

# Mythical Women Characters of Girish Karnad: A Close Study

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**Abstract-Critics and scholars are of the opinion that almost all the women characters of Girish Karnad are mythical and interesting in nature. In his writings there are different women characters that reflect different intellect and feminine sensibilities. We can explore feminism in the play *The Fire and the Rain*. Girish Karnad has tried to figure out and challenge the notions of patriarchy through different characters in this play. Liberal humanism and feminism have been yoked together to understand true colours of feminism in this play. In almost all the plays of Girish Karnad we can find that there is a kind of dichotomy between women as an object and women as human beings. Karnad is a kind of playwright who understands that in history women were looked merely as an object but the time has come when the world is advocating for equal rights given to women. In this article we are going to uncover mythical women characters of Karnad in a unique way. Women are no more merely subordinates of their male counterparts but they too play a progressive role in society. It has been reflected through mythical women characters of Karnad because these women characters have been given certain freedom to explore themselves by the playwright. The character sketch of Vishakha in *The Fire and the Rain* seems to be a role model of modernism. She is not silent and thus she defies the code of conduct of the society. Similarly in the play *Hayavadana* the central character Padmini explores autonomy and freedom in the society in her own way. She is a bold character and she understands the value of emotions and desires.**

**Keywords:** - Mythical, Feminine, Modernism, Autonomy, Freedom, desire

Looking into the dynamics of mythical women characters of Karnad we find that the playwright has tried to do experiment with the stories of mythology. The main character in Hayavadana who worries about her feelings and desires is Padmini. She defies social norms in order to express and affirm her distinctive qualities. She is not the type of woman who slavishly adheres to social norms. One of the reasons why she only carves for her feelings is that she longs for two

men. Girish Karnad has attempted to demonstrate to us through this persona that women are not always timid and obedient. She is free to observe society and she is not satisfied with the rules of patriarch (Mukherjee 117).

According to Abhishek Kosta, Girish Karnad has attempted to demonstrate us that female consciousness cannot be constrained in any civilised community. The character Padmini is not prepared to abide by the customs and norms of her civilization. The two main male characters in Hayavadana, Kapila and Devadatta, are close friends. Devadatta's wife Padmini is devoted to her husband. Her inability to regulate her emotions is the root of her issue. She adores her spouse, but she also lusts after her husband's friend Kapila's toned physique. She secretly yearns for him, but as she is already married, she is unable to publicly declare her feelings for him. Devadatta her husband is an intellectual person. He is also well-mannered and wise. Padmini desires a blend of her spouse Devadatta and his friend Kapila. Her issue is that no civilised society would tolerate such ambitions. She barely gives a damn about society; all she desires is to get what she wants. Devadatta lacks a muscular body despite having a keen mind. Although Kapila has a strong physique, he lacks the intelligence of his friend Devadatta. Padmini desires to have the finest of both of these men in her life together.

According to Suman Bala, Padmini's quest is that of a contemporary woman caught between two opposing polarities. It is incorrect to assume that modernism equates to moral degradation (Bala 197). It simply means that men and women have equal opportunities. Girish Karnad has attempted to demonstrate to us that women are no longer restricted to living behind four walls and it can be understood through the character sketch of Padmini. They are at the same level with men in nearly every aspect of life. Rani is the character that suffers the most in the play *Nagamandala*. Despite her beauty, she is plagued by the fact that she is a woman

