

Male-Female Sexuality in Girish Karnad's Naga-Mandala

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Abstract:

In regional drama, the contemporary Indian dramatist Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, vijay Tendulkar are well known. Their dramas present contemporary issues. Girish Karnad in his play Nag-Mandala examines the issue of adultery, chastity and questions the patriarch moral code. Through the heroine of the play Karnad examines the martial life, and Male-female sexuality in Indian society.

Introduction:

Girish Karnad portrays deftly the women characters in his plays, whether Padmini of Hayavadana, Vishakha of The Fire and the Rain, or Rani of Nag Mandal. Through women characters he mainly discusses the marital life, in Indian society, sexuality and adultery.

Rani, is the heroine of the Nag Mandal. The action of the whole play centers around her character- her hopes, desires, misery, happiness and at last her union with her husband. The character of Rani presents the journey of a woman from enslavement to empowerment and from frigidity to sensuality. She begins as a victim of her husband's oppression but ends up as a Goddess.

Rani is brought up in a family where her parents shower love on her. She is treated as 'a queen' and that is why her name is Rani. Her father arranges a suitable match for her and she gets married at a very early age to Appanna who is a rich man without any other family member.

He brings her home but ill-treats her. He flirts with a harlot. He leaves home after lunch everyday and returns only for lunch the next day. He locks her in the house. Rani becomes passive victim of her husband's oppression. She is scared of staying alone in the house. She longs to meet her parents. She starts day-dreaming and talks to herself and escapes from the troubles of her life. At the beginning Rani emerges as the very image of an ideal Indian woman demure and unquestioning.

Rani is an extremely innocent and naïve woman. She is totally ignorant about sex so her husband neglects her. Appanna finds her psychologically and physically mismatch. He can never establish the relation of wife with him and so she is reduced to the status of a housemaid who

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cooks for the husband. But the arrival of Kurudavva, brings ray of hope in her life. She proves to be God Mother for her. Kurrudavva realizes that rani does not even comprehend the meaning of sex. When she asks her, “Has your husband touched you? How can I put it?” she looks blank. Kurrudavva provides her with some magical roots to win over her husband. She mixes it with curry but it turns into poisonous red, so she pours it into the ant-hill where a king cobra lives and the snake turns into her lover. With the ingress of the snake into her life her transformation begins.

Initially Rani is frigid and shy and hates sex. She yearns for love and affection which Naga provides her. Naga explains to her the meaning of sex and tells her that it is a universal phenomenon. He says, “Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows- even the geese! The female begin to smell like the wet earth. And stung by her smell, the king cobra starts searching for his queen.” Gradually Rani grows and matures. Naga cures her frigidity and she starts enjoying erotic pleasures. Every night she anxiously waits for Naga to arrive and wants the night to last forever. His intense and sincere love satisfies her. When she discovers that she is pregnant which is a definite evidence to prove that Naga is not an allusion but reality, she attains a state of heavenly bliss. But Appanna, the real husband, who does not have any physical relation with her, declares her to be a whore and complains to the village elders.

Rani’s character also explores the issue of chastity. No hue and cry is raised when Appanna commits adultery openly, whereas Rani is compelled to face trial. She reminds one of Sita in Valmiki’s Ramayan who has to pass through the test of fire to prove her **infidelity**. Rani has to hold a heated iron and take vow of chastity or she has to put her hands in the boiling oil. As per the instructions received from king Cobra, Rani prefers to take the test by putting her hands in the Ant-hill. She is scared in the beginning but finally she does succeed in taking the test. She confesses swearing by the king Cobra that she has not touched any one of the male sex, except her husband and this snake.

The Cobra does not harm her and she is apotheosized into a divine goddess incarnate. Appanna is instructed by the villages to take her home with respect as she is Devi. Rani, gets her husband, becomes mother of a baby-boy and lives happily.

The character of Rani focuses on the deplorable state of women in India who are neglected by their **husband. For them they are a whore or a Goddess to be kept under lock and key**. The ordinary woman with normal desire i.e. Rani as she is, is rejected by Appanna.

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But Rani's character is criticized for committing adultery too. She has good many reasons to doubt that the Naga is not Appanna but she hesitates because she does not want to lose the heavenly bliss that she has been enjoying at night: "No, I won't. The pig, the whale, the eagle- none of them ask why. So I won't either. But they ask for it again. So I can too, can't I?" Says She. ." she wants only physical pleasure and commits adultery with full knowledge about it. Once at night she sees wounds on Naga's body but at noon when her husband comes she can not find scars on him. She deliberately ignores this.

In the end when she combs her hair a dead Cobra falls out but she is not astonished. She responds calmly, "Oh! Poor thing, it is dead." At last she gives shelter to Naga in her hair and protects it from her husband. Even at the end the story states that Rani must have guessed that the person who made love to her in the beginning was not her husband when she slept with her husband after becoming goddess. The story says, "**No two men make love alike. And that night of the village court, when her true husband climbed into bed with her, how could she fail to realize it was someone new.**"

The character of Rani is **rounded**. Rani emerges from a very weak, frail Indian woman to an extremely bold person who knows the ways of the world. She says, " I was stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a mother, I am not a parrot. Not a cat or a sparrow."

At the end she occupies the highest position of the head of the family. She is elevated to the status of a living goddess an object of worship.

In short the character of Rani shows a journey of a woman from enslavement to empowerment.

Reference:

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