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## Depiction of Women Characters and Their Resistance To Patriarchy

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Girish Karnad is a writer, playwright, actor and director in Kannada language. His rise as a playwright in 1960s marked the coming of age of Modern Indian playwriting in Kannada. He is a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India. He wrote many plays acted in a number of movies. I have been taking up three of his plays *Nagamandala*, *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album* and analyze them under a new aspect. Girish Karnad has attempted to give a panoramic view of the women ranging from pre-modern times to the modern day with respect to their social surroundings. Altogether these plays can be read from the perspective of women resisting patriarchy and their urge to rise above it. As we know, Women constitute one half of the humanity. They have been given the place of goddess in Indian mythology, folktales and legends but ironically they have never been given the equal status. Hence their presence in literature is inevitable. It is another story that they hold neither the literary space nor the grandeur befitting their number. It is easy to explain that largest number of books have been created by men. Women's situation seems to be in a mess where submissiveness and resistivity goes side by side. Instead of involving in an in-depth study, this paper primarily focuses on Karnad's representation of the women characters in the plays *Naga Mandala*, *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*. These three plays in their setting itself contains the reality of contemporary India consisting of folktales, legends, information technology, education, globalization, commercialization, modernization, etc. It shows India in a continuous state of transition and evolution. Even in the contemporary world superstitions, folk beliefs, magic, etc. have found their own relevance.

The present paper aims at an in depth analysis of the plays *Naga Mandala*, *Broken Images* and *wedding album* to see how in his works Karnad has deployed traditional and modern material to voice female desires and aspirations. Female characters have already been studied by various scholars in various fields but this paper attempts to present the resistance shown by women in the ancient times and how this is resistance still shown in the contemporary period. In all three plays the society portrayed is to a greater extent patriarchal and is applicable to the whole Indian society.

The society depicted in *Naga-Mandala* is in sharp contrast to the society of other two plays. *Naga Mandala* is a feminist play which not only exposes male chauvinism, the oppression of women, the great injustice done to them by men and the patriarchal culture, but also stealthily deflates the concept of chastity. This play is narrated by a story woman and this is a clear device to allow for further displacement and disguise. This play can be interpreted in Freudian terms by applying his views on dreams.

In *Naga-Mandala* there is the local law and order of the village which controls and runs the village as is very much present in the rural areas of the modern day. When pregnancy of Rani was questioned, the elders were given the right to do appropriate justice. And the method they employed was not reasonable but was entirely enigmatic i.e. Rani was given the 'choice' either

to hold the red-hot iron bar or to put her hands in the boiling oil but she herself insisted to hold the venomous cobra and speak the truth, so ultimately it is the cobra who has to do the justice not elders [quite unpredictable in the modern world]. Equally unbelievable is Rani's magical rise to a 'GODDESS' after saved by cobra. The society portrayed here is very much patriarchal, rural and uneducated, believing in superstitions, legends and the old ways of justice, also somehow supporting Appanna. What kind of society is this? , questioning the chastity of Rani but not the infidelity of Appanna who has insulted the sacred bond by living with his mistress and dehumanizing and humiliating Rani. The play narrates the story of male possessing superiority and female subjected to inferiority.

Pramod in *Broken Images* is dominant in his own ways. He never wants himself to be questioned. He makes his emotional relationship with Malini, his sister-in-law and for sexual pleasures he comes to Manjula. Like Appanna he also enjoys the company of two women. Likewise Ashwin Panje in *Wedding Album* shows his dominance by making Vidula marry him on his pre-defined terms. He wants her wife to live according to him and wants no interference on their part. But quite contrarily the modern day society is educated, civilized and democratic society as is portrayed in *Broken Images*, *Wedding Album* where women enjoy sound social status and have the opportunity to choose their careers and husbands.

"*Broken Images*", comes out as a modern play. It is entirely a psychological play dealing with internal actions of the characters. It is a drama about women only and captures the picture of modern women in a wider social context. Women are no longer confined to a particular space; they have become mobile, advanced and resistive to the patriarchal society. It is a monologue by Manjula, elder sister of Malini [we get to know her only through Manjula]. The entire play is set in a studio where Manjula is invited to enlighten the audience about her successful venture with the bestselling novel which has been warmly welcomed by both Indian and International people. On this proud moment, she gets confronted with her inner self. It was a shocking and self-revealing experience with her inner-self in the form of Image. Karnad's dramatic craftsmanship is at its best when he vividly pictures and presents the inner psychological dilemma of Manjula when she is at the pinnacle of her writing career. Earlier she gives the impression as if she is the most contented and satisfied person in the world and very cleverly flaunts her immense learning. She diplomatically boasts of how there is no problem in turning from Karnad to English writing,

``There is no Prayashchita for it, no absolution.'' [Pg-266]

But she feels bewildered and baffled when she hears herself speaking when she has stopped doing that. She says,

``Oh God! am I still on?'' [Pg-266]

She finds herself at a loss when she confronts her inner-self. The device of personification adds charm and depth to the dramatic aspects of the play. The title *Broken Images* is well justified by breaking of the initial images provided to us and is given a firm platform with Manjula's dramatic encounter with her deep seated inner, real self as Image. Adjustments are being made within themselves. There is a metaphorical significance of the title i.e. women cannot get anything unless they resolve themselves. Resistance is there in the behavior of women. Altogether it is an intensely psychological as well as a dramatic play consisting of the mental being of a newly successful woman writer belonging to the elite section of the society.

