

## CHARACTER DELINEATION IN GIRISH KARNAD'S NAGA-MANDALA

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**Abstract:** GirishKarnad, one of the prominent playwrights of Independent India is a kannada writer who took to play writing inspired by the plays enacted in the form of 'Yakshagana'.Yakshagana becoming quaint (unusual, old fashioned) he embraced the theatre.

This paper presentation is on "Character Delineation in GirishRughunathKarnad'splay Naga-Manadala(1988)". The play was written based on the oral tales that GirishKarnad heard from his mentor, guru and friend Prof. A. K. Ramanujan. These tales are normally narrated by elderly women at feeding or bed time for kids. It is the story of a typical Indian bride who struggles to win the heart of her husband at any cost.On the advice of an elderly lady,Kurudavvashe was to administer the love potion, but decides against it due to emotional conflicts. She throws the curry mixed with potion on the ant-hill which was consumed by King Cobra-Naga which has the power to assumethe human form (husband) and visits her at nights.She is so perplexed to see the dual personality of her husband as a stranger byday who is arrogantand lover by night who is caring. She becomes pregnant. Her husband orders her to under-go the'Snake Ordeal'to prove her chastity just like Sita in 'the Ramayana'. The ordeal transforms her being into a 'Goddess'. The 'denouement' is 'happy ending'. The portrait of characters is in patriarchal system. It is the concoction of history and myth and combination of two stories. The first story is about the lamp flames which gather in a ruined temple in the village to gossip about the households they reside in. The second story is about Naga who visits the bride - Rani every night due to the consumption of love potion poured out by Rani into his Ant-Hill. The play is all about socio-cultural issues.

**Key words:** Naga-Mandala, ordeal, potion, conundrum, revelationetc.

**Introduction:** GirishRaghunadhKarnad, renowned Indian Play-wright, actor, writer and movie directorin kannada language was born on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1938 at Matheran, Maharashtra.He had his education in Marati and did his Degree from Karnataka University. He secured Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy, Polictical Science and Economicsat Lincoln and Magdalen Colleges in Oxford, London. Since his adolescence, he is anardentlover of Yakshagana which paved the way for his writings.He belongs to the formative generation of Indian Playwrights. After Independence, along with others, shaped the Indian theatrecollectively.He is the recipient of Padmashshri, Padmabhushan and Jnanpith Award (1998) the prestigious literary honour conferred in India.Some of his Kannada plays were translated into English.

The first play of GirishKarnad, 'Yayati' (1961) being a huge success was translated into many Indian languages.Tughlaq (1964) his best loved play,brought him name and fame and arrayed him in the line of the best playwrights. He rendered his voice for Dr.APJ Abdul Kalam, former president of India forthe audio book of Kalam'sautobiography-'Wings of Fire'.His three plays - Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala and Tughlaq are the most popular ones. This is a study on*Naga-Mandala*(Play with a Cobra).

Naga-Mandala is related to the ritual of serpent, pictorial drawing of a serpent on the floor and the union of male and female snakes.The scene in the Play opens with the protagonist, Rani, a young brideand her rich husband, Appanna entering into

Appanna's house. While entering, he asks her whether they carried their entire luggage by using words sparsely. After that he rushes out of the house and locks it from outside by ordering her to keep his lunch ready for the next day as she stands perplexed. The portrait of characters is in patriarchal social order, where male members of the family are given utmost priority in all walks of life. Whatever they say, it is a law which has to be obeyed without being questioned. Ladies are treated as weaker sex. She was just like a 'caged bird' without having an exposure to outside world. During Kurudavva's first visit, she requests her to inform her parents to take her away.

Being alone,Rani goes into imagination and sleeps. The next day, she wakes up in a fright and goes into kitchen for preparation. At lunch, when her husband comes for food,she tries to speak about her fear of being alone, but, he doesn't heed to her words. The days rolled by, one day, Kurudavva a blind lady, friend of Appanna's mother comes to her rescue carried by her son,Kappanna. The love and responsibility of son towards his mother is perfectly depicted and carried out by Kappanna.He carries his mother on his back all the time.Kurudavva treatsAppanna as her son though he doesn't give any importance to her. Kurudavva and her son are treated as 'meddlers' by Appanna. Kurudavva comes to set right the things after coming to know about Appanna's visits to his concubine.Kurudavvapresents Rani with love roots which were given to her by a mendicant. The root when ground and mixed with

food is served to a person, the consumer falls in love with the giver. Kurudavblessees Rani and as she is leaving, bumps into Appanna. Appanna decides to have a dog at home to check intruders.

That day, Appanna wishes to have milk instead of lunch. So, Rani mixes the love-root paste in the milk and gives it to Appanna, as soon as he consumes it, swoons and falls at the threshold by leaving the least chance of closing the door. Rani sits there wailing. Regaining consciousness, groggily he asks for water, she splashes a pot of water on his face, slowly he staggers up, washes his face, pushes her in again and locks the door from outside before leaving. At midnight, Kurudavva comes to find out the effect of the love root, learning that it did not have the desired effect she gives Rani the other big piece to be made into a paste and mixed with food items.

