



Three Heroines Rani, Padmini and Vishakha : The Feminist Perspectives of Girish Karnad



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Research Paper :

Girish Karnad presents the characters Rani, Padmini and Vishakha in the plays Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana and The Fire and The Rain respectively. He retells myth, history and folk tales exposing human quest for perfection and the conflict of passions. He agrees with the notion that

“Drama presents fiction or fact in a scene that can be acted before an audience. A play has a plot, characters, dialogue and an outlook on life, it is not only read but it is written with a purpose to be staged.”¹

Karnad presents Rani as an epitome of an ideal Indian woman in *Naga-Mandala*. Appana, her husband often turns a deaf ear to her needs and freedom in this play. But, she remains a long-suffering Indian woman confined within four walls of stereotypical life. Her husband puts her in the imprisonment of deeply-rooted social customs and rules. Despite of all this, she is loving, creative and innocent by her temperament. Naga meets her at night in the guise of Appana which makes her get confused throughout the play as the behaviour of her husband in a day was dead opposite to her from Appana who meets her at night. Naga helps Rani come out of her melancholic world. She becomes pregnant due to her failure to understand the presence of Naga in the guise of Appana at night. In the trial, she becomes victorious and is worshipped as goddess. Thus, the creative belief conquers in the end which is a true demonstration of social constraints in this play. The readers seek to fathom the disturbed mind of Rani who is helpless to resolve her own unsolved questions throughout the play.

For instance, Rani in *Naga-Mandala* cries,

“Why are you humiliating me like this? Why are you stripping me naked in front of the whole village? Why don't you kill me instead? I would have killed myself. But there's not even a rope in this house for me to use.”²

Padmini in the play *Hayavadana* needs Kapila, a dark and strong man. She gets strongly attracted towards him from the beginning. She bemoans that her husband cannot satisfy her body's need after marriage. The appreciation of her beauty was not enough to quench her thirst. During the way to Ujjain, like Lady Chatterly, Padmini gets impressed by Kapila who is a source of instinct in Lawrentian term. On the other hand, Devadatta is intelligent, fair and a poet by temperament. In the plays of Karnad, one can observe a woman's position as dominated, exploited and insecure.

“In *Hayavadana*, the heads of Kapila and Devadatta are exchanged. *Hayavadana* puts forward his case of incompleteness very impressively.

Hayavadana's image brings the Lacanian subject – incomplete, incoherent, fragmented, divided and centreless.”³

The playwright exposes a few basic truths using myths and folk-tales. One of the existential awareness is that life is a product of tension of opposites. Another truth is that woman having a creative principle should not be dominated over. Most importantly, intellect cannot fructify by starving instinct. Rani, Padmini represent instinctual life in the play. Karnad portrays the flames, the story and the dolls as female figures. He expresses the fact that the society should be liberated from all life-denying customs.

“The Fire and The Rain presents the myth of Mahabharata symbolically and psychologically. Karnad has already proved his dramatic excellence while dealing with myths and symbols in Yayati, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala and Tughlaq.”⁴

The Fire and the Rain dramatizes the feminist notes through the torture of Vishakha, the wife of the Chief Priest, Paravasu and daughter-in-law of Raibhya. The dramatist represents an elitist class of Brahminic society in the play. He displays Vishakha as a lonely figure experiencing loveless marriage like any modern woman of contemporary elitist society. Her husband uses her like an object of a spiritual and mystical experiment. She lives in a pitiable loneliness waiting for the end of fire sacrifice fruitfully. She promises her husband to remain a devoted wife.

Raibhya, her father-in-law calls her as a buffalo rolling in the mud, whore and bitch. Thus, she becomes a victim of humiliation and exploitation in the play. Vishakha is dissatisfied with her husband, the members of the family and Yavakri, her lover. Yavakri feels intoxicated with her sex-hunger. Her identity of womanhood is repeatedly interrogated in the play. The untraditional love never lasts longer. This finally leads to her victimization in a so-called male-dominated traditional society. She likes virtue to vengeance, love to hatred and sex to sexlessness. She praises a sense of goodness in Yavakri. She is lonely, helpless and

exploited like every woman in the elitist society at present. She belongs to a class-consciousness of being humiliated in a society. Her fires of sex are notes of anger and protest against the Brahminic elitist society where a woman becomes a silent sufferer of endless miseries.

The characters like Rani, Padmini and Vishakha depicted in the plays demand freedom and dignity of a woman in a male-dominated society. His plays based on oral tales, myths and history are relevant to the contemporary times which are quite expressive of Indian ethos and human psyche.

References :

1. Tiwari, Shubha (Ed) : Contemporary Indian Dramatists (New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd, 2007) P. 6.
2. Karnad, Girish : Naga-Mandala – Play with a Cobra ((New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2001) P. 33.
3. Tiwari, Shubha (Ed) : Contemporary Indian Dramatists (New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd, 2007) P. 71.
4. Ibid., P. 84