and she feels that her husband is sleeping with another lady. It becomes clear that Rani's spouse is not devoted to her and that their marriage is not founded on love. Everything occurs as a result of social constructs. Matrimony provides women considerable security in a patriarchal society because it is an integral part of who they are. It is one of the causes of women losing their autonomy and personal preferences under the sake of security. The author created two distinct characters, Padmini and Rani. Their distinct life experiences may also account for the differences in their personalities. They now have some room of their own to reflect and progress in their lives and all the credit goes to the dramatist Girish Karnad. Scholars and critics generally agree that nearly all of Girish Karnad's plays have a fine balance between location plot and setting. Rani's husband, Appanna, had extramarital affairs with other women. In a traditional patriarchal society, he is a model of masculine authority. Despite having violated the sanctity of the marriage, he is never questioned in society. It is ironic that he questions his wife. She gets pregnant even though he never shares a bed with her. His masculine authority is triggered, and he gets enraged. Rani, his wife, sobs because she fails to understand her own situation. Rani appears to be the perfect wife at the play's outset because of her lack of doubt. Despite knowing that her husband will be seeing other women, she stays mute. Her identity and uniqueness are crushed in her husband's house. She appears to be enthralled in a home where she is forbidden from asking her husband any questions. It is thus made clear that her husband is a man who views Rani as his property. He never considers her needs in a humane manner. It is beyond his understanding that his wife has sentiments and emotions for him. Girish Karnad has compared her situation to that of a "caged bird". Rani is aware that she must change the way she lives. This raises the question, why are the female characters in Karnad's plays mostly mythical? The majority of the Karnad dramas are either directly or indirectly inspired by Indian mythology, as noted by critics and academics.

He is the type of playwright who recognises that mythology is necessary to fully understand the demands of a progressive society. It might be one of the explanations for Girish Karnad's dual traditional and modern traits. It is debatable among academics and critics whether Karnad is the primary figure who discusses the dilemma and favours modernism over

traditionalism. Time spares no one, so discussing which is better is ridiculous. As time goes on, all of the theories and discoveries become conventional. It's the necessity of time that decides the fortune of any society. Women were not permitted to discuss individuality and autonomy in the past, but time has changed drastically. In modern society women too have their own individuality and freedom. Girish Karnad agrees, arguing that modernism is equally to blame for the society's rapid transformation. Both men and women have new chances in today's world. This may be one of the causes of the inspiration drawn from Indian mythology for Karnad's characters, particularly the female ones. One of the most well-known Romantic writers, William Blake, stated in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that we cannot observe growth or advancement without contradictions. Girish Karnad's plays contain a number of contradictions, which indicates that Karnad is attempting to use his works to illustrate the evolution and advancement of humanity. We need to understand the more general facets of feminism in order to understand the mythical female characters of Karnad. Virginia Woolf attempted to provide us feminism ideas in her landmark essay *A Room of One's Own*. It got Published in 1929. Woolf has addressed social injustice, lack of freedom, and the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society in this essay (Carter 86). She uses a lot of metaphors in her essay. It's amazing to observe how skillfully she has conveyed her opinions using the metaphor of a fish. She further says that a woman must have her own room to live a life of happiness. The idea that a woman is regarded as an object in a culture where men predominate is a matter of discussion. Her responsibilities include taking care of the family's male members and bearing child. Woolf disputes these ideas. Rani's character sketch in *Nagamandala* makes it quite evident that her husband doesn't really care about her. This may be one of the causes of her husband's affair with another woman despite having a wife. Rani is defenceless, like a fish trapped in an aquarium. She is not entitled to investigate her freedom. She continuously thinks about her situation and her problems are never ending because her destiny is tied with the destiny of her husband. Rani is unable to understand the character of her husband. She is tricked by Naga who comes at night and makes love to her. It seems that Rani is like a puppet that revolves round the fabricated plot of Naga. The theme of

adultery and chastity is embedded together in this play. We find both Appanna and Rani guilty of adultery. It is remarkable to find that nobody tries to question Appanna but Rani is exposed in the society. She undergoes a trial and it is ironical. Everybody knows that Appanna visits brothel but his character is not a subject of scrutiny because he is a male. He is free to do whatever he wants whereas Rani is looked down upon because she is a female. Virginia Woolf talks seriously about the rights of women. I am not advocating that adultery is good but I am trying to say that both male and female should have equal rights everywhere. Rani feels tormented because she is unable to understand what is actually happening with her. She is charged of infidelity but later we find that at the climax she attains divinity and Appanna realizes that it is his fault never to understand his wife.

