

# **Influence of Brechtian Technique on Girish Karnad: A Study of *Nagamandala***

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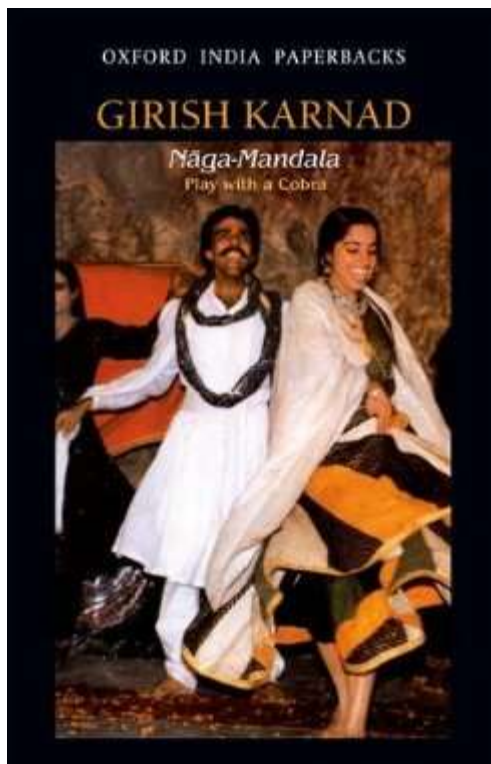
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## **Issues in *Nagamandala***

Taking up *Nagamandala* (1980) for discussion we must not lose sight of the issues raised in the play and their subsequent evaluation by a technique most fitted for the purpose. Emphasis is on appropriate technique, it may be “convention” (qtd. in Schorer) as T. S. Eliot calls it or what Mark Schorer views as “any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action, by means of which... our apprehension of the world is enriched or renewed. In this sense, everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself”. (72)

In *Nagamandala* Girish Karnad approaches his subject through folklorist technique. He confesses that he cannot do otherwise, in a conversation with Montushi Chakravarty he asserts that “he felt incapable of inventing stories, he drew his plot from history, folklore, myths and legends” (183). Montushi Chakravarty believes that Karnad transforms the preexisting material, **Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) **ISSN 1930-2940** 13:5 May 2013  
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like Shakespeare, “into unique drama of human emotions and feelings” (183). If by the “unique drama of human emotions and feelings” she means excellence comparable with Shakespeare’s one may debate her assessment, but at a later stage. For the time being, however, our focus is on the nature and efficacy of Karnad’s folklorist technique in *Nagamandala*. In an interview with Tutan Mukherjee, Karnad revealed:

*Nagamandala* combines two folk-tales. The framing story describes the gathering of the flames in a dilapidated temple after the lamps in the village homes have been extinguished. The gossip of flames is overheard by the playwright who is condemned to die unless he can keep awake the whole night. The story the playwright hears is about a woman, her husband and her snake-lover. When I heard the folktale, I was captivated. I wondered if a woman in such circumstance would commit a deliberate adultery. Would she accept the secret lover? The conservative Indian attitude will neither permit nor tolerate this, of course. So how does she face the fact that the person who visits her at night, who is her tender lover, is not really her husband? What kind of truths or half truths do we tell ourselves to avoid facing a stark and unpleasant reality? That was the inception of the play in my mind. (42)

### **Adoption of Folklorist Technique**

To explore the ‘truths and half-truths’ of our existence, Karnad has adopted folklorist technique, but he does not tell us how the two folktales, one of the condemned man and the other of the snake-lover, are significantly connected in his thematic definition. **Secondly**, in his introduction to his play he acknowledges:

The social values of this class [the Indian middle class] were shaped by the English education it had received.... Inevitably by the theatre it created imitated the British theatre of the times... several new concepts were introduced, two of which altered the nature of Indian theatre. One was the separation of the audience from the stage by the proscenium, underscoring the fact that what was being presented was a spectacle free of any ritualistic associations and which therefore *expected no direct participation by the audience in it*, and the other was *the idea of pure entertainment*.( Girish Karnad I: 304) [Italics are my own].

### **No Direct Participation**

Here the stress is on ‘no direct participation by the audience’ and on the idea- ‘pure entertainment’, these are the two western concepts introduced, and at the same time Karnad concedes:

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Even to arrive at the heart of one's own mythology, the writer has to follow signposts planted by the west. (Girish Karnad I: 304)

The western signposts Karnad follows, or what he endeavors to avoid is direct participation by the audience in his folklorist technique.