The next day when Appanna arrives and goes for a bath, she added the love-root paste to the curry being cooked, there was a sudden explosion which froze her to death. She slaps herself for her evil thoughts and decides not to serve it to her husband as it may harm him, pours out the curry into the Ant-Hill in the court-yard. Her idea is not to befall any harm to Appanna but to gain his attention and love. Engrossed, she doesn't observe a Cobra following her from the ant-hill though the dog which was brought by Appanna starts barking. When her husband returns from the bathroom and enquires about the barking and her whereabouts she doesn't respond. He slaps her hard and he doesn't even look at her even though she collapses. As usual, he locks the door and leaves.

When it was dark, the Cobra (Naga) enters the house through the drain in the bathroom, assumes the form of Appanna, husband of Rani and goes near her and caresses her. Rani wakes up with a start. He speaks and behaves in such a wonderful manner that melts her heart. Naga says, "I am not a mongoose or a hawk that you should be so afraid of me. Good. Relax. Tell me about your parents (pg. 271)". Finally, Rani relaxes on Naga's shoulders and sleeps. In the morning, Naga lays her down gently, turns into his original form and slithers away. Later, when Rani wakes up, she's in a dilemma whether the night's scene is a dream or reality. She freezes when Appanna comes for lunch with all distaste on his face.

At night, when the dog starts barking she tries to decipher, what is happening but of no use as it's pitch dark. She returns to her bed when the silence restores. She hears the foot-steps, as Naga enters. She sulks and complains about his split personality during the day and night time. But Naga requests not to ask anything about that. Rani is anxious/desperate for his presence and asks him not to 'spin riddles' (Pg. 272). When Rani observes some blood stains on his cheek, she goes to get the ointment given by her

mother, which is kept in the mirror box and opens it. Before Naga can move away, Rani sees his reflection in the mirror. She shrieks and screams in fright when she sees a snake in the place of her husband. With lightning speed, Naga pulls her away from the mirror and holds her in his arms as he shuts the box. But, she was so terrified to utter the word 'snake' thinking that it would enter into the house if she mentions it at night time. It speaks about superstitious beliefs. After wards, she says, "Let it. I don't feel afraid any more, with you beside me" (pg. 273). It shows the mentality of a loving wife. When she touches his wounds, she shivers by the touch of cold blood. They also talk about the mesmerizing looks of a snake by saying, "The cobra simply hooks the bird's eyes with its own sight. The bird stares-and stares-unable to move its eyes.....It stands fascinated.....Then the snake strikes and swallows the bird" pg.274).

On other occasion, when Naga speaks about Rani's parents, "Good! Our daughter is following nicely in our footsteps" (pg.275). Rani retorts saying that he need not be answerable to anyone about her and her parents are not like dogs. Next, Naga speaks about frogs croaking, tortoise singing, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows and even geese and how King Cobra searches for its mate. He uses all words related to snake. She wonders a lot and teases him for the skill of conversation at night but day time "Goats have to be sacrificed and buffaloes slaughtered to get a word out of you in the mornings (Pg. 276)". Naga also cautions her, "At night, wait for me in this room. When I come and go at night, don't go out of this room, don't look out of the window---whatever the reason. And don't ask me why (pg. 277)." The way he draws lines around her is like 'Lakshmana Rekha', she succumbs to him and readily accepts whatever he says. It is all out of love and respect that she has developed towards her husband. When their conversation is in progress, Kurudavva and Kappanna arrive outside. As usual, Kappanna lowers her down and sits under the tree. Kurudavva stumbles over the dog, feels the lock on the door and when Kappanna is called, he hears footsteps near the bathroom and expects Appanna to emerge out. To his amazement, Kappanna sees a Cobra and yells out in fright, "Snake! Snake! Cobra". He picks up Kurudavva from ground and tries to run away. But, she stops him from running as the snake is not chasing them. Due to that commotion, Rani comes to the window and finds Kurudavva who in turn knows about the progress in the situation and at last advises her to 'burn incense in a ladle and stick it into the drain' to keep the reptiles out and goes away.

In the afternoon, when Appanna comes home for lunch, finds the dead dog with marks of snake bite. He enquires Rani if she had heard any sound at night and confirms that there might have been a big fight

until the dog succumbed to death. The death of the dog infuriated Appanna. So, the next day, he brings mongoose. It is also lasted only for one day. There might have been a 'tougher fight'. "Its mouth was full of blood. There were bits of flesh under its claws. Bits of snakeskin were found in its teeth" (pg. 281). Rani fainted when she saw the dead mongoose. From that night, Naga does not visit Rani for fifteen days. She spends nights wailing, crying and pining for him. When Naga visits Rani with partly healed wounds, she applies ointment and tends him. She doesn't ask him anything. She feels happy for his return. There are some qualities which have to be learnt by today's brides from her. She was sure that Appanna did not have scars when he came in the afternoon. When Naga comes, she is able to feel the fragrance and make love.

