



## EXPOSITION OF MALE EGOISM AND EXAGGERATED SUPERSTITIONS AS DEPICTED IN GIRISH KARNAD'S NAGAMANDALA: A BREIF NOTE

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### **Abstract**

*This article attempts to analyse the male egoism and exaggerated superstitions depicted in Girish Karnad's Nagamandala. The selected play belongs to the category of myth and folk tales. This story revolves around a young girl Rani who suffers much after she was married to Appanna. The exposition of problems due to male egoism and the solutions gained due to superstitious beliefs are the main themes discussed in this play. This play is always quoted as an example for feminism as it portrays the life of a newly married woman in a crucial manner. Thus this article has touched upon few selected instances from the play to analyse the selected idea of male egoism and superstitious beliefs.*

**Key Words:** *Male Egoism, Superstitious Beliefs, Feminism, Supernatural Elements, Myth, Patriarchal Society, Male Chauvinism.*

Literature, as defined commonly, it is “the reflection of life”. Of course literature reflects human life and sometimes goes beyond reality and fixes its deep roots into a world which is totally imaginary and sometimes even goes far beyond imagination. The play that is taken as a reference to the selected topic belongs to that kind of a story. The ideas discussed in this article are totally based on the instances that took place in the selected play. Literature has created a greater space for the readers to know and understand the realities of life. It also allows the readers to be in an active mind to develop solutions for the problems that arises in between the characters. In short, literature helps the readers to balance the human relationships and maintain the distance between each human relationship.

Even though there are many different genres used by the writers, drama plays a significant role in making the readers to understand and experience the real life instances in a beautiful way. Drama always creates an illusion to the readers by allowing them to watch the words in the mental screen. The heated arguments, powerful words and deep emotions are presented in a very stronger way in dramas. Every single expressions and emotions are beautifully compiled into words and thus allows the readers to dwell along with the characters. Starting from the ancient folk street dramas, this particular genre has achieved greater heights in English literature. Drama in India originated from the Sanskrit drama tradition. There were street dramas staged all over the country for smaller group of audience especially occasional dramas. But now it has become a trend of staging dramas in theatres and people themselves pays to watch literary dramas on stage. Dramas according to M. K. Naik are so special because,

“An important reason for this is that drama - essentially a composite art involving the playwright, the actors and the audience in a shared experience on the stage - has its own problems of which the other literary forms are free” (1982: 255)

There are many playwrights in India who writes in their own mother tongue and also in English. Girish Karnad, one of the most famous English playwrights, who writes in his own mother tongue Kannada and he himself translates his works into English for the convenience of other language readers. There are many playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, etc., who are very fine playwrights capable of presenting their minds to the audience. One more special feature about playwrights was that they were good stage directors too. They write their works and select proper actors to act and also direct them to act accordingly and present it to their audience. Hence they could be praised as doubly skilled writers. The ideas about Modern Indian theatre by Adya Rangacharya serves as a good advice for the present day playwrights in India. The ideas as follows,



“I was one of those who first opened the doors of the Indian Theatre closed for centuries. In my enjoyment of the fresh breeze that suddenly started blowing from the West, I forgot that the breeze could give me only fresh energy. Unthinkingly we opened our theatre and bewitched by the breeze we forget it and just walked over to the western theatre. It would make me happy if youngsters learn from my mistake.... My plea to lovers of modern Indian drama is first to study classical Indian drama and make a reassessment of it” (1974: 40-41).

Indian plays mainly focus on social, political and moral values of family and society. The conflicts that happen among human beings are the mainly focused themes in Indian dramas. The selected play in this article is by Girish Karnad, who has won one of the highest literary honours awarded in India, called “Janpith Award” in 1998. He has won several other awards both in literary and cinema fields. He was well known by Indian audience as an actor, director and playwright. He is a much courageous writer who pours out his mind to the audience that even creates some controversies in literary fields. Recently during the death of well known political reporter Gowri Lankesh, Karnad participated in the condolence meeting and protest he came along with a board with some controversial slogans written on it. The board said that, “I am an urban Naxal”. Karnad courageously held the board on his hands during the meeting. Karnad courageously touched upon many controversial areas in his works too. In the selected works **Nagamandala**, he spoke about male chauvinism and female suppression in touching the most controversial areas of chastity.

Thus Indian dramas have achieved greater heights and so that it was called as the fourth wall in literature. Literature, in earlier days, was used to record the life style of people. Now literature gives people a direction to live and lead life in a proper way. The ultimate goal of writing is to expose the unexpressed happiness and sorrows to people who read it. Drama has now become a special tool to expose the social, political and moral issues that humans face every day. Humans face a lot of problems in and out their houses. All those problems require simple solutions to overcome sufferings. But usually as an emotional being human fails to think of executing those solutions in their life. Drama teaches them to use those solutions efficiently and acquire success in life. Literature teaches to live a problem free life. On reading other’s happiness, one could become further strong. That is what drama does with human beings all the times. R.K. Dhavan says how to check the real success of a play as,

“It is a well-known fact that the real success of a play can be tested on stage. A playwright needs a living theatre to put his work on acid test, evaluate its total effect on the audience and thereby get a chance to improve upon his performance” (1999).