### **Association with Brechtian Technique**

This technique of keeping the participation by the audience at bay is associated primarily with the German playwright, Bertold Brecht (1898-1956), who is better known for his concept of 'Epic Theatre' or 'Alienation Effect'. *Nagamandala* is Girish Karnad's play in which Brechtian technique is glaringly operative though the means are different. The play runs like a parable showing that if a newly-wed young woman is neglected for days altogether in a patriarchal society, she is bound to get a secret lover and the play highlights it in the climax, in the poetic justice when she is rewarded with all she wanted, notwithstanding social violations she has committed. The whole drama is enacted in folk theatre form with all the usual devices of magic and mime. The audience remains detached being reminded that they are only watching a play hence should think more rather than feel about all that is going on the stage.

### **Impact of Epic Theatre**

Karnad has admitted Brecht's influence on his play. Brecht's formulation of Epic Theatre is a reaction against the traditional Aristotelian theatre of illusion. The essential point of Epic Theatre is that it appeals less to the spectator's feelings than to his reason. Brecht uses the stage platform as an arena, fully unmasked, and exposes the lightening equipment that negates all Romantic- Symbolic- Illusionist- Idealistic theatre. Secondly, epic theatre also demonstrates the principles of multiplicity and simultaneity. In traditional theatre though the audience knows that it is watching an illusion of reality, yet, it accepts it in what Coleridge calls "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (314; ch.XIV).

### **Empathy versus Alienatio**

In challenging the traditional principles of drama, Brecht questions the value of identification or empathy [*Enfuhrung* – translated 'as to feel into']. The theatrical alternative to

empathy, according to Brecht, is Alienation or Estrangement (*Verfremdung*). Brecht wants us not to identify ourselves with the characters, but to stand back from them.

Brecht assumes that when one abandons empathy one can see the object in itself as it really is. Brecht also renounces the classical principle of pity and fear, “the twin-yoked classical cause of Aristotle’s catharsis” (271), in favour of the process of alienation or estrangement.

Instead of becoming emotionally involved in the stage action, the spectator should remain a dispassionate observer and judge. Brecht’s aim is to teach men to think, to shake or enrage them into revolutionary action against social injustice. We may note here that art, according to Brecht, is a mean to urge you to take revolutionary action against social injustice. Thus a predetermined aim of art is defined.

### **Partial Exploitation of Brechtian Model**

Karnad does not fully exploit the Brechtian artifice of Epic theatre in *Nagamandala*, yet he claims that the play does strike a departure from the emotion based world of traditional values. He observes:

The theatrical conventions Brecht was reacting against – character as a psychological construct providing a focus for emotional identification, ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’ syndrome, the notion of unified spectacle – were never a part of traditional Indian theatre. There was therefore no question of arriving at an alienation effect by using Brechtian artifice. What he did was to sensitize us to the potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques in our own theatre. (Jolota 264)

In *Nagamandala*, Karnad attempts to achieve ‘alienation effect’ by deriving the material of the play from folktales, and also by using the non-naturalistic techniques of Indian traditional theatre – that is by mixing of human and non-human worlds as distancing device which brings in the element of alienation in the play.

### **Folk Element and Magical Power**

The folktale element of *Nagamandala* and the magical power which the cobra possesses continually remind the spectator that he is only watching a play. Karnad, in short has rejected the

value of emotional identification and catharsis. The play leaves the audience in possession of their critical faculties, so that they may learn something conducive to social reality. He observes:

The energy of folk-theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on head. (Jolota 264)

He further adds:

The various conventions – like chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds – permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. To use a phrase from Bertold Brecht these conventions then allow for complex seeing. (Jolota 264)

So Karnad is consciously adopting and practicing a folklorist technique – a technique rooted in Indian traditional theatre with all the devices of Sutradhar, magic, mime, mixing of human and non-human worlds, changing the course of events, even the end of the story at the behest of the audience. First he is motivated to instill alienation effect, so that he can question the prevailing social values.

### **What He Communicates and How He Communicates**

Now our task is to see how far Karnad's art comes alive within the confines of art, especially in the context of the play *Nagamandala*. Secondly, rather more importantly, what matters is not what he communicates – his content – but how he communicates, in other words, how he achieves his content in his artistic process.

