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# Redefining Feminine Sensibility in Girish Karnad's Selected Plays: The Fire and the Rain and Naga-Mandala

Seema Jaysi

## ABSTRACT

Feminine word is related to women or girl and it's considered suitable for them. The word feminine is used for the inner units of the self and sensibility in the fragrance of an artist's personality. It means an artist's (women) is identified and distinguished by their sensibility that is self- identity. Feminism is used to describe political, cultural or economic movement aimed for establishing equal rights and legal protection for women in society. Girish Karnad's plays are very significant from feminist point of view. His plays ridicule the unjust values of the patriarchal society which does not care for the feelings of a woman and considers her a sub- ordinate that exists only to serve him with absolute loyalty. The plays – The Fire and the Rain and Naga-Mandala these elements are all there to serve the purpose of the dramatist. The paper highlights the pathetic condition under gone by the women characters in selected play of Girish Karnad. The paper present Girish Karnad effort to redefine the position of women in the society that has always limited their opportunities. His feminist sensibility is allowing his heroines to struggle for their identity with respect. He presents truth about human life and emotions contained in ancient Indian stories with alteration of social or moral values and modern norms.

**Keywords:** feminine, patriarchal society, self- identity, pathetic condition, social and moral values.

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# Redefining Feminine Sensibility in Girish Karnad's Selected Plays: The Fire and the Rain and Naga-Mandala

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*Feminine word is related to women or girl and it's considered suitable for them. The word feminine is used for the inner units of the self and sensibility in the fragrance of an artist's personality. It means an artist's (women) is identified and distinguished by their sensibility that is self- identity. Feminism is used to describe political, cultural or economic movement aimed for establishing equal rights and legal protection for women in society. Girish Karnad's plays are very significant from feminist point of view. His plays ridicule the unjust values of the patriarchal society which does not care for the feelings of a woman and considers her a subordinate that exists only to serve him with absolute loyalty. The plays – The Fire and the Rain and Naga-Mandala these elements are all there to serve the purpose of the dramatist. The paper highlights the pathetic condition undergone by the women characters in selected play of Girish Karnad. The paper present Girish Karnad effort to redefine the position of women in the society that has always limited their opportunities. His feminist sensibility is allowing his heroines to struggle for their identity with respect. He presents truth about human life and emotions contained in ancient Indian stories with alteration of social or moral values and modern norms.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The word 'Feminism' comes from French word 'Feminism' means 'of the female sex' or 'Mature Woman'. The feminism is a cultural structure of

marginality in relation to patriarchal orthodox society. Its origin is the fact that in all societies which divide the sexes into different cultural, economic or political spheres. Women are always referred in sub- ordinate position as objects or show piece where men are treated as subject which is always argumentative in nature. In broadly, we can say that feminism to consider as the social relation with reference to patriarchy and gender- bias. It is a critical theory aimed at analysis gender in relation to the true position of women in society. Feminism is a women's movement which struggle or aim for equal right for women and men involving in a fair competition with male dominated society. However, this movement has, to face many challenges different issues like stereotype sex role, politics of patriarchal system etc. Hole and Levine point out that "the socially unequal position of women throughout history is not the result of biology, but is due to the value which society has placed at any given time on the biological differences between the two sexes"<sup>1</sup> (Bhagwat, p.30) According to Janet Richards, "The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regardless as continuing Feminism"<sup>2</sup>(Janet, p.03).

The play 'The Fire and the Rain', (1998) is the most successful play, based on the myth of 'Yavakri' from the *Mahabharata*. It is an English trans-creation of a play in Kannada with the title "Agni Mattu Male" (1994- 95) with his own playwright. In play, the writer show different feminist issues which include the socio- political, role of womanhood, sex role, identity, race,

liberation and reflection of socially imposed values on women in a diverse manner. Vishakha and Nittilai are two major female characters pushed into the tangled network of the action, controlled by the male domination in the play. The study of the characters of Vishakha and Nittilai demands the analysis of belonging to two different social-cultural statuses in society. Karnad, through the character of Vishakha, openly criticize the typical image of a women constructed by the society where a women is expected to remain 'silent' or 'dumb' as an object of suppression. Karnad thinks nothing is wrong in extramarital affairs of married women and he boldly shows extramarital relationship in his most plays. In an interview with Tutun Mukherjee, when he says, "I used to know a married woman once who positively blossomed after she had an extra marital affair"<sup>3</sup> (Mukherjee, p.43). So, he wants his reader to understand that every human being has desires not only men, but a woman too has desires which should be given an equal opportunity in the society, without granting cheats in masculine system.