The selected play **Nagamandala** is the story of a young girl named Rani. Her life with her husband Appanna is the central plot of this play. The incidents that happened in her life after her marriage are beautifully delivered by Karnad through his words. Karnad never failed to discuss about the mental sufferings of his female characters in all his plays. The dilemma created in the minds of his female characters will be the reason for the movement of the story in his plays. This play is a combination of myth and folk tale that mainly focuses on the male chauvinism. This play clearly shows that how male chauvinism degrades and suppresses women and exploits them in all ways. **Nagamandala**, with its ideas and themes discussed in the plot, it is considered purely as a feminist play. Simone de Beauvoir in his book writes that,

“Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (1972: 25).

This play throws light on the situation of women in rural Indian societies. Along with the exposure of feminist ideas, this play also questions the patriarchal society that stays dumb on seeing the female repression. Karnad’s picturization of Rani’s character was in such a way to expose the patriarchal society and its crucial prejudices towards women. This play totally revolves around Rani, a rural young girl who got struck in the patriarchal society due to her marriage. Rani was forced to marry the person whom her parents selected. She was not asked for opinions either. Karnad portrayed her marriage with Appanna as a marriage which could be compared to any



man's marriage with any woman. Marriages are really unfair to women because it totally exploits them mentally, physically and emotionally. It is to be understood that, in the words of Beauvoir,

“to be woman is something strange, so confused, so complicated, that no one predicate comes near expressing it and that the multiple predicates that one would like to use are so contradictory that only a woman could up with it” (1972: 175).

Rani's parents decided to marry her to Appanna because of his economical status. Appanna is wealthy but he had affair with another woman. He is not really a suitable pair for an innocent girl like Rani. Rani, like other common woman, is very much perfect and does all the household chores in a proper way. She symbolized an ideal house wife. Appanna leaves her alone in the house on every night and meets his mistress. He comes to Rani only in the noon times that too to have food. He treats Rani in a cruel manner. He locks her inside the house and leaves out for the whole day so she could not express her feelings to anyone. All her dreams were shattered. She was exploited by her inhumanistic husband. She did not have any kind of happiness in his house. She was not even allowed to question the suppressions that she faces every day. It is important here to remember the works of Jessica Benjamin in one of her article that,

“The male – ego and dominance is the key note in the analysis of man-woman relationship where the male attributes are associated with the mental thought and positive activity while the woman is regarded as a passive creature that is forced to respect the male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the human species” (1986: 125).

Appanna lives an unethical life. He has no limitations and lives his life by his wish. But he controls Rani and makes her to be in house which seems to her like a prison. Karnad images Rani as a symbol of loyalty and dedication who serves even for her disloyal and cruel husband. Manchi Sarat Babu criticizes the life of Rani as,

“This solitary confinement of Rani by Appanna in the house symbolizes the chastity belt of the middle ages, the reduction of women's talents to housework and the exclusion of women from enlightenment and enjoyment” ( 1999: 239).

There is no freedom for women in patriarchal society. There is no hope for her to come out of that confinement. When she tried hard to step out of it, she was helped by her neighbour with two roots. She was advised to feed both the roots to her husband by mixing them in the food he takes. First time when she mixes the small root Appanna falls down unconsciously after eating it, so she in the fear of trust, did not try the second root. At the same time she wants her husband's love and affection. So she dared to use the second root but the colour of the dish after mixing the root again threatened her so she poured the dish into the snake grove located in her house and that marks the beginning of the superstitious story in the play. It is evident through Pranav Joshipura's words that,

“In our Hindu mythology the Naga represents several images. In south India, many houses have their own shrine which is often a grove reserved for snake, consisting of trees, festooned with creepers, situated in a corner of the garden” (1999: 257-258).

Karnad used supernatural elements to create magic in the plot and that is what makes the plot more charming and thriller. These supernatural elements make the audience to think that they are watching a magical play. Karnad brings out the usage of supernatural elements through personification. He gave human shape to a snake and allows it to live along with a woman. Exposing the whole villagers as the strong believers of superstition was total realistic depicted by Karnad. In south Indian society, the elders in the village believe strongly in the superstitious elements greatly. When the question of chastity arises, the elders in the village forces Rani to prove her chastity by stepping in to the fire or catch the hot Iron bar. But listening to the advice of Cobra, Rani accepts to catch the Cobra from the grove in front of the elders in the village. All these instances are purely superstitious.



Thus it is evident that Karnad have used supernatural elements to eliminate the real life problems of the characters. Appanna did not even allow his wife to speak in front of him. He orders her by saying that, “Look, I don’t like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand?” (NM 7). Rani feels much in a severe sense of fear. Appanna instead of supporting her, he again orders her to stay inside the house. He says, “What is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you...” (NM 7).

After the interference of Cobra in Rani’s life, she experienced great differences in Appanna’s character. She was in a confused state that Appanna’s behaviours during day times and night times are totally different. She could not guess the real face of Appanna. She thought that the things happened to her in night times are her dreams. But she came to know the truth only after she got pregnant. Appanna doubts her chastity and she was forced to prove her purity in front of the elders. But the story took a great twist after Cobra’s action. After the epic incident happened in the temple, the villagers started believing Rani as the incarnation of God. Appanna also started respecting her and it is evident through the words of Appanna. He says, “Any wish of you will be carried out” (NM 44). Thus **Nagamandala** by Girish Karnad serves as the perfect example to expose how superstition overcomes male egoism.

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