

Patriarchal Forces: A Study of Rani's Character in Karnad's *Nag-Mandala*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze the various facets of Rani's character, who is the central protagonist of the play *Naga-Mandala*. However, the setting of the play is altogether different from the present day society, but strong enough to show the impact of patriarchy on the woman. The play depicts the reality of contemporary India, where we can find the simpletons like Rani of *Naga-Mandala*, who are deceived and threatened by their husbands. All the characters display the versatility of the playwright with which he has made them relevant in the wider social context. The patriarchal rule seems natural and has been accepted as the order of the day, but the woman has been showing resistance to it and, therefore, is still struggling against the existing male framework. The aim of this paper is to depict the psychological, cultural and social aspects of woman fighting to have an existence of her own.

Key-Words: Patriarchal Forces, Resistance, Simpleton, Struggle and Existence.

Women constitute one half of the humanity. Hence their presence in social, economic, political as well as in literature is inevitable. It is another story that they hold neither the literary space nor the grandeur befitting their number. It is easy to explain that largest number of books have been created by men. Women's situation seems to be in a mess where submissiveness and resistivity goes side by side. Girish Karnad has attempted to give a panoramic view of the women which ranges from pre-modern times to modern day modern women with respect to their social framework. Altogether these plays can be viewed from the perspective of women negotiating and resisting patriarchy at their urge to come out of it.

The society portrayed is to a certain extent patriarchal and can be taken as the whole Indian society in general as the plays are set into different contexts and different social surroundings but patriarchy being the binding factor common to all. These plays mirror the cultural variations present in Indian society at different levels. The societies represented here are fictitious but the cultural spheres coalesce with the real and which sustain the dramatization. The present paper aims at an in depth analysis of *Naga-Mandala* (1988) to see how in this work Karnad has deployed traditional material to voice female desires and aspirations. *Naga-Mandala* revolves around a girl and a Naga (a cobra). This play deals with a fantasy world which has sometimes been read as coming out of Rani's imagination. Rani's character is drawn along pre-modern times, who gets married in her childhood and is sent to her husband's home only after attaining 'puberty' and continues to be relevant even in the twenty first century i.e. contemporary society atleast partially as hundreds and thousands of girls suffer the same fate. Child marriage might have been abolished or declined but is still seen in the marginalized sections of society.

Rani, the young, beautiful girl, obedient and naïve to her husband Appanna's torments does not even dare to answer him. She laments: "No, I won't the pig, the whale, the eagle, none of them asks why, so I won't either." (45). Earlier in the play she had very calmly accepted the unprovoked beating and snubbing at Appanna's hands. As Veena Noble Dass rightly observes:

This play is narrated by a story woman and this is a clear device to allow for further displacement and disguise. This play can be interpreted in Freudian terms by applying his views on dreams. The story states that the main characters names are not important. We can even go to the extent of calling them every man and woman because the experience that they undergo is typically the experience of many young men and women. (Jaydip Singh Dodiya, 27)

When pregnancy of Rani was questioned, the elders were given the right to do appropriate justice. And the method they employed was not reasonable but was entirely archaic i.e. Rani was given the 'choice' either to hold the red-hot iron bar or to put her hands in the boiling oil but she herself insisted to hold the venomous cobra ironically it was 'cobra' himself insisted on this mode of ordeal and speak the truth, so ultimately it is the cobra who has to do the justice not elders (quite unacceptable in the modern world). Though quite believable within the framework of play is Rani's magical rise to a 'GODDESS' after ordeal by cobra-deification goes all around

us even today. We find the drama is enacted against the complex cultural context where folk beliefs and information technology co-exist in a relationship which becomes reflective of contemporary Indian culture. About Rani's state, a critic, S.R. Jalote feels: Rani's problem in Appanna's house could be the problem of any bride in Hindu family." (Jaydip Singh Dodiya, 267)