Before one plunges into *Nagamandala* for analysis, it may be worthwhile to remark that when one reads a folktale or sees it enacted on the stage, it runs like a story with a moral, boring or interesting. If interesting, we keep asking what happens next, and leave it as it is at the end without getting affected except, of course, picking up a piece of wisdom. The point is that the penetrating search of art is missing; therefore, alienation effect is not much of a love of labour's result, it is rather a foregone conclusion; and the play depicting folklore rears its import like a morality play without hammering it through an evolving process. We have to see now how Karnad does otherwise in his *Nagamandala*.

## **The Theme of *Nagamandala***

The theme of *Nagamandala* is the same as that of *Hayavadana*, woman's sexuality but with a variation. Here the protagonist, Rani, is not freewheeling, candid and bold like Padmini. She is a young timid woman married into a patriarchal family, neglected and deserted for days together by her husband. How she suffers and overcomes her ordeal, finds love outside the marriage and starts enjoying the pleasures of her body, is her ensuing story. No less amusing are her efforts to stay abreast of social conventions despite her violations against them, much as she comes to dominate her straying husband. Her story is presented by Story, a female character in the play. The play opens on the:

Inner sanctum of a ruined temple. The idol broken, so the presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified. It is night, moonlight seeps in through the cracks in the roof and walls. A man is sitting in the temple, long silence. Suddenly, he opens his eyes wide. Closes them. Then uses his fingers to pry open his eyelids. Then he goes back to his original morose stance. He yawns involuntarily. Then reacts to the yawn by shaking his head violently, and turns to the audience. (Girish Karnad I: 247)

## **The Story of Flames**

With this opening we move on into the story of flames attached to the main story of the play. This dilapidated temple is located on the outskirts of a village. One then finds many tiny flames entering the temple and talking to each other. All the flames have come from different households in the village, who, after the lights have been put out for the night; escape their houses to gather in the temple to gossip, to share with each other their experiences. The stranger, the man in the temple, enters into conversation with them, shows interest in lightening, in their stories. He has perforce to listen to the story to keep him awake one whole night, if he has to live next day.

So this is the setting – dilapidated temple, flames and the condemned man – for the story, the narrator to begin her story of Rani. Santosh Gupta comments:

The identification of the flames with young, sprightly and vocal women, stories that they tell each other is a brilliant device used by Karnad for creating a particular female context and content in the 'man-oriented' folktale. He brings

within the play the strong association between oral narrative, tradition and woman's sub-culture existing within the patriarchal societies (250-51).

### **Setting Represents Community Life - Connecting to the Theme**

We may understand they represent communal life. The moot point is how this setting, this episode is connected with the main story, the theme of which is woman's sexuality. Even if it is a separate episode attached to the story, it must have bearings on the central theme of the play. It must contribute to the thematic development of the play. How it is connected with the theme of woman's sexuality? That is our major concern whatever technique Karnad adopts, irrespective of the fact whether this episode is a distancing device, a device to achieve alienation effect or what Karnad says that "flames represent a lived counterpoint to the patriarchal structures of the classical texts and institutions" (Dodiya and Surenderam 36). But he does not tell us how this prologue is part of his artistic process to examine the issue raised in the play – the woman's sexuality. At best it creates an ambience for the main folktale.

### **What Is Technique?**

But one must remember that technique is not arrangement of events within a plot, or arrangement of suspense or arbitrary device for heightening of dramatic interest. On the contrary, technique is a means towards the positive definition of the theme. One may add further that technique is not means of organizing material that is available in folklore or otherwise, but a means of exploring and defining values in that material for the first time. The temple-and-flames episode hangs loose as a surrealistic piece. In other words, this episode is not merged with the central theme of the play.