After a few months, when Rani informs Naga about her pregnancy, she doesn't find any traces of happiness on his face. Instead, he advises her to keep it secret as long as possible. She doesn't understand anything. "Scowls in the day. Embraces at night. The snarl in the morning unrelated to the caress at night. But day or night, one motto does not change: Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you (pg. 283)." The mentality of male in the Patriarchal system is clearly seen here. They do not bother to understand their counterparts. When the scene changes to mid-day, Naga becomes Appanna. He pushes her to the floor and kicks and beats her by calling her 'harlot, slut, whore' etc. after knowing that she is a pregnant. The brutality and male dominance is at its peak. Neither of them observes Cobra watching them through the window. By this we can understand the love, affection and concern that the snake has towards Rani.

Appanna drags Rani out and picks up a huge stone to throw on her. Cobra comes to her rescue by hissing and when Rani yells, 'Cobra', Appanna throws the stone on the snake, but it withdraws instantly. Rani uses the moment to run into the house and locks herself in. Appanna bangs on the door and goes out to the Village Elders. He complains to the Village Heads and says he never touched or slept with her. Yet, she is a pregnant. He requests them to give judgement regarding her infidelity (adultery, disloyal, unfaithfulness). Appanna who ran around harlots, did not think of purity of his character, but expects his spouse to be smudge less. He goes to the extent of calling for the attention of Village Panchayat. Though male domination is seen in Naga also, love and affection are uppermost. He maximizes his efforts to make her happy and does justice to Rani. He does not want her suffer because of him.

The same night, when Naga visits Rani, in the discussion, he suggests her to prove her innocence by 'Snake Ordeal' and warns her to speak the truth. On

the day of judgement, one of the Village Heads asks her to vow by 'holding a hot iron rod in her hand or plunge hand in hot oil' but not to take the risk of snake ordeal. The huge congregation does not like the idea. This reflects the mob mentality and dangerous superstitions in the name of 'honour'. When Rani progresses towards the ant-hill, the Cobra rears its head and the crowd shrieks back in terror, so also Rani. When Kurudavva comes there in search of her son, Kappanna, Rani tries to seek her help. Kurudavva doesn't heed to her words as she is worrying about her son. Relation between mother and son is evident here. Finally, Rani in her frustration decides to end her life by the kiss of Cobra instead of being tortured by her husband though she was innocent. She 'goes to the ant-hill, plunges her hand into it, pulls the Cobra out' and says, "Since coming to this village, I have held by this hand, only two.....

My husband and ..... And this Cobra".

Yes, my husband and this King Cobra. Except for these two. I have not touched any one of the male sex. .... if I lie, let the Cobra bite me. (pg. 292)"

The Cobra slides up her shoulder, coils around her neck like a garland and spreads its hood over her head. The crowd sees a 'Goddess' in Rani and makes her sit in a palanquin with Appanna, and the couple is taken in a procession to their house. Village Elders advise Appanna to spend rest of his life 'in the service of Rani-Goddess' as he is the chosen instrument for the revelation of her divinity.

Naga plays a pivotal role in Naga-Mandala. The way 'he speaks, imploring Rani to turn to his line of thoughts, the way of rescuing her from her husband when he was throwing a big rock, the way, he suggests her to go for 'snake ordeal', warning her to speak only truth, trying his level best to see her go through the ordeal in a blessed manner' impresses the readers. Even at the end, when he sees Rani in happy state of mind with her family, though he feels tormented, he decides to be with her by staying in her locks.

Baffled and mortified Appanna falls at her feet and requests her to forgive him. She gently takes him in her arms and both of them talk to each other in a gentle manner. Every night, there might be a conundrum for Rani as "No two men make love alike". Rani could bring change in Appanna's concubine who in turn becomes the life-long servant for Rani. The couple lived happily ever after with the child.

After a few days, when Naga wants to see Rani, it takes human form, enters her bed-room, sees sleeping Rani with her husband and child, recoils in sudden anguish but subsides and becomes the size of her tresses to hide in it and play. Suddenly, when Kurudavva is calling for her son, Kappanna, Appanna

feels it like his mother's call and gets up. Rani feels heaviness in her head and asks her husband to comb through her hair. They find a dead snake. Appanna utters words of gratitude and praises her long hair that saved them. Rani requests Appanna to give it a ritual cremation and their son should light the pyre and every year on the same day, their son should perform the ritual to commemorate its death. Her wish is granted. Rani bows down to the dead snake and presses it to her cheek.

The other way of ending the story is-when Naga comes to Rani, sees her family and goes into her hair. Rani suddenly sits up and moans holding her head and requests her husband to comb through her hair. They find a small live cobra writhing on the floor. When her husband goes out of room to get a stick,

Rani softly asks Cobra to climb into her hair and stay there safe, and slowly, she can get used to it. She pats her hair and says, "This hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, forever(pg.300)". In that way, the snake is saved. The couple lead a blissful life there-after with their son.

Contradiction of superstitious beliefs on one side and love and care on other side co-exists in the story. The maximum extent of justification is done by the playwright while drawing different caricature. The language he uses is simple but abundant in meaning. The scenes are picturesque which makes the reader to have reels before them and the style adopted by GirishKarnad is quite captivating which doesn't allow reader to blink. If we have to evaluate the characters, both Rani and Naga, score equal praise.

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