

# Projection of Female Characters by Girish Karnad's with Reference to His Plays Hayavadana and Nagamandala

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**Abstract-** This paper attempts to bring out the position of women in the plays of Girish Karnad with reference to his plays Hayavadana and Nagamandala. Bringing out the ideas of Karnad on women and his views on their role in the society, this paper examines how he presented the characters of women. With the help of instances taken from the selected plays, this paper gives a clear view of Karnad's mind towards women.

**Index terms-** feminism, patriarchy, courageous, dominating, liberty, strength

## INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad was one of the great Indian dramatists, steadily made successful dramas on myth, folk tales and historical plays. He has marked his success in both written as well as stage performance. His plays serve as a good reference for exploring the feminist writings. Karnad's plays tell different stories in a different plot but everything related to the traditional societal issues. He focuses on the problems faced especially by woman in the society. He gazes at the domestic issues in all his plays and tries to give solutions through the plot. He has mixed several aspects in his plays including the concept of existentialism, epic theatre technique, historical and mythological stories in a folk plot which deals with the contemporary socio-political problems and domestic issues which grabs much attention from the critics as they usually paid much feminist design in his plays.

His portrayal of women characters speaks about his understanding of Indian women in a better way. He has made his female characters subjected to all the critical stages of life especially guiltiness. Almost all his plays are in some way dominated by the female characters in it. He used his full freedom to describe the role of women in his stories. He has introduced

several other techniques of portraying both the traditional and modern archetypal female characters in plays. There are four main varieties of plays written by Girish Karnad and the picturization of women in all these types varies according to the need and plot. In historical plays women are made as subservient characters because during the ancient times women were not subjected to socio-cultural, political and economical issues. This point is well evidenced in his most famous plays *Tughlaq* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. Nayak perfectly says referring *Tale-Danda* as a:

“Historical teleology on social conditions of north Karnataka in the twelfth century A. D. The play projects a socio-religious movement during the time of Kalachurya Dynasty. Karnad has analysed his contemporary Mandir and Mandal movements as an objective chronicler in the ‘historical givens’ of the past” (Nayak 140)

In case of mythological plays, his women are so courageous, dominating and they go to the extent of maintaining extra-marital relationships without even a guilty feeling. *Hayavadana* is a best play to quote of this assumption. In the very beginning of the play the past story of Hayavadana is built only by his mother ‘the princess’. The character of the princess is constructed as the stubborn character here. Whereas in another plot of the same play, Karnad moves the whole plot with the Padmini character who loves Devadatta's soul and Kapila's body. She boldly messed up the condition by changing the heads of both the men. She didn't miss the chance to live with the soul of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. This is in a way an illicit relationship but she justifies it through her arguments. Devadatta never suspected her for the happenings but he fights with Kapila till the end. Padmini never gave her senses to the chaos

she enjoyed her life to the fullest. Even she decides the death of both the men.

PADMINI: They burned, lived, fought, embraced and died. I stood silent. If I'd said, 'yes, I'll live with you both', perhaps they would have been alive yet. But I couldn't say it. I could say, 'yes'. No, Kapila, no, Devadatta. I know it in my blood you couldn't have lived together. You would've had to share not only me but your bodies as well. Because you knew death you died in each other's arms. You could only have lived ripping each other to pieces. I had to drive you to death. You forgave each other, but again, left me out. (176)

She also given liberty to decide the fate of her child whom she claims as the son of both Kapila and Devadatta.

PADMINI (without looking at him): yes, please. My son is sleeping in the hut. Take him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in this forest and tell them it's Kapila son. They loved Kapila and will bring the child up. Let the child grow up in the forest with the rivers and the trees. When he's five take him to the revered Bhramin Vidhyasagara of Dharmaputra. Tell him it's Devadatta's on. (176)

However at the end of the story she gives her child to Bhagavata and decided to die in the funeral pyre of both Kapila and Devadatta. Karnad finally puts the whole weight in the character of Padmini as she is responsible for the tragic end of the story. Kapila helped Padmini and Devadatta in their marriage and so he was portrayed as Hanuman. This is not actually a healthy way to project a woman's character. Padmini's son laughs in hands of Bhagavata for the first time in his life of five years. This shows that Padmini is not even a good mother. Projection of female in such a way is not a healthy portrayal. In a patriarchal society, a woman is supposed to obey the orders made by men in the family but Karnad made Padmini as a decision maker and made the story end up in tragedy. The patriarchy insists that a women should listen to her parents words before her marriage and totally rely on her husband's words after marriage. But in case of Padmini, Karnad breaks that rule and allows Padmini to speak out and take decisions on her own. The following conversation between Padmini and Devadatta expresses her decision taking boldness against her husband. The conversation follows thus'

"Devadatta: But... you will be disappointed.