### **Story – Women's Sexuality**

Anyhow, Story begins her story of Rani and Appanna. Rani is neglected, deserted, humiliated and left lonely for days together, in a male dominated family, by her husband Appanna. She has suffered mutely day in and day out. She is daydreaming wistfully:

... so Rani asks, 'where are you taking me'? And the eagle answers: 'Beyond the seven seas and seven isles on the seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under the tree your parents wait for you'. So Rani says: 'Do they? Then please, please take me to them immediately'. 'Here I



come'. So the eagle carries her clear across the seven seas...( Girish Karnad I: 254)

Rani is a young married girl, blooming in her youth and is:

Queen of the long tresses. For when her hair was tied up in a knot, it was as though a black King Kobra lay curled on the nape of her neck, coil upon glistening coil. When it hung loose, the tresses flowed, a torrent of black, along her young limbs, and got entangled in her silver anklets. (Girish Karnad I: 253)

Rani is a tender lovely woman left to suffer by a debauched husband who is otherwise enjoying extra-marital affair with a concubine. Once she sees a golden stag in a dream who says, "I am not a stag", he explains, "I am a prince...." (Girish Karnad I: 254). Rani sits up and begins to sob. A prince she wants in the heart of her heart. Then she takes a lover, a secret lover. Kurudavva who extends help in providing Rani with magic roots is mother in-law figure, and is anxious for Rani to start her married life. Magic and Nag are psychic phenomenon, in fact externalization of Rani's inner urges whose fulfillment she seeks. Nag is also a phallic symbol. The story of Kurudavva, her roots and Rani's throwing of reddish substance on the ant-hill are dramatized means by which she gets a lover, and sees a husband figure in the lover who resembles her husband, visits secretly at night. He approaches her tenderly and she comes off slowly at first:

( ... Naga comes and sits very close to her. When she tries to move away, he suddenly grabs her, with frightening speed.)

Naga: Don't be afraid. Put your head against my shoulder.

(she slowly puts her hand on his shoulder. He gently puts his arms around her. )

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(she has fallen asleep against his chest. He slowly counts her hair. It is long and thick. He picks up her hair in hand, smells it...)

Naga: What beautiful long hair! Like dark, black snake princess!

He admires her beauty, is attracted to her, visits her every night overcoming the impediments – of dogs and mongoose – lovers have to face. Love admits no impediments. Rani is no longer afraid:



Rani: ... I don't feel afraid anymore, with you beside me. Father says: 'The Cobra simply hooks the bird's eyes with its own sight. The bird stares – and stares – unable to move its eyes. It doesn't feel any fear either. It stands fascinated, watching the changing colours in the eyes of the Cobra. It first stares, its wings half opened as though it was sculpted in the sunlight.

Naga: Then the snake strikes and swallows the bird. (Girish Karnad I: 269-70)

The first love making is mesmerizing and violent for Rani, and her experience is like dancing:

Through the weaver's nest  
And light the hanging lamps  
Of glow-worms  
Through the caverns in ant-hill  
And set the diamond  
In the cobra's crown ablaze (Girish Karnad I: 274)

In fact, the whole cosmos is set ablaze for her, yet she is afraid, and has not realized the power of love as yet when love is the rhythm of nature:

Frogs croaking in the pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, shark, swallows – even the geese! The female begin to smell like wet earth. And stung by her smell, the King Cobra starts searching for his Queen. The tiger bellows for his mate when the flame of the forest blossoms into a fountain of red and the earth cracks open at the touch of the aerial roots of the banyan, it moves in the hollow of the cotton-wood, in the flow of the estuary, the dark limestone caves from the womb of the heavens to the dark nether worlds, within everything that sprouts, grows, stretches, creaks and blooms – everywhere, those who come together, cling, fall apart lazily! (Girish Karnad I: 276)

### **Images of Sexual Intercourse – Rani in the Centre**

The passage is replete with images of sexual intercourse reaching orgasmic climax to the lazy falling apart. Rani is mesmerized so much that when birds announce dawn, her comment is:

Why don't those birds choke on their own songs? Who has given them the right to mess about with other creatures' nights. (Girish Karnad I: 276)

Rani enjoys her lover's company so much that she wants the night to last forever, seeking fulfillment to the brim. The very fact that she is reflecting her joyful state of mind, by

commenting on morning birds' song shows that she is no longer a timid miserable woman of early days. Her love life is installing in her a new confidence, and she is growing, gathering her life into her control. As she waits for Naga, how impatient she gets:

*(It gets dark... Rani hurriedly lights the lamps in the house.)*

Rani: Wait now. Don't be impatient. It won't be long... It will open out. Reach out with its fragrance.

