, love, care and peace and husband is the great supporter of a house but here the home is a jail and Appanna is a kind of jailor. So Rani's dependence on her husband leads her depression and perplexity.

Rani's unvoiced pain and her perplexed situation turn her into the dark word of suppression. She cannot speak, talk and even not weep for her predicament because there is no one to listen to her. This isolation of hidden pain and wound of her heart take her nowhere except grief and tears. As she laments her pain and loneliness in her reverie.

"where are you taking me? And the Eagle answers: 'Beyond the seven seas and the seven isle, your parents wait for you.' So Rani says: 'Do they? Then please, please take me to them-immediately. Here I come(*Naga-Mandala*,74)."

Rani is so obedient and genteel girl that these virtues lead her to suffering, distress and futility in her own eyes. Rani lives in intricacy, on one hand she receives great love and care by Naga, on other hand she is highly tortured and badly treated by the violence of Appanna. So she cannot determine and comprehend the game being played with her. As she confuses; "you talk me so nicely at night. But during the day I only have to open my mouth and you hiss like a stupid snake(*Naga-Mandala*,90)."

However, the character of Appanna is himself very suspicious and doubtful, he argues about Rani's chastity and he wants ordeal for Rani's purity. Rani explains her grief in her words.

Give me poison instead. Kill me right here. At least I'll be spared the humiliation. Won't the cobra bite me the moment I touch it? I'll die like your dog and your mongoose(*Naga-Mandala*,103).

She has grown up in very cordial and warm atmosphere therefore she has much difficulty and complexity in the atmosphere of frost, gloom, and pessimism in Appanna's pessimistic house. She is locked up like an imprisoned creature. Rani's relationship with Naga becomes blessing for her. With Naga, she feels crucial value of her own. She feels secure and solaced in recovering her predicament. As she explains. "I don't feel afraid anymore, with you besides me"(*Naga-Mandala*92).

Every human being has desire for love, care and warmth which Rani receives from Naga. Naga's relation with Rani fulfils her with love, care, emotion, and motherhood. She appeases her hidden expectations and desires which every mothers and wives expect from their husband. She sacrifices everything for her husband and for the sake of her child. So she desires for these needs. Naga fulfills Rani with her need and satisfies as a wife and mother. But this exhilaration and excitement of Rani lead her to *Panchayat*. She is an innocent wife, she is perplexed by circumstances, does not know

anything about her doubted chastity in the sight of Appanna as well as society. She cannot utter a single word except "I haven't done anything wrong!" (*Naga-Mandala*,106). In her perplexity she articulates her bewilderment of life. She continues with her puzzlement and confusion in the play as she says about her perplexity;

I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or a sparrow. Why don't you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like chameleon from day to night? (*Naga-Mandala*,101)

She is not able to do anything as she is helpless, even she cannot weep or complaint against someone. There is no one to release her, for helpless woman. At Panchayat she shouts haplessly. "Help me, Kurudavva, help me please! I am innocent.... I haven't done anything, what shall I do?" (*Naga-Mandala*,107).

The character of Kurudavva is an old, experienced and matured lady in the play. She is blind but she has detective eyes. Though she is blind she has seen the biased patriarchal society. Though she is blind she is able to assume Rani's beauty while Appanna is unable to do so even with his eyes. She could somehow articulate her joy, happiness as well as grief. She is brave woman, she knows about Appanna's suspicious nature however she helps and sympathies Rani. But she also depends on her son Kappanna. She knows what is patriarchal society and women's actual significance in it. That is why she helps and supports Rani to overcome from her grief.

Kurudavva gives three roots to Rani getting Appanna's affection. This is such a medicine which can turn a man from abhorrence to adoration. So Kurudavva shows the way to humble relationship between the couple of Appanna and Rani. In this way, Karnad depicts the picture of such a woman who has sympathy

and compassion for victimized women in male-dominated society. Thus Kurudavva is a torchbearer in the beginning of the play showing Rani love and care.

Karnad artistically endeavours to manifest the hidden pain of woman with the creation of characters like Story and Song. Here, these two characters are hidden themselves too by an old woman. She keeps them to herself and never tells the story and sings the song. So Story and Song are choked or imprisoned inside her. Somehow, they come out and express themselves. In this artistic way Karnad articulates female voices and presents reality to the readers as well as the audience of the play. The character of the Story is the symbol of thousands of women's hidden story and hidden pain, hidden perplexity, desires and expectations. It is the symbol of hidden and suppressed identity which brutally abandoned by society. And this story or reality comes from Karnad's play *Naga-Mandala*. Through this play one can become aware about this unveiled story of biased society of India.

Thus, in play *Naga-Mandala* Karnad has exuberantly manifested unvoiced female voice. He tries to give voice to the unvoiced characters. Through the portrayal of various characters in the play, Karnad has created a gallery of female unvoiced characters struggling to express their inner pain. He tries to unveiled the patriarchal dominance and imprisonment of innocence. On the other hand, some of the characters articulate their life story but their articulation leads them too nowhere. Karnad portrayed his protagonist Rani as an innocent woman who is living under the custody of her husband.

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