Padmini : Me? of course not. We'll do as you feel. You remember what the priest said – I'm your 'half' now. The better half! We can go to Ujjain some other time... in another couple of months, there's the big Ujjain fair. We'll go then- just the two of us. All right? We'll cancel today's trip." (29)

There is something that Karnad tried to insist upon through the character of Padmini. Karnad projected her as a woman who longs for perfection, she longed for a perfect husband who is perfect both physically and mentally. She wanted a perfect life that was not given to her even by Goddess Kali. The point to be noted is, even Kali did not give that perfection to Hayavadana and that is evident at the end of the play. Not only Padmini, Karnad also used female chorus in this play. this female chorus has some significance that the story is taking its route only by the decisions taken by the female character. He used this chorus as a symbolic representation of hidden feelings of human mind and also as the situational reference. Female chorus sings while Kapila took Padmini into the hut as,

"Female Chorus:

*The river only feels the  
Pull of the waterfall.  
She giggles, and tickles the rushes  
On the banks, then turns  
A top of dry leaves  
In the navel of the whirlpool, weaves  
A water-snake in the net of silver strands  
In the green depths, frightens the frog  
On the rug of moss, sticks and bamboo leaves, sings,  
tosses,  
Leaps and  
Sweeps on in a rush" (39)*

Karnad's projection of female characters is something fishy and unusual. *Nagamandala* is an exceptional play where he projected women in a patient and sacrificing character. *Nagamandala* is of course a feminist play where he fully spoken about the plights and sufferings experienced by women in Indian society. this play is actually the song of Rani, the protagonist. Naming his female lead as 'Rani' has some significance. Karnad projected Rani as a suppressed and sorrowful woman in her life with her husband. Whereas she was treated as a queen by the cobra that comes to her house in disguise of her husband. Cobra takes care of her in a better way,

consoles her to be strong and courageous. Even though Rani was the main focus in the story, she was again made as the stern follower of patriarchy. She listens to the words of cobra again that is a male. His protagonist also follows traditional rules that are already proposed to make a patriarchal society. Appanna, Rani's husband was really projected as a dominating character who is careless about his life and wife. Rani strives hard to keep up their relationship so she goes to the extend of doing the root trick to her husband.

Though Karnad in some place praises Rani, he speaks about her immaturity too. Karnad presents her as an immature girl who falls for every sweet word spoken by any one. Rani falls even for the cobra that comes to her in disguise every night. She is not mature enough to find the difference between the real Appanna and the disguised Cobra. Karnad projects her as the woman who longs for love and affection. Rani was also subjected to purity test by the village elders while Appanna claims that the child in her womb is not his child. Even after the accusation by her husband, she allows him, that is, the disguised cobra into her room. She again madly believes the words of cobra and decides to do what te cobra advised her to do. She promises that, "Since coming to this village I have held by this hand only two... My husband and... this cobra... (1988: 58)

Karnad allows Rani, at a point of time, to speak against the male dominated society. she shouts about her husband's behaviour at night that is a total contradiction to her in the morning. She says that, "Rani: I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now 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 a chameleon from day to night?" (37)

In such kind of instances, Karnad presents her as a representative of post-modern Indian women who fights for their freedom and strives hard to understand their place in the society. Her move in some instances gives a kind of awareness to question back the patriarchy that forces her to behave as it wishes. But in many instances she was not allowed to let her tongue open. Karnad puts Rani into a situation where she has to prove her chastity as Sita done in

Ramayana. Karnad brings Sita into the readers minds through this scene.

Thus, Karnad through her female characters Rani and Padmini, tried to present the mind of post-modern women who wants modernity but still sticks into the patriarchy. Karnad proved that the women questioning against the patriarchy is fine but sometimes it is that patriarchy that saves her from tragedy.

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