

Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala*, Its Folkloric And Mythical Study

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Abstract

Indian drama written in English by Indian playwrights makes intensive use of tradition, myths, legends and folklore. Myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or special phenomenon, and typically involving super natural elements. According to Northrop Fry, "Myth is a drive towards a verbal circumference of human experience" Myth and legends represent the social value, the principles of life, shared experience of race, the norms and codes of society. According to William Golding, "Myth is a story at which we can do nothing but wonder; it involves the root of being reverberates there." The mythical story is a tale of responsibilities, sacrifice and self realization. India is a nation of various religious sentiments and beliefs. One can find everywhere in the farthest and in the nearest part of nation some mythical story or folklore or song related to divinity or some heroic deeds of ancestors. In other words, myth explains a ritual by providing an authority for it. Karnad himself says in his introduction to three plays that, "The myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally." (TP1). As Jose George quotes, "The leitmotif of Karnadian art is the metamorphosis of central characters in mythical and social situations from meaning to being and from being to meaning."

Keywords: Naga-Cult, Myth, Ritual, Kalpana-Parayal, Folktale.

Karnad has gone significantly back to Indian tradition and culture to write his plays. He has recreated the rich and dynamic picture of Indian society, culture and its people. He often takes a theme, a historical event of Indian history and presents it in a modernized way. Majority of his

play employ the narratives of myth, history and folklore to evoke an ancient or pre-modern world that resonates in contemporary context because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of present. He has also adopted the oral tale of the people and presents in dramatized way. He feels that they are very much relevant today, and hence, seeks to adopt myths and folk forms in his plays. Thus he creates a synthesis between the ancient and the modern to serve his purpose of using the past to illuminate the present. Most of the playwrights in India have either written in such a traditional manner that it lost relevance to their urban existence or they have written in such an urbanized manner that it lost its relevance to the traditional part of their personality. In this regard Karnad comments “we keep acerbating between the traditional and the modern, perhaps we could not hit upon a form which could balance both.” He attempts to balance both in his plays. He does not takes myths in their entirety, but he takes them only in parts that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination. Basically he has given a new interpretation to the historical, oral and mythical tales.

The play *Naga-Manadala: a play with cobra*: is based on folk belief and myth which has a twist of romance in it. According to Jose George, “folklore in the oral tradition is free from all strictures and, in fact aims at deconstructing boundaries and confinements.” Myths are generally dateless. Their verification of date is the matter of controversy. It has not been proved yet that which myth existed earlier to other. The chief source of Indian myth is the Vedas which are too old to be proved. In the context of folk theatre and its importance it would be quite appropriate the views of Brecht. He was the first to say and give a clear cut definition of folk theatre. To quote Bertolt Brecht , “ the energy of folk theatre comes from the fact although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values... The various conventions-the chorus, the music, the seemingly unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of human and non- human worlds- permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative point of view ... They allow for, to borrow a phrase from Bertolt Brecht “ complex seeing.” Focusing on the them and type of the play Jose George states that the play *Naga Manadala* depicts to the second phase of Indian ‘Avant Garde’ which consists of the dramatic representation of the local myths,

folktales, political / cultural narratives that convey the ethnic spirit, the local colour and so on in a dramatic mode and tries to combine the elements of Sanskrit dramaturgy and folk performance.

The play *Naga Mandala* is the dramatic representation of two perspectives of the Kerala people. As Jose George quotes, “the play depicts the local colour myths, folktales, political or cultural narratives that convey the ethnic spirit, the local color and so on.” It also combine the western and Sanskrit dramaturgical elements in it. The first is the oral tradition of Naga cult and the second is the folktales of Kannada people. The folklore of the Naga has its origin in the folk belief which existed among the people orally. The author has converted the oral tradition of Naga into a dramatic performance. The play is an extension of folk culture when seen through the perspectives of cultural belief and practices. If it is isolated from its cultural context it becomes merely the fake story of superstitions. Naga the protagonist of the play operates a cultural sign. It also represents the eco- centric animal world that is capable of sensory human emotions. Therefore the cultural context determines the meaning of *Naga Mandala* and governs its impact. The play *Naga Manadala* may be viewed as a morality play in the sense of religious mysticism combined with a view of nature. Because each character of the play has been given a particular name, accordingly to their special quality as it happens morality plays.

The play *Naga Mandala* is about the ceremony of Naga cult which is a festival of Kerala in that they perform dance and invoke the Naga. Naga cult is a type of worship which is still in trend in many parts of Kerala as well as Karnataka. There are many types of Naga cult performances. Naga is a semiotic cultural in myths and sacred texts of Hindu Mythology. The Pulluva community, a Hindu sect of Kerala, is believed to have descended from a Dravidian clan whose totem is Naga. The ritual is done solely by the Pulluva sect only to escape from the ‘Sarap Kopam’ that is the anger of serpent. They come to the temple and worship the nag and perform a dance which resembles the serpent movement. During the worshipal performance one Pulluva women enters the temple and she do trance like dance of which is like the dance of Naga after sometime the women gets in trance and she is ready to predict the oracle or the quarries of the people. The ritual is called the ‘Kalpana Parayal’ which means ‘the telling of future’. After the foretelling the women fall unconscious and that marks the end of the ritual worship of Naga. In

the play the author has tried to establish a cult and belief in the Pulluva family. The playwright has used the folk narrative for his most of the play as he has used it in the play very successfully. Folk narratives are the cultural constructs that are indented to shape the individual in accordance with the codes of the moral of tradition.

There is enough influence of German Philosophy and the theatrical devices too in the play *Hayavadna*. k. Narasimhamurthy writes: “*Hayavadana* is a Brechtian kind of play employing native folk theatre strategies to present through a folk tale man’s tragically futile aspiration for perfection. Regarding the usage of western influence Karnad in his introduction to three plays says, “oddly enough the play owed its form not the innumerable mythological plays I had been brought up on, and which had partly kept these myths alive for me, but to western playwrights whom until then I have read only in print: Anouilh (his *Antigone* particularly from he has used the myth in the play *Naga Mandala*) and also Sartre, O’Neill, and the Greeks.” He has used the existentialist philosophy of Sartre in the play. In the regard of using alienation effect, he says that 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 of pure entertainment.” He has used the mask technique of O’Neil in the play. The first and foremost influential play which influenced him most was the *Miss Julie*- a realist and naturalistic tragedy of August Strindberg. There is plenty of influence of western playwrights and their techniques in his plays. Nobody can deny the fact; even the playwright has acknowledged this fact in the introduction of Three Plays.

I will conclude my paper with statement of book review, “Karnad’s plays ... have greatly contributed to the enrichment of contemporary theatre... [They] have great perform ability; [Karnad], in a way, is directors playwright.” No doubt he has contributed a lot to the Indian drama by writing such monumental works in play genre which deal with the past Indian culture. He has revived the culture by writing the plays about the great Indian culture. In *Naga- Mnadala*, Karnad weaves two Kannada folk tales together. The first one comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general: they have an existence of their own, independent of the teller, and

yet live only when they are passed on from one story teller to another. Ensclosed within this is the story of Rani, who makes up tales to fill the void in her life. Rani's predicament poignantly reflects the human need to live by fiction and half truth."

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