

Folklore as A Prism of Fidelity, Desire, and Identity: A Comparative Study of Rani in Nagamandala and Padmini in Hayavadana.

M. M. Keerthi Verma¹, Dr.G. Sivabalan²

¹MKU22FFOL10628

²Research Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. And Head
Sourashtra College

Abstract

This paper talks about Karnad's idea in folklore through the ray of prism. It refracts the desire, identity and fidelity in the play of Nagamandala and Hayavadana. In Nagamandala's plot was Rani whose life was changed because of fate, when the curry was supposed to eaten by her husband but she gets terrified and pours it into the cobra hill. Here happens the intervention of the fate, the curry was tasted by the cobra who can change his from. In Hayavadana it's an exact opposite. Where Padmini life starts with love but turns to love triangle. She finds it difficult to choose between her husband or his friend. The main character Hayavadana who happens to be half human and half horse. He becomes complete celestial divine white horse. The play ends with wholeness. This paper talks about how Karnad's re-figures the idea and perspective of how our dysfunctionala society and their views. Allways the ladies of all the plots are sidelined but in Karnad's play he always puts women in center. He talks about the instability of human mind by human it also includes women and their thinking too.

Index: Folklore, fidelity, desire, identity, patriarchal society, love-triangle

Introduction

Girish karnad is one of the India's most prominent and powerful play-writer. He loves innovating plays with the use of myth, folklore, oral stories which was passed down from generation to generation and histories. He tries to scrutinize the social realities into contemporary. Karnad's plays, "written largely in Kannada, explore the present by way of the past" (Britannica). His dramatic vision is shaped by a deep engagement with folk traditions, which he always explains it as "I cannot invent plots therefore I use myths. I cannot invent stories and hence go to history" (Mohan). Karnad's plays—including *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, and *Nagamandala*—transform traditional narratives into powerful critiques of identity, gender, power, and human desire.

His work Nagamandala and Hayavadana is merely not a folklore or an decorative way of storytelling it act as a "prism" through which he induces desire, love, imperfection, identity, promises, love triangle, worship and social acceptance. The way he handles fidelity in his play is not a easy one which is straightforward or moralistic according to our society. He tries to explain his point of view through various concept of acceptance, trust used to construct a unique image for his women characters in his play to make them stand out. He imposes fidelity to become a spike of plot to carry the protagonist ladies to survive in this male-dominant society with

their own expatriation set on women from start to still now. He tries to explain everyone about the sexual need of women who never talks about and how important their desire is. Also to give them a chance to let it out and speak freely. In Mohans point of view he observes Karnad's play "expose male chauvinism, the oppression of women, overtly deflate the concept of chastity that undergirds the patriarchal mythic imagination". (Mohan).

The Prism of Fidelity in Nagamandala and Hayavadana

In the play Nagamandala fidelity showcases as prism. A multifunctional lens that reflects and projects the traditional ways of faith in marriage than showing fidelity as an easy binary of trust and untrust. He uses the play folklore's structure to uncover the injustice caused by the male chauvinistic world imposes the set of laws rules for women to follow to make the world the better place for the ladies. To protect them from the patriarchal society. In cultural studies the play Nagamanadala points its clarity to "the interconnection between identity, marriage, fidelity and female agency" (The Voice of Creative Research).

The lead of this play is Rani who happens to be naive young girl who marries the man name Appana who keeps her locked at the house all the time, due to this she becomes close to her neighbour who happens to be an old blind lady whose son went missing. Rani finds care and love from the old lady Kurudaava. Rani tells kurudavva how Appana treats her coldly. Out of concern Kurudavva gives her two pieces of root which she advises her to grind and mix it in the curry, when her husband taste the food in an instant he would fall in love with her like love at sight, but when the colour of the gravy changes to deep red she gets aftaid and pours it in the cobra hill. The king cobra comes and taste the curry and falls in love with Rani.

This is where the myth starts, when ever her husband goes out the cobra takes her husband's form and enters through the bathroom drain, shows her affection and love which she has never got from her husband when evening comes the cobra goes out and the actual husband comes. When he is back at night he acts coldly. This leaves Rani in confused state. She couldn't know the difference for both the cobra and her husband. She gets pregnant with the cobras child. Appana confines her infront of the village heads telling he is not the father of this child. Rani tries to prove her innocence. In her dream the cobra appears and tells her to do exactly as his says. The next day infront of the village she tells everyone that she will put her hand into the cobra hill if she gets stung she has cheated her husband if not she is pure and innocent. Like she said a cobra comes out and coils in her neck as a garland. "it is her very infidelity that comes to her aid in proving that she is a faithful wife" (Mohan). In Mohand view This paradox lies at the heart of Karnad's treatment of fidelity—Rani's "adultery". in each myth or folklore always the women are the one to prove this male dominant world that they are innocent. When Rani proves herself to others when she is not sure what's happening around her, she doesn't know that because of the love the cobra has for her he didn't hurt her and she gets to prove her chastity. The play becomes the

skeleton for expressing the women's mind "women's inner experiences and desires" (IJCISS).