*(Rushes into bedroom. Waits tensely. Suddenly jumps up, breathe deeply)*

There it is ... The smell of the blossoming night queen! How it fills the house before he comes! How it welcomes him! God, how it takes me, sets each fiber in me on fire! (Girish Karnad I: 281)

Rani's whole self is responding to her lover's embraces, her soul is opening out to the beauty and fragrance of her surroundings. Yet Karnad is not boldly probing her exact responses in love-making, nor does he trace out the effect of her love experience on her soul. She is drowned otherwise in the overwhelming waves of metaphors which only show her experience is joyful as it is, but is not gripping enough to turn her topsy-turvy. For her, who has been oppressed and repressed for long, sexual experience could have been apocalyptic. This could have come only through deeper emotional involvement on the part of Karnad and on the part of the audience, which he consciously avoided to his own disadvantage for whatever the reason he has, whereas art has its own reason for grilling into the outer crust. The overwhelming reason should have been to get at the truth and not to please the social graces of the society tied to traditional conventions.

### **The Panchayat**

The next landmark in the play is the panchayat decision, or how the custodians of the society handle the sexual transgression of a married woman on an express complaint by her own husband. After five months of her happy erotic life, she discloses that she is pregnant and she is extremely happy:

Rani: All these days I was never same. I didn't just dream up these nightly visits of yours. You don't know how I have suffered when I saw your scowling face in the morning; I would be certain everything was a fantasy and almost want to cry ....thank God. That's all past now.

Naga: Why?

Rani: I have definite evidence to prove I was not fantasizing.

Naga: What evidence?

Rani: I am pregnant (*He stares at her, dumbfounded.*) (Girish Karnad I: 282)

Naga is not happy because her pregnancy can reveal his identity, the identity of her secret lover. She is utterly confused and helpless because she can neither hide the pregnancy of five months nor have it aborted.

When Appanna discovers that Rani is pregnant, he knows that she has committed adultery and this infuriates him and he pushes, kicks and curses her.

Appanna: Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off?

Rani: I swear to you I haven't done anything wrong.

Appanna: You haven't? And have a bloated tummy. Just pumped air into it, did you? And you think I'll let you get away with that? You shamed me in front of the whole village, you darken my face, you slut!

(*He beats her. The cobra watches this through a window and moves about, frantic, neither notices it*)

Appanna: I swear to you I am not my father's son, if I don't abort that bastard! Smash it into dust. Right now...

(*Drags her into the street. Pick up a huge stone to throw on her. The Cobra moves forward, hissing loudly, drawing attention to itself. Rani screams*)(  
Girish Karnad I: 284 )

She escapes from being hit by a stone, but the trial by the elders is unavoidable. Through her liaison with the secret lover she had to face the consequences one day: pregnancy and then the ire of the society. By now she is mentally ready to brave all.

### **The Miracle: Cobra**

The village elders sit in judgment the next day. They listen to Appanna and Rani. Rani has to prove her chastity by taking the oath while holding the Cobra in her hand. She says that she has never touched anybody other than her husband and the Cobra. The Cobra slides up her shoulders and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her shoulder like a garland, slides down and

goes into the ant-hill. Rani stares with confusion while people prostrate before her and praises her.

Elder I: A miracle! A miracle!

Elder II: She is not a woman. She is a Divine Being!

Elder III: Indeed, a Goddess! (Girish Karnad I: 292)

While Appanna stands uncomprehending, the people take Rani and Appanna in a palanquin to their house. The couple is taken in procession to their house.

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

Elder II: Spend the rest of your life in her service you need merit in past ten lives to be chosen for such holy duty. (Girish Karnad I: 292)

When all people are gone Appanna too falls at her feet and says, "Forgive me, I am a sinner. I was blind" (Girish Karnad I: 293). She gently takes him in her arms. Thus she gets everything. Appanna becomes a devoted husband; Appanna's concubine becomes her maidservant. In due course, Rani gives birth to a beautiful child.