In this play, the two women characters Vishakha and Nittilai, the innocent women who were victimized and subjected to tremendous pain, insult, suffer from gender injustice which gradually helped them to be bewildered and supplicating into strong, bold and rational women. Vishakha, a Brahmin girl is married to Paravasu, sage Raibhya's elder son in a high caste Brahmin family. After one year, Vishakha's married life became joyless and companionless and she falls easily to the hand of the male persecution and loneliness torments who wish (seamlessly) explore her body as an experiments or even worse. Vishakha affirms, "There was no happiness in that exploration as we experimented with our bodies. He used me as an instrument for search; I didn't know what the search was for. I yielded to him and let my body be turned inside out, as he did his own. I didn't know whether it was a mystical or spiritual search for something which could not be defined. Only the sense pervaded the air"<sup>4</sup> (The Fire and the Rain, p.68). Then Nittilai is a virtuous and beautiful tribal girl belongs to a lower caste family which shows

women are equally subjected to harsh behavior, displacement and inevitable victims beyond social order as patriarchal system denies the backgrounds of women's social status. Vishakha's openly objection against being treated as an instrument of exchange between men as she had to meet the expectation to fulfill the sexual desire of both her husband Paravasu and her former lover Yavakri. Vishakha, expresses her feeling, "My husband and you! How different the two of you are! He didn't leave even a pore of my body unexplored- and you think that a women is only a pair of half-formed breasts" (p.68). Nittilai also has to face many challenges to create place for herself within her own society although being low caste tribal community. It doesn't matter whether a woman belongs to which class or caste but there is little chance for women to escape the suffering of the gender-bias. Karnad makes a very clever use of Nittilai character who courage to challenges the oppression imposed upon her by the violent and male dominant subjects. Nittilai is frank, bold and fearless girl. She is a fearless critic of Brahmanism and rationally exposes its deceitfulness, hypocrisy and opaqueness. She proudly quotes what her father says; "These high-caste men are always glad enough to bed our women but not to wed them" (p.60). She is criticizing of the secretiveness of high-caste Brahman. As a reformer Karnad wants to reform his society for which he has uncovered the hypocrisy, double standard and hollowness of the Brahmins who always held the highest position in society. As a social reformer Nittilai asks very brave questions to Yavakri who claims to earn pursuit of knowledge. She says that she would ask just two questions about his Universal Knowledge. "First, can he make it rain? And, second, can he predict the hour of his own death?"(p.62) At this point Nittilai's thinks, all knowledge is fruitless if it doesn't lead to the well-being of the people.

Vishakha is another revolutionary character Karnad has portrayed. She is a passionate person but her personal life is ruined and left to suffer alone, homeless and without any support to flower in her youthful age. "Women were less valued than man"<sup>5</sup> (Kosta, p.200). Vishakha

becomes the victim of the power struggle among the male dominate characters of upper-class bigotry to which she gradually appears more intensely conscious to control their fates. Now time allowed her to take revenge on Yavakri, in his unpleasant plan which she came to know that Yavakri, in his obsession of desire for revenge, molests her to retort the misbehavior done to his father, by her husband's family. Vishakha thinks that she has been used by Yavakri as instrument, weapon of vengeance and Universal Knowledge that he attained couldn't help him to possess noble idea. So, it's time now to take final step to save her family from giant Yavakri when she pours out the sanctified water from Yavakri's kamandalu. Vishakha empties the water. Vishakha starts emptying Yavakri's kamandalu by pouring the water out, calmly and slowly. Yavakri's looks at her and shouts. (p.76) Yavakri has to become the fall guy (scapegoat) of her treachery which exemplifies her intellectual presence of mind. She does not forgive Yavakri even when he cries out: "I love you, Vishakha. I have not looked at another woman in my whole life. Is it my fault that you happened to marry Paravasu?" (p.76) Hence, Yavakri is killed by Brahma Rakshasa as she takes her revenge and now realizes her strength or full potential to free from abused enslaved sexuality.

