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## Myths in Girish Karnad's Naga-Mandala

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### Abstract

Girish Karnad is a contemporary Indian Playwright who is known for writing plays in Kannada and English. He has written many plays in which Tughlaq, Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala are perhaps his best known works. He draws plots from history, myth and folklore and composes plays on contemporary issues. Tughlaq is a historical play that is based on the life of 14th century historical personality Muhammad bin Tughlaq. It presents political reality of sixties. Hayavadana is based on Transposed Heads of Thomas Mann. Naga-Mandala is his mythical play. Karnad accepts, "Naga-Mandala is based on two oral tales from Karnataka which I first heard several years ago from Professor A. K. Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women -normally older women in the family- while children are being fed in the evening in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults parents on these occasions are also women. Therefore these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as an open system of communication among the women in the family." (Author's Introduction. Karnad Three Plays:16-17) This play is full of mythical elements and this paper will try to find out the applied myths in it.

**Keywords:** Myth, History, Folklore, Communication.

Naga-Mandala presents the position of a woman in a patriarchal society and ambiguous nature of men in matter of chastity. It uncovers the concept of chastity, mindset of virility, sanctity of institution of marriage and futility of patriarchal system. Rani has not committed adultery. It is Appanna who vitiates the sacredness of marriage yet one questions him. Rani who is locked in an empty house and has not come to the contact of another man except her husband Appanna yet all villages raise fingers on her character. It is fact that Naga comes to her every night in the guise of her husband Appanna who makes love with her and makes her pregnant. He gave her everything that Appanna should give her. He gave her a child that every woman wishes for eagerly and made her a mother. Since Rani is hunger of manly love, sex and affection. Appanna deprives her of physical, emotional and psychological need but Naga provides her these things. Karnad here presents Naga as an embodiment of love, compassion and protection. So Rani could not differentiate between the behaviour of Appanna and Naga and willingly surrenders herself to him. In fact, Rani is not culprit, Appanna is faulty who leaving her alone in a locked house, enjoys with a concubine.

Rani is right at her place. She did what a woman should do with her husband yet she faces the wrath of others. Obviously, Naga-Mandala depicts the status, dignity and identity of woman in a male dominated society. Karnad says, " The position of Rani in the story of Naga-Mandala, for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles- as a strange during the day and as lover at night."(Author's Introduction. Karnad Three plays:17)

## Applied Myths:

### The Myth of Naga:

The myth of Naga is very popular in Indian society. It is believed that Naga can assume any shape of his/her desire. Not only Indian scriptures but also Greek and many more affirms the concept of Naga. The Ramayana, The Mahabharata and other literatures are full of the story of Naga. Since Naga is considered as a Devine creature who fulfills the desires of men. Secondly in Indian society, Naga is regarded as a keeper of fertility and for this reason, houses, temple-walls and village shrines are adorned with the images of Nagas. A woman who wishes to bear a child worships him. In Naga-Mandala, Naga consuming the paste of magical root, takes the shape of Appanna and enters into Rani's house. Since Appanna comes to Rani only for lunch at mid-day and goes to his concubine with whom he spends whole day. Naga comes to her at night and talks to her sweetly while Appanna never speaks with her well. Rani is confused by seeing the two unconnected and strange behaviour of her husband. During the day, she finds her husband as a rude, arrogant and insane but at night, a congenial, loving and affectionate. Rani say, " You talk so nicely at night. But during the day I only have to open my mouth and you hiss like a.....stupid snake."(Karnad; Three plays:42)

In the absence of Appanna, Naga gives her emotional support, love and as a result, she becomes pregnant. Rani enjoys his company happily and now she is very glad. She says, " 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."(Karnad; Three plays:51)

But Rani's happiness shatters when Appanna hears of her pregnancy. He drags her to village court where she has to face an ordeal. Here Naga as a savior, defends her sacredness and proves her as a Devine Being in public. Villagers who have gathered to test her now consider her a deity. They all fall at her feet. One Elder orders Appanna, " Spend the rest of your life in her service. You need merit in ten past lives to be chosen for such holy duty. Another Elder" Bless us, Mother. Bless our Children."(Karnad; Three plays:59) In this way, Naga made Rani's life happier and more meaningful. She got everything she wished for, a devoted husband, a child, happy life and a lifelong servant.

