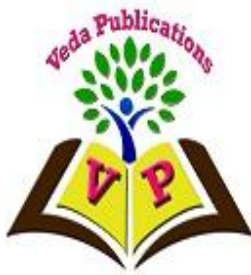


**TRADITION, FOLKTALE, CULTURE, & REVOLT IN NAGAMANDALA**

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*(PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur)*doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/joell.61.151>**ABSTRACT**

Girish Karnad is one of the prominent writers of Indian Drama in English. He is an outstanding playwright of modern India who much focuses on myth, folklore and culture. The present research paper is intended to focus on the tradition, folklore, culture and even revolt in the play *Nagamandala*. He is successful in bringing a drastic change in his female protagonist Rani.

**Keywords:** *Folklore, Tradition, Revolt, Rani, Myth.**Author(s) retain the copyright of this article*

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'Nagamandala (1988)' is one of the handpicked plays from the pen of GirishKarnad which fetched him Karnataka Sahitya Academy award for the year 1989 in the respect of the most creative work. Initially, it was written in Kannada and got translated by himself into English. It can be considered as a classic in all respect as it is the combination of tradition, folktale, culture and even revolt at the end. The term nagamandala is a compound of two words: naga and mandala. Naga means serpent and mandala implies decorative pictorial drawings on the floor.

The play is of two acts along with a prologue. The title itself is impressive as Karnad gave Kannada title even in English. The title suggests that it is the story of a cobra, but it depicts a vivid picture of outrageous state of woman

protagonist. About the two oral tales Aparna B Dharwadkar gives her impression:

"The first story, about the lamp flames that gather in a village temple to exchange gossip about the households they inhabit is part of the outer play and gives imaginative expression to the idea of community life. The second story, about the woman who has visited by a King Cobra in the form of her husband, is personified in the play as a beautiful young woman in a sari and it tells itself (as the inner play) to an audience composed of the playwright and the flames." (Collected Plays, xxx).

Nagamandala is based on two oral tales from Karnataka, which Karnad heard several years



ago from Professor A.K. Ramanujan, his mentor and guru for whom the play is dedicated. The source of Nagamandala is inspired by the snake myths prevalent in South India. Karnad admits that he is influenced by those stories narrated by his mentor and has become an inspiration for his play. With this regard Karnad says in the 'Author's Introduction' of the Three Plays:

Naga-Mandala is based on two oral tales, I heard from A.K. Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women—normally the older women in the family—while children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. (Karnad, 16).

The story 'Nagamandala' is narrated by a woman narrator called 'story' who has escaped from the mouth of a woman along with a song. She joins the flames who gathered in a ruined temple at the night. Karnad has used the play within the play technique. The man who is sitting in the ruined temple is once a writer and is cursed to death by a mendicant for making his audience sleep with his plays. The only way to escape from this problem is he must awake one full night in that month and that is the last day of the month. He has become a spectator of the flames that gathered in that temple and started narrating their respective houses' affairs particularly about their mistresses. Karnad mentions that he heard from some far-off villages of Karnataka that the flames have power to talk like-wise they start exchanging their household affairs. For that purpose, they select the ruined temples where there are no movements of people.

A new flame has joined them late telling the reason that while her mistress was sleeping the story and a song which she has known from the years have escaped from her choke and have taken the form of a young woman and a sari. Later that woman starts narrating the story of Nagamandala by the urge of the man who wants to awake the whole night on the condition that if he is alive the next morning, he would tell the story to others.

Nagamandala is the story of a young girl Rani and her miserable condition after she got married to a careless husband Appanna. The play has become a sociological study for the readers who are

the evidence for her suffering in a male dominated society. Though women are considered as equal to men in the modern society, it is just limited to the words but practically it is not seen anywhere.

Girish Karnad shows his feminism towards his women protagonists by giving voices at the end of the plays. How much suffer they have undergone, much more than that they dominate or rule the entire things later. Karnad's partiality comes in the form of powerful questioning from the women.

Here in this play Rani also undergoes certain turmoil but gets everything by the end. It is the credit of Karnad who usually projects his women in the plays in both the dimensions as first they suffocate the suffering like any wedded woman, but later they will be given a voice to question and dominate the suppression. Taking all the considerations into account, we can say that Karnad has successfully projected the character of Rani with two dimensions.

In the search of identity of Rani, the king Cobra (Naga) plays a vital role. We don't see the snakes or the Cobras with suspect rather; we worship them as if they are Gods. The Naga also treats Rani with love and affection. It has known the fact that she is totally ignored by her husband and longing for love. It has also known that Appanna leaves her in the nights. So, it has chosen night for its arrival and in the form (disguise) of her husband so that he could be allowed by her. Naga loves her like anything. He wants to help Rani when she was asked to come before the village elders about her infidelity. It, in the form of Appanna suggests her to go for the snake ordeal and tells her that she would get everything she wished for after that ordeal.

The same Naga couldn't not bear Appanna sleeping, next to Rani after their life is settled. It wants to kill Rani so that she can become his queen forever. It is just because of its jealousy towards her husband and not about Rani. It can't do injustice and any intolerable thing against Rani as it loves her very much. Then it retires from such idea.

When Appanna is ready to throw a stone on Rani after he comes to know that she is pregnant, it is Naga which moves forward, hissing loudly, drawing attention to itself. Seeing it, Rani screams and Appanna throws the stone at the Cobra which instantly withdraws. Rani immediately runs into the



house and locks it from within. Thus, the Cobra saves both Rani and her baby in the womb.

