

Introduction to *Nagmandala* by Girish Karnad

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Girish Karnad's 'Nagmandala' is published in 1990. It is originally written in Kannada and later translated in English. 'Nagmandala' effectively raises the issue of the exploitation of women. 'Nagmandala' is based on two oral folk tales from Karnataka state. Karnad has heard them from his friend, guide and guru Prof. A.K.Ramanujan. During his stay at the University of Chicago as visiting professor, he wrote it. Then he translated it into English and produced at the University theatre at Chicago. Mythical stories about 'Naga' who can assume shape of any man or woman are available in different versions.

'Nagmandala' begins with a prologue. In the prologue, there is a man who is 'Sutradhar'. He tells the audience that he is required to keep awake for the whole night to save his life. At that time, he sees some flames entering into the ruined temple and one of the flames starts telling the story of Rani.

Rani is the heroine of the play who is a very innocent girl. To prove her chastity, she has to go through snake ordeal. She comes out of the ordeal unscathed. Then she is called as 'divine' and accepted as 'goodness' by the people of the town as well as her husband Appanna. In this play, Karnad exposes the male chauvinism as well as oppression and injustice done to women under the patriarchal structure. Patriarchal structure has invented and accepted 'chastity' as a value. It is expected that, everyone should follow it. Especially for women, it is a kind of compulsion to observe the value faithfully. It has a very powerful cultural value. The women

characters in literature who observe this value faithfully are glorified by the writers. If any woman violates these values she is looked down upon. Every man and woman or mother and father teaches their daughters to obey the values and norms set by society. Amongst these values, chastity is considered to be of great importance. For women, chastity is more important than life. They can at times sacrifice their life for chastity because society respects and honours only chaste women. To prove their chastity, they tolerate any kind of injustice, physical harassment and violence done to them by their husbands.

Rani is the only daughter of her parents. She gets married to Appanna. Appanna takes her home when she reaches womanhood. She arranges for his bath as well as serves him lunch. After lunch, he locks her into the house and goes to his concubine. Being alone in the home, her condition becomes miserable. She is not mentally matured and craves for parental love and affection. She is mentally tortured in this way. When for lunch, Appanna comes to home, at that time also, she talks only a few words and tells her.

Appanna : Look, I don't like idle chatter. Don't question me. Do as you are told and won't be punished. (Finishes his meal, gets up) be back tomorrow for lunch.

(N.M. – P. 7)

When kurudavva and kappanna comes to Rani and talk affectionately with her, Appanna does not like even that.

Appanna: she won't talk to anyone. And no one need talk to her. (NM.p.14)

Later he brings a dog so that no one will come again to meet her. It shows that Appanna does not want Rani to talk to others or come in contact with others so that she will not get information about him.

At one side , he enjoys extra-marital sex, but does not allow her to enjoy even the affection of others . He is so merciless that he cannot understand her need of Affection and love for the growth of her mind . she is confined to the house and household work. This shows that how women's talents are reduced to housework. Rani is afraid of escaping into a fantasy world created by her Rani tells kurudavva:.

Rani: I am so frightened at night, I can't sleep a wink. At home , I sleep between father and Mother. But here, alone – Kurudavva can, you help me, please? Weill you please send word to my parents that I am, like this, here? Weill you ask them to free me and take me home?) Would jump into a well –if only) could-

(NM – p.11)

The house of Appanna symbolizes a house where a newly wedded bride comes and there is no one who can understand the problems, difficulties of the girl and left alone to face them. Emotional support and love is the need of every girl who leaves the parents house and comes to her husband's, it is by her husband firstly that she expects the understanding of her feelings and emotions. Though Appanna cannot complete his duties of being a husband, Rani is a typical wife who does not want to harm her husband. She even pours the curry mixed with the root paste out, in the anthill, so that it should not create any harm to the health of her husband, Appanna is a typical husband, who beats her for such a small thing as going out of the house. He is a male chauvinist. He believes that whatever he thinks and does, is always right and he has the right to do so.

When Naga starts coming to meet Rani, at night, Rani gets astonished by his behaviour. She cannot understand how a rude person will behave so gently with her. Even when Naga kills Dog and Mongoose, he has scars on his body and her husband

Appanna when comes at home during day, he has no scars. She realizes it but does not ask question either to Naga or to Appanna because both have told her not to ask questions. Questioning her husband is made a taboo. In the patriarchal system, women are taught to listen to their husbands. They have the right to take the decision and women are expected to accept it. The same thing happens with Rani. Rani mutely follows the instructions given to her by Appanna and Naga without any question. She accepts the duality of her husband because what she needs is love and affection which she gets at least at night.

When Appanna discovers that Rani is pregnant, he gets infuriated. He kicks her and curses her.

Appanna:- Aren't you ashamed to admit it. You harlot? Locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is, who did you go to with your sari off? (NM- p.33)

It is very surprising that Appanna has an extra. Marrital relationship and yet he expects faithfulness from Rani. It questions the patriarchal moral code which demands faithfulness of a woman to her husband but not from husband to his wife. Appanna is openly engaged in adultery. He is not even ashamed of it. The people know about it. But nobody objects him Nobody believes in the innocence of Rani. They do not ask questions to Appanna, about his extra-marital relationship with a harlot. No one asks him why he has not given the rights of a wife to Rani. The partiality of the elders is exposed. The elders who are doing justice do not ask questions to Appanna. It is shows the discrepancy between our social and legal system.

Joshipura Pranav writes,

“The name Appanna means ‘any man’ and it is a way comment on any man who tries to enforce chastity on his wife, wife he himself indulges in extra-marital relationships.”

(Joshiyura Pranav p.260)

Even Naga also suppresses Rani’s reason and intuition so that his identity not be revealed. He was patriarchal authority.

Naga: (seriously) I am afraid that is how it is going to be. Like that during the day. Like this at night. Don’t ask me why?

Rani: I won’t. (NM-(p.23)

As well as, he tells her not to go out of the room when he comes and goes.

Naga: Listen, Rani. I shall come home everyday twice. At night and of course again at mid day. At night, wait for me here in this room. When I come and go at night, don’t go out of this room, don’t look of the window whatever the reason. And don’t ask me why. (NM-p.25-26)

It shows how the power in the patriarchal society, enables the men to suppress the rationale and intellect of women and make them remain ignorant so that they get the freedom to do whatever they want. The order of Naga is followed by Rani so faithfully that she never comes to know the real identity of Naga.

In this manner we find the mythological use in contemporary sense in Karnad’s *Nagmandala* and throws light on patriarchal nature of Asian Societies.