Rani, the female protagonist of the play 'Naga-Manadala', as her names itself justifies she is beautiful and looks like a princess. Karnad describes her personality as "Queen of the whole wide world. Queen of the long tresses" (Naga-Mandala, p.56). She was married with Appana Rani feel happy for her new life starts with husband but her happiness was not for a long time. The day entered her husband house she was treated like a maid-servant for which she is thrashed in tears. And Appana has enjoys openly extra-marital affair with a bazaar harlot. He locks her in the alone house where she lives a life without any hope and identity. Rani is neglected by her husband Appana and the rights of a wife are given to that concubine. At the starting Rani appears as the image of an ideal Indian woman bashful and unquestioning just as the ensign of 'subordinate' where Rani is looked

in her own husband house. She obeys her husband order like a dumb. Women in India are taken for granted as men have failed to understand that she too has emotion and feeling. She is exploited easily because she is an innocent girl and no one care to ask for her sentiments. In the alone house of her husband, Rani is locked-up "like a caged bird?" (p.88) symbolizes the chain of restrictions placed around women, which denies ever her legal rights and blocks her natural growth.

Presently ,Rani realizes the importance of self-identity that awaits another point of view as though it seems Karnad is giving a twist to these – old custom by portraying Rani's resolve to get release from the oppression of these situation. This way Karnad's seems to legalise the sexual intercourse between human and inhuman world that provide enjoyment and peace. In fact Karnad ask question and expose the problem of the identity of women that provide him a space to tackle the women issues. The story starts with Rani who for the start of new married life from complete sincere to fulfillment of experience to assert her identity. It is at the instruction of Kurudavva, an old blind women is a close friend of Appanna's mother. She offers Rani magic root that is a powerful love potion. With the help of that magic root, she finds Naga (King Cobra) mythical snake falls in love with Rani. Naga provides the role of passionate lover to give the sexual pleasure to Rani.

Karnad locates the complicated suspense of Rani's circumstance which ultimately helps her to break- out of the moral codes imposed by society. She also wants a male partner in her life with whom she desire for love and happiness. Her inner urge remains repressed and at any cost she has to fulfill her sexual desires with the first appearance of Naga, Rani gets faith and commitment in her body. She feels heavenly marital joy or happiness in company of Naga that become a wonderful world for her. By which Karnad gives a twist to the Indian tradition. Naga who become the form of Appanna and starts visiting her during the night whose love helps her to forget the demonic world of her cruel husband. Her capability to recognize her own selfness leads

her place or value to acquire a subject status beyond the status of male. She looks to be a free woman who shows the dare to overcome the model of gender-bias society. The Cobra- a passionate lover Naga, who fulfills the wish of his beloved Rani with gift of motherhood, finally has to sacrifice his life for the sake of love." Naga presses Rani's hair to his body" (p.96). Whatsoever the special care and love she doesn't get from her husband in real world, Rani gets it from Naga. In the presence of Naga, she starts to feel in safe hand, happy and comfortable thus breaking her isolation when she says to Naga, "Let it come. When you're there by my side, I don't care" (p.76).

Rani gets to experience the wedded bliss in the company of her lover Naga. Further, she forces Appanna who represents patriarchal male-dominance in his misbehavior to accept the reality of his wife in front of the village elders when she becomes pregnant. While Appanna questions her chastity when she is put on the ordeal to prove her loyalty by virtue of the snake-ordeal in front of the society without thinking her mental and physical condition. All villagers bring to heel her position. No one shows the sympathy for innocent and pregnant woman everyone wants to prove her purity. Rani puts on snake-ordeal and proves her chastity. And everyone applauds Rani's innocence and the village elder declare that she is not a simple woman, but a 'Divine Being', 'a Goddess' and her husband Appanna is forced to accept her with respect in front of public as the Elder announces:

*Elder I:* Appanna, your wife is no ordinary woman. She is the incarnation of a goddess. Don't feel sorry that you doubted her and ill-treated her. This is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were chosen as the instrument to reveal your wife's divine status to the world. (p.93).

Karnad thus making a challenging task by balancing the power to remove patriarchal dominance society and the identity is restored when he declares, "Rani gave birth to a beautiful child. It was son. And Rani lived happily ever after with her husband, child and servant."(p.94)

and Rani recovers her identity as a respectful wife and mother.

In the two plays *the fire and the Rain* and *Naga-Mandala* Karnad's has intentionally refined sensibility the women characters to raise their powerful voice against injustice and suppression which signifies a positive message on our modern society. By exploring the lives of women caged by patriarchal dominated society. Karnad has taken the responsibility of underlined women to free their lives from the bondages of male chauvinism. Actually, through these women character Karnad has explored the symptoms of refined sensibility which has enable them to fight against traditional rules of patriarchal society. It is observed that here Vishakha endeavour to create space for herself in the crossroads of conventional custom. Nittilai free herself from a forced shackle of marriage despite the traditional norms of patriarchal system. Even Rani recovers her position from total declension to unique power.

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