In Hayavadana the prism shows the fullness of the bond in marriage. This play is not an upright ethical play of morality. This play shows the desire of a woman with love triangle between her husband and his friend. Here the conflict is between the head and body. This play was adopted from Kathasaritsagara (Ocean of Stories) an old Sanskrit tale. In this the main character Padmini loves both men for different reasons she like her husband Devdatta's mind and his friend Kapila for his physic. She gets torn between love and lust. "Karnad's concern is with the life of the modern man that is very complex and lacks in wholeness" ("The Criterion") Padmini's confused love make her lose both Devdatta and Kapila "her split desire which causes Devadatta to kill himself, followed quickly by Kapila" (LitCharts). Padmini marries Devdatta while hiding her feelings for Kapila she leads a normal marriage life by fulfilling all her wifely duties. She gets pregnant with Devdatta's child. He gets happy and takes her and his friend Kapila to an Goddess Kali temple to offer his head for making his love come true. When Kapila finds Devdatta's motionless body he feels guilty and he also offers his head to the goddess. When Padmini finds both their headless body she regrets and tries to chop her head, that's when the goddess appear and tells she is pleased with the offerings and ask her to put back the heads on the body, this is where the play gets twisty Padmini mixes up the head and Goddess bring back them back alive. It leads to confusion claiming which part is domain head or body, and claiming the child Padmini is pregnant. Padmini gets her dream come true. With devdatta's mind and Kapila's physic "the best of both worlds," yet this arrangement proves unstable. As the bodies slowly return to their former states, "she begins to yearn again for a different life" (LitCharts). . As she asks rhetorically: "Devadatta changes. Kapila changes. And me?" (Karnad, *Hayavadana*). This question exposes her existential crisis—she is unable to remain faithful because her identity itself is fragmented. This incident becomes the main plot of this play. Padmini's desire for wholeness make her to follow Kapila who lives in exile after the head misplacement she tell him "the head always wins, doesn't it?" Kapila replies "I did" (Karnad, *Hayavadana*). The play's catastrophic plot exposes the fidelity which will never cease to be accepted by our society even its bit of fragmentation would never be thought in our society. When Devadatta and Kapila sacrifice themselves, Padmini cries her fate : "I had to drive you to death. You forgave each other, but again—left me out" (Karnad, *Hayavadana*). According to hindu culture when husband dies the wife has to show her faith by jumping into the pyre, but when a wife dies a husband can happily remarry. Which was accepted by the society.

"Padmini was, in her own way, a devoted wife," suggesting that her devotion was real but incomplete, trapped within a system that denied her full humanity (LitCharts). Still in Hayavadana Padmini doesn't accept the self-annicipated fidelity set by the patriartchal society. The work in "suggests that completeness is left to beings that are divine, while humans work at—and ultimately fail to achieve—a true sense of wholeness" (LitCharts). In Karnads work the prism of fidelity bends the unfortunate

reality through mind, body, intellect, desire and willfulness. If all these are followed a human marriage would be perfect according to our patriarchal society.

Conclusion

In both the play Nagamandala and Hayavadana, the writer has converted folklore into a beautiful prism. Through which he explains fidelity, desire and identity. He crinkles and completes the play by converting into an amazing work. Through Karnad's point of view Rani and Padmini are exposed to various issues formed by male-chauvinistic people without women's concern their idea and view of this obligations framework which is formed to suppress them. Still to date women are bound to the old structure in different names, culture or social norms. There is a saying "that a woman's first enemy is another woman". After plenty of struggles for many generations fighting, now we have a little freedom of speech and to come out and explore this world, but am not telling that this freedom is enjoyed by every woman still in many part of country ladies tend to suffer a lot under this society.

In Nagamandala the structural construction of fidelity appears as infidelity which becomes the very important soul of chastity of authentication. The relationship with the snake cannot be called as adulterous because it happened without her consent and the snake was in her husband's appearance where she thinks it was Appana. As Mohan astutely observes, "it is her very infidelity that comes to her aid in proving that she is a faithful wife" (Mohan). This act exposes the stupidity of patriarchal adjustment framed against the female domain. If same thing a man does it was accepted by this society and appreciated by everyone, but while a man can get this freedom of marital choices why can't a woman get it. If a wife passes away a man can get married inspite of his age the society urges him to get married as soon as possible, but the same society if a husband passes away they force the woman to get into the pyre where her husband body burns it's called as Sati. Why not tell that to the man also when his wife passes away get into the pyre?. this is the kind of society we live in. This proud male chauvinistic society didn't even feel like asking the truth from Rani's side they didn't give her a chance to speak. Appana accused her of being adulterous where he was in relationship with a mistress. The village heads didn't bother to ask about this. They were ready to punish Rani but when she said she will insert her hand into the cobra hill. They were all shocked of the result. Those who were accusing her for being immorality they all started praising her as goddess.