### **Maturity through Crisis – Truths and Half-truths**

But before the Cobra trial by the village elders, she has grown into a mature confident woman and told the Naga:

I was a stupid ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot, not a cat or a sparrow. Why don't you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like a chameleon from day to night? Even if I understood a little a bit – I could hear it. But now – sometimes I feel my head is going to burst. (Girish Karnad I: 283-84)

The point is, she is a woman possessing confidence and intelligence; and under advice from her secret lover she successfully maneuvers it brilliantly with what Karnad says 'truth and half-truths' while facing 'the stark and unpleasant reality'. She, in other words, survives the social storm by making her pregnancy a miracle. Neither her husband nor the village elders established her adultery through substantial evidence. Yet she is pregnant and that also through

no human union. Instead of reasoning out the elders' behavior, it must be through supernatural agency, a divine phenomenon. A belief is set afloat and is affirmed that Divinity has revealed itself through Rani. And Rani survives through dignity and divine aura on the basis of deceit, and reconciles to her stray husband dropping her lover who could fill her surroundings with fragrance even before he arrives to join her at night. By another option she can keep her lover for secret liaison inspite of the presence of her husband in the house. What we are shown in the double ending is that her husband is as good as her lover whether she keeps him or not. Isn't that to say no male is unique for a woman; this posture rejects the concept of patriarchy which considers woman as property. Then again, if she drops her lover, can she do so overnight without any emotional turbulence? On the other hand does her husband accept her willingly or under social pressure after she has been declared goddess? No he has his doubts:

Appanna: What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I sinned so much that even nature should laugh at me? I know I haven't slept with my wife. Let the world say what it likes. Let any miracle declare her a goddess. But I know! What sense am I to make of my life if that's worth nothing?( Girish Karnad I: 290)

### **A Blurred Character – Lack of Psychological Probing**

The fact that Rani accepts her situation tamely shows that she is a blurred character, not sensitive, unpredictable, neither is she emotionally rich and is lacking in depth worthy of a protagonist. More importantly, Karnad's technique of using folklorist frame does not penetrate the outer surface of Rani's condition after her reconciliation with her husband. Here Karnad's technique should have probed Rani's bruised and wounded self after she is parted from her lover with whom she has spent five months of heavenly life, her agonized separation, her tensions, her conflicts, her fears, and hopes. But Karnad's technique does not admit of psychological probing, does not even explore her fears and joys in meeting her secret lover. The very technique in Karnad's creative process does not invite the decisive ending.

In the interest of what Karnad claims of multiple seeing, the impact of the play is diluted, and intensity is sacrificed. Montushi Chakravarty states that, Karnad, like Shakespeare works on

pre-existing material and transforms it into “unique drama of human emotions and feelings” (181). How can any material pre-existing or otherwise be transformed into “unique drama of human emotions and feelings”(181) unless it is subjected to merciless examination, and turned upside down to gauge the emotional depth and discover its meaning and work towards positive definition of the theme first and finally to achieve moral evaluation. Rani has been deceitful at the trial, has been deceitful after she gets her husband, and finding her husband now devoted at her side throws out her lover.

### Shakespeare versus Karnad – Treatment of Pre-existing Material

It is Shakespeare who has actually transformed the pre-existing material into unique drama, not Karnad. *Hamlet* from simple revenge play by Kyd becomes a powerful play with the overwhelming problem of how to uproot evil. Nor does Karnad probe deeply the recess of Appanna’s mind that has an adulterous wife, yet has to live with her. Mentally she should have been a wrack inspite of his social compulsions to accept her and live with her. After a mild questioning he gives up. His character is as thin as aerial, and is not convincing foil to define her sexuality.

In the triangle if one is seized with sexual jealousy, it is Rani’s secret lover (Naga) who cannot hear the new situation in the social set up with Rani in the arms of her husband.

Naga: Why should I not take a look?

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- - - - -

*(Goes into Rani’s bedroom. Rani is sleeping next to her husband, her head on his shoulder, her long loose tresses hanging down from the edge of the cot. Her child is by her side. There is a quiet smile of contentment on her face. Naga looks at the group and recoils in sudden anguish, covers his face as though he cannot bear to see the scene.)*

Naga: Rani my Queen! The fragrance of my nights. The blossom of my dreams! In other man’s arms? Does she curls around him as passionately every night now? And dig her nails into his back? Bite his lips? And here I am – a sloughed-off skim on the tip of the thorn. An empty sac of snake-skin. No I can’t bear this. Someone must die. Someone has to die. Why shouldn’t I kill her? If I bury my teeth into her breast now, she will be mine. Mine for ever!