## The Myth of Root

The myth of root has been found in various forms in epics and literatures. There are abundant stories of magical herb, fruit and prasad in Indian Mythologies. In this respect, the Yagna-Prasad of the Ramayana is the strongest proof in Indian society. In Naga-Mandala, Kurudavva gives Rani a root and instructs her to use it. Rani according to the instruction, feeds it Appann with milk but does not work on him effectively. Kurudavva gives her same larger root and Rani makes it paste but its colour frightens her. She hesitates to feed it Appanna. She screams in fear, " Oh my God! What horrible mess is this? Blood. Perhaps poison....Suppose something happens to my husband? What will my fate be?"(Karnad; Three play:37) She runs horridly to the tall ant-hill and pours all the paste into it. Inside the ant-hill, there is a King Cobra that consumes the paste and takes the shape of her husband Appanna and starts vising her every night.

## The Myth of Ordeal

The myth of ordeal has a mythical significance. It reminds us the ordeal of Sita in the Ramayana. Indian mythologies are replete with the stories of Ordeal of many characters who have undergone it. In Naga-Mandala, Rani has to undergo an ordeal in order to prove her chastity. Since she has not committed adultery. She has spent time with Naga as a wife. Naga comes to her every night in the guise of her husband Appanna. Rani, assuming Naga as Appanna enjoys his companion and becomes mother. Naga here comes to protect her. He advises her to opt for snake ordeal and suggests her to speak the truth otherwise he will not help her. Elders of village court order her to hold hot iron rod in her hands but she willingly as per the suggestion holds snake from the ant-hill and says, " since coming to this village, I have held by this hand, only two..... My husband and,.....this Cobra, yes, my husband and this Cobra. Except for these two, I have not touched any of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me, if I lie, let the Cobra bite me."(Karnad; Three plays:58)

Naga slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. All villagers fall at her feet and prostrate before her. Obviously and ridiculously the ordeal proves her as a Goddess in them.

## The Myth of the Name of Snake

In Naga-Mandala, Girish Karnad mentions the prevalent belief of Indian society where the name of snakes is not pronounced at night. It is believed that if it is called by its name, it would appear in the house. It is called by its symbolic names as rope, insect and animal.

Naga: What ? A Cobra.

Rani: (Silencing him) Shh! Don't mention it.They say that if you mention it by name at night, it comes into the house.....

Naga: All right. Suppose. A Cobra comes into this house.

Rani: Dont't! Why are you tempting fate by calling that unmentionable thing by its name.....May God

bless our house and spare us that calamity.(Karnad; Three plays:43)

### The Myth of Raat-Rani Flower.

The myth of Raat-Rani flower is deep rooted in Indian society. It is concept that snakes love and smell Raat-Rani flower at night and it lingers around it, and people are not allowed to go to near the tree. In Naga-Mandala, Karnad mentions the fragrance of Raat-Rani flower.

Rani: There it is.....The smell of the blossoming night queen! How it feels the house before he comes!

How it welcomes him! God, How it takes me, sets each fibre in me on fire! (Karnad; Three plays:49)

Thus, Naga-Mandala is a mythical play. It contains a lot of myths that are prevalent even today. The myths of Naga, the magical herb, ordeal, the names of snake and smell of Raat-Rani are very popular in Indian society. Karnad used the myth of Naga as a central character in the play and all other myths in effective way to convey the message of the play. The myth of Naga made play very popular and living. Masterly, "Karnad has deployed all devices used with the folk-tale and mythical pattern, like the imputation of superhuman qualities to human and non-human, the use of magic elements, extraordinary ordeals. The Flames, the Naga taking Appanna's form, the magic root, the imputation of divinity to a woman-all conform to the needs of folk-tale and myth."(Mukherjee:185)

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