When it becomes again 'Naga' comes to Rani and starts pacifying her. Rani who is unable to understand the difference between the behavior of Appanna in the day and nights pleads him not to humiliate her like that. But the real intention of Naga is to help Rani somehow. It advises Rani to take snake ordeal at which Rani is horrified.

Rani: Won't the Cobra bite me the moment I touch it?

Naga: It won't bite you. Only you must tell the truth.

All will be well Rani. Don't worry your husband will become your slave tomorrow. You will get all you have ever wanted.(34)

Naga has loved her every night before her trial for chastity. He can't bite her. On the contrary he summons his magical powers for the last time and becomes the size of her tresses. He then enters her tresses and makes love to them and finally ties a tress into a noose and places it around his neck.

Rani has asked her husband to give the rituals and funeral rites to Cobra; we think that she is intentionally ordering that. But she believes that her present life is given Cobra. Before it is cremated, she sits staring at it. Her eyes fill with tears. She bows down to the dead snake, then picks it up and presses it to her cheeks. She is projected as she has everything only because of it while she is successful in the snake ordeal.

Karand has been successful in portraying the evils of the society which prevail over those days. First comes the male domination. Especially, Appanna who shamelessly has a concubine and extends to get married with a young girl only to look after his house. He is satisfied with the affair he is maintaining, but he wants to get married because he attained the age, he is capable of, and wealthy and wants to become a family man in the society. He is not cared of any customs, traditions and not even feelings. No villager questions him when he keeps his wife locked and spends his time with his concubine.

But the same villagers question Rani's chastity when Appanna complained against her. They

even don't stop Appanna from throwing a stone on Rani. The villagers have known that Appanna is spending time with concubine and they haven't asked him anything with regard to the ill treatment of his wife and his guilt. But when Appanna has complained against the chastity of Rani, they are furious and started enquiring her.

Elder II : It brings no credit to the village to have a husband publicly question his wife's chastity. But Appanna here says: since the day of our wedding, I have not once touched my wife or slept by her side. And yet she is pregnant. He has registered the complaint, so we must judge its merits.

Elder III : The traditional test in our village court has been to take the oath while holding a red-hot iron in the hand. Occasionally, the accused has chosen to plunge the hand in boiling oil.(36)

Finally, Rani is acclaimed as 'Pativrata' a noble woman who got everything that she wished for she has been patient and bearable and waiting for her husband in good reasons. Usually Indian girls are brought up like that they are tuned from the childhood itself that they shouldn't question their husbands irrespective of their harassment, abandon and torture. Even Rani is not an exception. She is directed by her parents to be patient and calm with her husband and she obeyed the same thing. Even her parents have no worry about their daughter and haven't enquired her conditions even after few months of her marriage. They simply think that their burden (daughter) is handed over to son-in-law and nothing to worry for her.

Karnad has given a true picture of culture and traditions usually the society has. In the opening scene itself, we see Rani following Appanna indicating that a wife has to follow the footsteps of husband. Appanna without having a talk with newly wedded wife leaves his house informing that he would come the next day afternoon for lunch.

Appanna enters, followed by Rani. They carry bundles in their arms. Appanna opens the lock on the front door of the house. They go in.



Appanna : Have we brought in all the bundles?
 Rani : Yes
 Appanna : Well, then, I'll be back tomorrow at noon, keep my lunch ready, I shall eat and go. (6)

[Rani looks at him nonplussed. He pays no attention to her, goes out, shuts the door, locks it from outside and goes away.]

Kurudavva dominates her son despite of her blindness and Kappanna is an obedient son to his mother. Even he has good consent for Rani in gaining the heart of Appanna. So, he rushes very fast on the words of her mother to bring the magical root for Rani.

We can see a good culture and tradition form 'Naga' the king Cobra, it stays in an enormous ant hill nearby Rani's house. It doesn't want to commit adultery intentionally but influenced by the magical root curry which is poured onto the anthill by Rani. That influence has made Naga to get attracted towards Rani. Otherwise we don't see 'Naga' in such a way which started leading an extra marital affair with a human being and that too taking the form of her husband Appanna.

Kanad's typical play 'Nagamandala' deals with the failed relationship between a man and a woman, where the man fails to treat the woman as a wife and at least a human being. Here in the play the focus is on the folk belief and myth of a Cobra.

In the end when she sees the dead Cobra from her tresses, she is not startled. She responds peacefully.

RANI: "Oh poor thing. It is dead..." (44)

She never hesitates in giving an order to her husband that their son has to perform the rituals and funeral rites to the dead cobra stating that her son is given the gift of life by the Cobra.

When discussing socio conditions of the play 'marriage' aspect is also projected in a different manner. The woman protagonist in the play Rani is suppressed by her husband along but unable to give voice to her feelings as she is brought up in such socio-conditions. The 'marriage' is performed between two mismatched persons. Appanna though he has been with a harlot all the years, doesn't leave

his habit even after he got married. He gets a young and beautiful wife but her charms and beauty get wasted as Appanna doesn't pay any attention towards her.

Appanna fails to recognize the real worth of his wife. He doesn't have any bond with his wife even he is newly wedded. He treats Rani, only as a machine or an instrument which cooks for him and maintains the house hold works. He projects himself as a mischievous husband, where Rani depicts herself as an ideal wife who cares for the traditions, relationship and commitment.

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