She was made to suffer both physically as well as mentally, her husband Appanna was an orphan, hence, got neither husbandly nor parental love there. She was compelled to live a life of loneliness and solitude. This solitude made her make her own stories, a glimpse of it we get in the very beginning of the play when Appanna leaves shunning her, she asks the Eagle in her dream:

"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 a tree of emeralds." (28)

In her pitiable state Kurudavva, a blind old woman, the other woman character in the play appears as a ray of light. She was Appanna's mother's childhood friend and has firm faith in world of superstitions and magic. She has a very strong hold on her son Kappanna which constitutes her world and is afraid that he will one day be carried by the supernatural beings he is haunted by. It is his, this urge for freedom that ultimately makes him to leave his mother. His absconding drives her crazy and makes her situation pathetic. Rani who is a product of patriarchal society think of her husband's discomfort and is naturally afraid when the color of curry changes into blood red and exclaims: "Oh My God, what the mess is this? It is full of blood. Is it poison?"

She in shock pours it in the ant-hill, where a cobra lives. This is the act that makes her life a 'bed of roses with thorns'. As a result of the curry Naga, the cobra starts visiting her in dark as Appanna (cobras can take any shape) and caresses her. She realizes her physical, carnal self with Naga. Tanushree Nayak aptly comments:

The disguised Naga comes to her at nights. He commiserates with her over her pathetic condition and showers on her parental affection that she badly needs. All her pent-up sorrow bursts out and feels relieved, happy and secure in his company. But she cannot

comprehend the situation since Appanna cannot be so affectionate and compassionate. Yet, she willingly suspends her disbelief and enjoys Naga's love and care. Rani is portrayed in the line of Sita and Savitri legends where a woman is made only to accept, yield and suffer and not to question and react. (Kanwar Dinesh Singh, 123)

The whole drama consists of the two faces of a same coin, one contradicting another and at the same time complementing each other as Appanna is contradictory to Naga.

Rani, symbolizes the condition of women in rural cultural setup. She is reduced to a status of puppet in the hands of her husband as well as her parents. Tanushree Nayak also expresses that Karnad is not only exposing the male chauvinism through the device of cobra ordeal, but also the double standard of morality of patriarchal culture and the hollowness of the concept of chastity. In *Naga-Mandala*, a cobra comes as the savior of feministic cause just as lord Rama saving the life of Ahalya in The Ramayana. The Ramayana depicts the story of Ahalya's transformation, exactly the same transformation we find in Rani. She is dead as a stone in the early days of her married life. It is a dynamic play dealing with the multi-faceted characteristics of women characters. Women's emotional pain and self-endurance is voiced at different levels in different situations. They depict how a particular woman character would reaction such situations. If we put a woman in society during the times of *Naga-Mandala*, she might have behaved and stayed in the same way as Rani does, because on the whole Rani symbolizes the suppressed women of ancient times. She fits into the picture of own grand women who has undergone and still going under a number of changes.

The women might have become strong and got to have their own identity but still they are struggling to come out of the patriarchal confinements. Elaine Showalter, a feminist critic, in her essay cites the example of Ardener's model where women wants to have a place of their own to which they belong that distinguishes their identity from the dominant group. They are essential segments of the society, in fact world cannot run without them but still they haven't got what they deserve. They have to live with the man but urge to have their own space which talks only about them, their experiences, feelings, emotions etc. they don't want to occupy the space of men but wants to have a space which resists any interference by them. Multiple endings also provide multi-faceted dimensions through which the play could be viewed and evaluated, and also that there could be no single accepted conclusions. In various endings Rani shows warmth and

sympathy to Naga as she unknowingly feels attracted towards him and finds a soft corner for him. She even wants the heavy cobra to live in their hairs forever or to let her son do his last rites. She instead of getting afraid of him feels attached to him. She unknowingly feels related towards him. Change is the law of nature and women are undergoing a series of changes and struggling to acquire independence, justice and dignity even today.

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