*Wedding Album* is a modern play and is the most recent one by the dramatist. For the first time we are introduced to a fully fledged family of nuclear tradition in industrial times which is in contrast to the ancient traditional agrarian family of Rani in *Naga Mandala*. Vidula, Hema and their mother are the leading ladies and Radhabai, their housemaid with her absconding insane daughter, Yamuna. Like any other modern play this play also offers psychological ups and downs. The society depicted in this play is reflective of the whole Indian society. The story revolves around a necessary evil i.e. marriage and the functions associated with it. Vidula, twenty-two and a half, graduate in Geography worked for a travel agency is a practical girl belonging to a Brahmin family is going to have a 'technologically arranged' marriage with an NRI Ashwin Panje, the suitable expat Saraswat boy. As expected in this contemporary world she enjoys the freedom to choose her own life partner. So, she has a self-arrangement via video, e-mail and telephone, the modern day modes of communication. She feels getting into it when she thinks she is mature enough. Actually she is not exactly as is pictured. Like any other common modern girl, she leads a secret life. She is resourceful enough to find herself a surrogate Swami, flesh and blood stranger to help her work her way through hopeless desire. In a darkened cyber café, out of her hysterical rage, she screams her 'sexual harassment' to make her moral tormentors run away. She is not a girl for whom their family is their priority, she is individualistic. The subjugation she seeks in her secret erotic world can after all be served as well through man and marriage and to higher purpose. After her initial hesitation she resolves to stay committed despite the frightening incommunicating and arrogant side of Ashwin to her.

"I will never divorce Ashwin,"[Pg-86]

She breathes fiercely to her worried siblings driven by their anxiety to even suggest it on the eve of her departure from India. She willingly resolves to subjugate herself and to have given up eating fish is a symbolic affirmation of her aesthetic resolve to stay committed. In modern world with the barriers between castes seems to be done away with, Vidula keeps thinking in that circumference and shows no trace to rise above them and chooses to stay in the safe haven. Likewise, Hema, her elder sister being married to a NRI and a resident of Australia again a modern and one of the technically advanced nation is opposed to Rohit's entanglement with a Christian girl, and angrily says,

"It doesn't seem to bother any of you that he's going out with a Christian girl."[Pg-43]

Rohit, her only brother calmly answers,

"Is this what going to Australia does to people? You are in the twenty first century, you know."[Pg-43] Hema, being mature enough to decide, does not view marriage as an elevating experience but in contrast a suppressing one,

"We Indian women are obedient Sati Savitris, ever willing to follow in our husband's footsteps. Look at me-Melbourne, Johannesburg, Singapore and now Sydney. Our men may get all top jobs, but I am in no better position than Ma," [Pg-17]

Indicates the male chauvinism persisting even in the contemporary world where marriage is just reduced to a fair bargain.

Since earlier times, women are targeted and are subjects to humiliation and torment. Karnad, being versatile and sensitive to its social surroundings has keenly observed and expressed the state of women through various women characters.

Karnad is not only exposing the male chauvinism through the device of cobra ordeal, but also the double standard of morality of patriarchal culture and the hollowness of the concept of chastity. In *Naga Mandala* a cobra comes as the savior of feministic cause just as lord Rama saving the life of Ahalya in The Ramayana. The Ramayana depicts the story of Ahalya's transformation. Exactly the same transformation we find in Rani. She is as dead as a stone in the early days of her married life.

Rani is elevated to the status of a living goddess, an object of veneration and worship. She is evolved from a weaker to a stronger personality. Rani undergoes a process of evolution which benefitted her with a successful marital life. She is evolved from a no one to a Goddess. Like Rani, Manjula in *Broken Images* also undergoes a kind of evolution. Her evolution is entirely psychological and mental. And likewise is the character of Vidula.

The various characters portrayed in these three plays together constitute a grand women character. They depict how a particular women character would react in those times and those situations. They are made to depend on the patriarchal system of society. Manjula in *Broken Images* belongs to the contemporary society and has got all the traits of modern women consist of. She is got to have her own individuality. She no longer gets her identity from her husband Pramod. She seems a writer by her own choice. Her insecurities due to Malini, quite natural as materialism nowadays has taken over human relations and emotions. Whereas Malini is a mature woman, Vidula is a young girl and likewise yearns to have her own identity and chooses to live life and her husband at her own will. She is open to the technology and the world around her. She is open to her erotic world and when needed leaves it for the sake of her wedding. They together fits into the picture of one grand women who has undergone and still going under a number of changes. With a passage of time she has moulded her attitude as well as her behavior and is determined to continue to do so. These women epitomize the change in vast arenas of the social systems and their position varying with them. The women might have become strong and got to have their own identity but still they are struggling to come out of the patriarchal one as there is a struggle in Manjula's mind between her and her sister. The women together are also facing a same problem with the masculine power. They wanted to have a world of their own as "Alice in Wonderland" where the world acts as a puppet in the hands of these people. Elaine Showalter, a feminist critic, in her essay cites the example of Ardener's model where women wants to have a place of their own to which they belong that distinguishes their identity from the dominant group. They are essential segments of the society, in fact world cannot run without them but still they haven't got what they deserve. They have to live with the man but urges to have their own space which talks only about them, their experiences, feelings, emotions etc. they don't want to occupy the space of men but wants to have a space which resists any interference by them.

The society has advanced both technically and socially and women have also undergone a considerable change in this globalised world but still there is a need for a sustainable improvement where there will be no place for gender bias and both sexes will live in mutual harmony. Education might have reached them so is the professionalism but it has not brought so much of difference as it supposed to have. Change is the law of nature and women are

undergoing a series of changes and will one day acquire its much awaited status but will take its considerable time, till then this struggle will go on.

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