*(Moves to her swiftly. But stops)*

No. I can't. My love has stitched up my lips. Pulled out my fangs. Torn out my sac of poison. Withdraw your veils of light. Flames let my shame float away in the darkness. Don't mock, gecko. Yes, this King Cobra is now no better than a grass snake. A common reptile. That's what I am and I had forgotten that. I thought I could become human. Turn into my own creation. No! her thighs, her bosom, her lips are for one who is forever a man. I shed my own skin every season. How could I even hope to retain human form? (Girish Karnad I: 295-96)

We can see how the lover is affected and seized with the emotion of jealousy. Karnad for the time probing the mind of a castaway lover smitten by the all consuming emotion of jealousy at least for a short period of time, emotionally involved with the plight of the lover and making us suffer with her, much to the contrary of his attempt to alienate us. Yet the depth and intensity which sexual jealousy could generate are missing. We may remember Shakespeare's depiction of Othello's sexual jealousy:

Othello: Had it pleased heaven  
To try me with affliction, had they rained  
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,  
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,  
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,  
I should have found in some place of my soul  
A drop of patience, but, alas, to mark  
A fixed figure for the time of scorn  
To point his slow unmoving finger at.  
Yet could I bear that too, well, very well.  
But there, where I have garner'd my  
Where either I must live, or bear no life,  
The fountain from which my current runs,  
Or else dries up, to the discarded thence? (Oth. 3.2.228)

Here is the intensity, the consuming sexual jealousy, the penetrating, heart-rending suffering of a man who thinks his wife has gone into the arms of somebody else, leaving him weak. Naga's suffering in his jealousy does not carry that depth and intensity. Scope for folklorist form does not probe deep enough into the minute working of the mind.

### **Enigmatic Character Kappanna – A Reflection of Appanna**



The question of dramatic significance of Kuruddava and Kappanna has to be settled within the evolving story of the play. We cannot brush it aside as something of a mystery in the middle of the play. Kurudavva is the means of providing Rani with a lover, and Kappanna remains somewhat an enigma who meets a Yaksha woman as Kappanna describes:

Kappanna: She is not a village girl. Which village girl will dare to step out at this hour?  
And I am not making up stories. That day she floats out from the haunted well.  
Just now she stepped out of the cemetery. Looked at me. Smiled and waved. (Girish Karnad I: 288)

Later in the play Kurudavva speculates when she finds Kappanna missing:

Kurudavva: If only I had eyes! I would have recognized. But can one do with these pebbles? When he tried to tell me I didn't listen. I was deaf. A temptress from beyond? A Yaksha woman. Perhaps a snake woman? But not a human being. No. What woman would come inside our house at this hour? And how? She wasn't even breathing. I shouted have asked, 'who are you? What do you want from us? Go away! Suddenly the door burst open. The rushing wind shook the rafters. He slipped from my hands and was gone. Never came back. (Girish Karnad I: 291)

Thus we meet her again towards the end of the play while she is searching for her son:

Kuruddavva Voice: Son! Where are you?

(Lights come on. Rani, Appanna and child are sleeping)

Kuruddavva Voice: Kappanna ...

(*Appanna sits up*)

Appanna: Yes ?

Rani (waking up): What is it?

Appanna: A thought I heard someone calling.

Kurudavva Voice: Kappanna where are you?

Rani: The poor soul! Kurudavva

Appanna: In my sleep, it sounds like my mother calling me... (Girish Karnad I: 296)

Kappanna seems to be a reflection of Appanna who has gone astray chasing a concubine who has been as elusive and flimsy as Kappanna's Yaksha woman, and gets nothing in the end, gets no palpable genuine love with gnawing doubts in the chastity of his imposed wife. Kurudavva then is a reflection of his mother, who has been blind to Appanna's upbringing, but an anxious mother-in-law to help her daughter-in-law start a family.

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Influence of Brechtian Technique on Girish Karnad: A Study of *Nagamandala*

## A Modern Treatment of Traditional Motifs

In *Nagamandala*, Karnad's approach and treatment is modern. He uses the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements. The various conventions – the chorus, the music, the apparently unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of human and the non-human worlds – present a simultaneous presentation of alternative point of view. Karnad leaves the stage apparatus visible, presents synoptic announcements, and has narrator's directly talking to the audience. All this compels the audience to respond to the action of the play intellectually and to question it, instead of responding emotionally and merely accepting it. Karnad has used his play as a vehicle to express the complexities of modern life.

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