In *Hayavadana* we can find that the playwright has used paradoxes extensively. Devadatta, the husband of Padmini is intelligent as well as handsome. On the other hand, his friend Kapila is not so intelligent like him but he has a well-built body. Padmini is a character who is sensual in nature. She likes the body of Kapila and she always keeps on thinking about him. The whole play becomes complicated when we find that both Devadatta and Kapila are killed and Padmini is granted a boon by Goddess Kali that she can resurrect them if she becomes successful in fixing their heads on their trunks. Padmini becomes confused and in this state of confusion she transposes their heads with their trunks. As a result, Kapila gets the head of Devadatta and Devadatta gets the head of Kapila. The real problem begins from here. A debate starts as to who is the husband of Padmini and it is decided that the head is the supreme commander of the body. After this incident we find Kapila depart to the forest and the couple, Devadatta and Padmini, goes to Dharampur. It is interesting to note that Devadatta attains his originality because head is the supreme commander of the body and Devadatta continues his routine to read and write because he is a scholar. It happens with kaplila also and he also attains his originality. Padmini once again becomes confused because she witnesses all these happenings (Dhanavel 54). This kind of disillusionment shatters the hope of Padmini because she likes the body of Kapila. She admits that everything undergoes a change except her. She goes to meet Kapila in the forest and remarks that she feels that she is the better half of two bodies. It is remarkable

to notice that finally Padmini chooses to follow her passion. She leaves her husband and decides to live with Kapila because she loves him. It again becomes a bone of contention for the two friends and they kill each other to win the love of Padmini. This time Padmini accepts Sati. Thus, we can witness that Karnad has played well with his plot. In this play we find that Padmini is not so weak like Rani of *Nagamandala* (Karnad 54). She is a strong lady and the playwright has given her some personal space. The play seems highly theatrical because the playwright has used appropriate and accurate symbols and images. His sense of irony is praiseworthy. We find in almost all the plays of Karnad that there is a good use of metaphor and simile.

As we are discussing the mythical women characters of Karnad, we should not forget that feminism is closely associated with such characters. The word Feminism has been evolved from a Latin word "Femina" which means the woman. It was in limelight during 1890's. It is interesting to note that the term feminism was coined in 1837 by Charles Fourier. He was a French philosopher. It was initially in use during 1890's in United Kingdom. However, critics and scholars are of the opinion that Mary Wollstonecraft should be considered as the founder of feminism because she has written a book in 1792 entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In this book Mary Wollstonecraft highlights the need to educate women. She considers women as a milestone of development and argues that her importance in the society cannot be neglected. We have seen that through different characters like Rani and Padmini the playwright Karnad has tried to show us that woman should be treated equally in the society. It is important to note that the feminism of Karnad is not different from The Seneca Falls Convention held in 1848. We have already discussed that Girish Karnad was born at Matheran in 1938. The Seneca Falls Convention which we are talking about was held much before the birth of Karnad in 1848. It seems that the playwright was very much aware of the movements of feminism. This might be one of the reasons that in his plays Karnad talks about the treatment of women in a typical patriarchal society. He argues that there must be equality among men and women in a civilized society. The Seneca Falls Convention is one of the major conventions of The First Wave Feminism. In fact, it is considered as one of the major precursors of the First

Wave Feminism which evolved around 1890's and continued till 1960. Few major issues of the First Wave Feminism were very vast like providing legal rights to women which includes right to vote. We can also understand it as women's suffrage movement. Second issue was connected to property and it was highlighted that women also have right to property. Second Wave Feminism starts from 1960 onwards. The world witnessed Miss America Pageant in 1968. From here the issues of Black Feminism came into prominence and it was thought that there must not be any discrimination on the basis of colour. Second Wave Feminism was different from the First Wave because it was radical in nature or temperament. Thus, there was a shift from legal rights of women to family and reproductive rights of women. The main focus of Second Wave Feminism was on office culture of female including their reproductive rights. Thus, the tenets of feminism were broadened in Second Wave Feminism. The basis of such issues was equality between men and women which Girish Karnad also highlights in his plays. It is noteworthy to find that the Second wave Feminism continued till 1980's. Then the literary world witnessed the Third Wave Feminism from 1990's to present time. However, some scholars and critics have also discussed about the Fourth Wave Feminism which emerged from 2010 onwards.

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