

6

## Naga Mandala: A Feminist Reading

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A woman is not born but made, says Simon de Behaviour in her epoch making book *The Second Sex* (1949). After so many feminist writers both creative and critics have come and gone but there has not been any spectacular change in the plight of women. Especially in India the plight remains more pitiable than in Western countries. It is because of religious fear, social taboos and dogmatism prevailing among the different communities in India.

*Naga Mandala* by Girish Karnad was stage - The play depicts the plight of women in general and Rani the main character in particular. Rani symbolizes the predicament of every uneducated woman; for that matter even educated women are no exceptions. The play raises a vital question about the identity of a woman as an individual. Thus she has right to exist as an individual first then as woman when she is deprived of right of sex, the primeval right instinctively acquired by every species born on the earth.

Rani is married to Appanna who has other women to while away his time. So he locks Rani from outside and goes on his amorous escapades. When he returns he even does not come to look at Rani. All complaints and prayer of Rani fail to move Appanna. So “the days rolled by” (38). She accepts her lot as, she thought, she is destined to this is what has been taught to her or ingrained in her for centuries. And Rani is not educated to get rid of the mental from her body or mind. So she thinks that she can mould her husband through her tears, ungrudging service and one day her husband will return like a prodigal son. This is what happens in the novel of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya. Time has changed. But the mind set of male have not change. Males still consider women to be commodities, to be enjoyed and thrown to the waste paper basket. But in *Naga Mandala* the playwright does not leave but spat at lurch. It brings to the play somebody who symbolizes sex, power, vitality and also as demi God in Indian religion his King Cobra or Naga, which worshiped as one of the God.

In Freudian psychology snake is symbol of sex which to a certain extent holds true among the Indian pantheon of God and Goddesses. Lord Shiva who is a male and potent is encircled by snakes. In the play Girish Karnad takes the help of surrealism present a hard reality, which is pleasant but painful, difficult to

digest. When Rani is locked from outside for long hours of the day and the empty home “Rani is locked in cloud be the family she is married into” (17). Naga comes and courts her. At first Rani frightened as the thought it to be a dream but it was a reality, which Raani feels to grasped. The diametrically opposed behaviour of the Naga and Appanna confused her. She says “Goodness! Goats have to be sacrificed and buffaloes slaughtered to get a word out of you in the morning. But at night...” (45). She accepts Naga whole heartedly. The have consummation, Rani becomes pregnant and it is noticed by her husband. This is where a male ego is hurt. He charges Rani, “Are not you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover!... Who did you go to with your sari off?” (52). A wife will be deprived of her right and she cannot fulfil her right even from outside. This is not only a problem of India but this is a problem of women everywhere. That is why Margaret Atwood wrote her novel *The Edible Woman*.

The play questions the patriarchal moral code, which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband but not the faithlessness of a man to his wife. Rani sleeps with Naga without knowing it, as Naga is in the guise of Appanna. On the other hand Appanna enjoys extra-marital sex openly and unashamedly. Everybody even the elders in the village know this but do not prove his chastity.

Now Rani pushes Appanna and all males, so called panchayats (dominated by males) assembled for Rani's trial. Naga is not a treacherous Appanna to betray Rani, leave her alone to her plight. He promises her to save her. Naga assures her that “your husband will become your slave tomorrow. You will get all you have ever wanted” (54). He knows the Indian minds and the Indian males those who have invented religion (it is anthropologically true of man's history all over the world) to chain down woman's freedom to be themselves. So on the trial day Cobra comes hugs her and the assembly is frightened and stunned. All of them think Rani to be the Goddess (No woman other than Goddesses can embrace and love a Naga) and they prostrate before her. Appanna her poor husband kneels down and touches her feet. The dramatist depicts the sham, hypocrisy of male ego and vanity. The play vindicates the right of a woman to live as another human being in the society. Males should extend a helping hand and not block her freedom to be another human being like lion.