In Hayavadana the female protagonist faces a harsh tragedy the plot of her story was very simple at first two men fell in love with her. The first person was Devdatta, he comes from a upper class, he is also a poet. The second person was Kapila who comes from lower class and he is an iron smith. Devdatta falls in love with Padmini but instead of confessing his feeling directly he takes help from Kapila and ask him to propese in his behalf. Kapila does this for his friend, but padmini also likes Kapila but she reffrains her feelings and marries Devdatta and leads a happy life. Padmini gets bored of Devdatta's physic she starts thinking about Kapila that's when the impossibility of achieving wholness within a fragemnt appears. As scholars note,

“Karnad’s concern is with the life of the modern man that is very complex and lacks in wholeness” (“The Criterion”). In that era Sati was practiced in every part of our nation. The sati was to make sure that the wife stayed loyal, devotional and pure to her husband even after death. Until 1829 Sati was performed in our nation this was created by the patriarchal society.

Karnad uses Rani and Padmini as a medium to talk his thought through to make the society realize the mistake through his fantasy and mythical play. He fought for feminist resistance that talked about the harsh reality every women faces inside her house and outside the society. Karnad makes sure that each of his female characters are simultaneously “victims of pervasive patriarchal repression” yet paradoxically endowed “with a powerful voice of modern women” (Research Ambition). Karnad tries to break the traditional structure that was built by the patriarchal society to free the women from all this stupid archetype. In the plot Nagamandala and Hayavadana goes through a tremendous pain. If this play was written now it would have been a feminist protest. The folklore reacts through prism. Karnad breaks the boundary in various aspects like in cultural boundaries, the struggles they face in their life.

In this world every human has his own fantasy, which he cannot fulfil in his life. The life which a person cannot lead in his real life he starts making a dream world in his dream he is the protagonist. He is the master of his dream no one can control him in it. He can lead the life as he wishes. That what Karnad tried to but he wanted people to lead a life but not in the dream, in the real life. He worked hard to break the shackle which was built to suppress the peoples desire, love life, happiness, freedom. He used myth to create those magic in his work. He fought for women's freedom when no one cared about that. His writing and thinking were bold and provocative. He was also an excellent play-writer and a movie director cum actor. He has directed his play in theatre in English. Karnad’s work is still fresh and capturing till to date. It can be read by all age reader. It suits the society and the superstitious practice which was believed and followed. His work was revolutionary.

Works Cited

1. Britannica, Encyclopædia. “Girish Karnad | Playwright, Author, Biography, Movies, & ...” *Britannica*, 28 May 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Girish-Karnad>.
2. Karnad, Girish. *Nagamandala*. Prasaranga, 1988.
3. Mohan, R.K. “Girish Karnad’s *Naga-mandala*: Problematising Feminism.” *Intersections* 22 (2009): n. pag. intersections.anu.edu.au/issue22/mohan.htm.
4. “The Criterion.” “Representation of Myth in Girish Karnad’s *The Fire and the ...*” *The Criterion* 7.6 (2018): n. pag.
5. Karnad, Girish. *Nagamandala*. Prasaranga, 1988.
6. Mohan, R.K. “Girish Karnad’s *Naga-mandala*: Problematising Feminism.” *Intersections* 22 (2009): n. pag. intersections.anu.edu.au/issue22/mohan.htm.
7. “Decoding Gender Roles, Identity, Marriage, Fidelity and Female Agency in Karnad’s Nagamandala.” *Research Ambition* 8.IV (2024): 61–67. doi:10.53724/ambition/v8n4.07.

8. “Girish Karnad’s Treatment of Myth and Folklore in Naga ...” *International Journal of Contemporary Integrated Studies* (2026). ijciss.com.
9. “Introduction-to-Girish-Karnad-and-Nagamandala.pptx.” *Slideshare*, 2025.
10. “Women, Marriage and Agency: A Socio-Cultural Study of Girish Karnad’s Nagamandala.” *The Voice of Creative Research* 7.3 (2025): 280–287. doi:10.53032/tvcr/2025.v7n3.30.
11. Karnad, Girish. *Hayavadana*. 1971. *Collected Plays*, Volume One, Oxford UP, 2005, pp. 106–187.
12. LitCharts. “Padmini Character Analysis in *Hayavadana*.” *LitCharts*, 27 Feb. 2018, <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hayavadana/characters/padmini>.
13. Pavithra, K., and L. Ravi Shankar. “Identity Crisis in Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana*.” *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews* 6.2 (Apr.–June 2019): 817–819. ijrar.com.
14. “The Criterion.” “Representation of Myth in Girish Karnad’s *The Fire and the ...*” *The Criterion* 7.6 (2018): n. pag.
15. Mohan, R.K. “Girish Karnad’s *Naga-mandala*: Problematising Feminism.” *Intersections* 22 (2009): n. pag. intersections.anu.edu.au/issue22/mohan.htm.
16. “Decoding Gender Roles, Identity, Marriage, Fidelity and Female Agency in Karnad’s Nagamandala.” *Research Ambition* 8.IV (2024): 61–67. doi:10.53724/ambition/v8n4.07.
17. “Introduction-to-Girish-Karnad-and-Nagamandala.pptx.” *Slideshare*, 2025.
18. “The Criterion.” “Representation of Myth in Girish Karnad’s *The Fire and the ...*” *The Criterion* 7.6 (2018): n. pag.