

**COMMON-NESS IN THE LEAD FEMALE CHARACTERS OF GIRISH  
KARNAD'S PLAYS-*HAYAVADANA, NAGA-MANDALA AND THE FIRE  
AND THE RAIN***

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**Abstract**

Girish Karnad is an influential Indian English playwright. His characters refer to idiosyncrasies of life and represent all walks of life. Like many a writer, Karnad also ridicules the behaviour of the patriarchal society. In fact, he wants to modify the oddities and be instrumental in the transformation of the society. He expresses his solidarity with the women community. The female characters of Karnad's plays are strong-willed, sharp, sincere and exemplary. They stand testimony to some ideals.

**Key-Words:** reform, inept, exploited, suppressed, oppressed, patriarchal society, glorified

Girish Karnad is one of the best in the galaxy of Indian English playwrights. He is a contemporary of Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh. The themes of his plays are borrowed from ancient myths, folk-lore and history. It appears that he wants to reform the society by raising questions on the social - evils racking the society. The characters are not silver bullets to many of the issues but throw light on the evils.

In *Naga-mandala*, the lead character is Rani whereas Padmini dominates all the male characters in *Haya-vadana* and Nittilai steals the show in the play *The Fire and the Rain*. All of them appear to be similar in the beginning of the plays. Every reader understands that they are inept, exploited, suppressed and oppressed by the patriarchal society in the initial stages of the play and as the plot unfolds they emerge as strong-willed feminine characters and role-models to many.

*Naga-mandala* is the story of Rani, Appanna, Naga, Kurudavva and Kappanna. The entire plot revolves round Rani and Rani is elevated in every scene. When she is introduced, she is a typical Indian girl- innocent and immature, totally relying on her parents and day-dreaming about the prince that she will wed. The two- worlds she knows are her paternal and maternal homes. In the entire play, we never see her crossing the precincts of her husband's house.

Like an ordinary woman, she wants to serve her husband and confine herself to the chores of family life. All her dreams turn out to be castles in the air. Never is she treated as a wife by her husband, Appanna. He is merciless and bosses over Rani and inflicts pain in her life by locking her in the house and spending his time with a concubine. Unable to comprehend the situation, Rani confined to the four walls of the house spends days and nights like a recluse. Finally, her prayers and cries are understood and she is helped by Kurudavva and Naga, the snake.

Rani: What?

Kurudavva (giving her the bigger piece): Feed him the largest one.

Rani: No!

Kurudavva: Yes!

Rani: That little piece made him sick. This one-

Kurudavva: It will do good, believe me. This is not hearsay. I am telling you from my own experience. Go in. Start grinding it. Make a tasty curry.

Mix the paste in it. Let him taste a spoonful and he will be your slave. And then? Just say the word and he will carry you to my house himself. (265)

Naga: .....From tomorrow I want you to be fresh and bright when I come home at night-----

Rani: At night?

Naga: Yes. I shall come home every night from now on. May I? May I sit by you now? Or will that make jump of your skin again? (269)

The village-elders who question her chastity do not question Appanna who locks her in the house and lives with the concubine. This raises the issue of the gender- biased laws. Rani also understands that Naga has come in the guise of Appanna in the night and appealed to her. Finally, Rani is glorified.

Elder I : Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate. Don't grieve that you judged her wrongly and treated her badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were the chosen instrument for the revelation of her divinity.

Elder II : Spend the rest of your life in her service. You need merit in ten past lives to be chosen for such holy duty.

Appanna : Forgive me. I am a sinner. I was blind.

Rani : Hush, now!

Story: So Rani got everything she wished for a devoted husband, a happy life. (293)

Padmini in *Hayavadana* is different. She marries Devadatta but also falls in love with Kapila. She is not satisfied and happy with the brilliant brain of Devadatta but also longs that Devadatta should also have had a strong physique like Kapila.

Devadatta: And why should I blame her? It's his body- his manly muscles. And to think I had never ever noticed them all these years! I was an innocent- an absolute baby.

Padmini: No woman could resist him. (134)

Had she not thought of it, she would not have juxtaposed the head of Devadatta on Kapila's body and Kapila's head on Devadatta's body.

Padmini: It's all your grace, Mother...

Kali; Don't drag me into it. I had nothing to do with it. You spoke the truth because you're selfish, that's all. (142)

She has craved for perfection in her husband which is the dream for every woman. She also wished for perfection in her son.

Kapila: I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong body...

Padmini: Shut up, you brute.

Devadatta: Suppose she did. There's nothing wrong in it. It's natural for a woman to feel attracted to a fine figure of a man. (148)

So, she wants her son to be raised as Kapila's child for a few years and as Devadatta's son later. She thus questions the equality of human –beings and conveys that none is superior or inferior to others. Everywhere there is imperfection. All are born with equal talents and the use of these skills depends on the family, the environment around and the circumstances.

On the other –hand, Nittilai in the *The Fire and the Rain* is a bold, sensible and intelligent girl. Though from a hunter's family, she is an embodiment of some values like love, kindness and honesty. Besides, she also hates violence. She is very practical and open as pointed out here:

Nittilai: Then what's the use of all these powers?

Andhaha: Ask Yavakri, when you meet him. He won't mind. In fact, he'll like it. He is a gentle soul.

Nittilai: Actually I want to ask Yavakri two questions. Can he make it rain? And then, can he tell when he is going to die?... Just two. What is the point of any knowledge, if you can't save dying children and if you can't predict your moment of death. (117)

She is unlike Vishakha who yields to Yavakri as her husband has ignored her. Though she falls in love with Arvasu, she wants Arvasu to be committed to her. She never allows Arvasu to touch her before the nuptials.

She helps the poor and the needy and lays her life for them.

Actor Manager: .....Mopping up your vomit, wiping your bottom. Like a baby. I'm grateful to her because my babies were starving when she came and now they get a bite to eat every day. Where she gets the food from I don't know- (136-137)

Thus, she attains completeness and stands tall among all the characters through her noble deeds though she does not hail from the superior strata of the society.

Conclusion: Rani, Padmini and Nittilai stand for the ideal women who defied the norms of the patriarchal society. They come from normal families built with love and affection, fight against the deep-rooted evils. They voice the innate desires of women.

### Workcited

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