



Research Article

## Infeasible Desires of Women in Girish Karnad's Selected Plays

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### Abstract:

This article is a humble attempt to search the identity of women in the patriarchal society prevailing in India. The condition of women in India has undergone several alterations since past millennia. During the Vedic time, women enjoyed a higher status and were extolled to the heights of Heaven by epitomising her as Goddess. Gradually with the passage of time women lost their status and dignity. She is regarded as an abla, a weak and helpless lady who depends upon man for her existence and sustenance. Indian Literature viewed women as role bound possession whose sacrifices preserved the sanctity and the well being of the family. Literature has always been ambivalent in its representation of women. Writers observed that women had become a heated argument and they started portraying them in their works. They drew inspirations from the real life incidents, which talked about liberating the images. This article traces the paradigm shift where women emerge despite all obstacles to hold her identity in personal and professional life. This paper aims at portraying, the women is no more an accessory to man rather she is a companion, a life partner who is equal to men in all aspects.

**Keywords-** Women, obstacle, patriarchal, alteration, existence

### Introduction

Problematization refers to a re- evaluation of a problem in detail. It involves taking a comprehensive view of a certain perspective with respect to the available context. According to Michel Foucault, "It is the ensemble of discursive and non- discursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought. (Whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis etc)" (Foucault, Essential Introduction xvii). Foucault also explains it in short, it is "...work of thought" (Foucault, Essential 24). Problematization is an inquiry to the how and why of a problem. So, to

say, problematization means to reach to a deeper understanding of the issue in question. The development of a problem into a question and its mutation into a problem requiring manifold solutions in order to form a response for that problem constitutes problematization. Michel Foucault, during his lifetime, participated in various identity movements. One comes across the concepts of identity, exclusion, and marginalisation in his works. Foucault was cognizant of the exclusion of the marginalised in a social set up. Exclusion marks identity through the process of subjugation.

Foucault's categorisation of people into the

normal and the abnormal foregrounds the idea of identity further. In his view, we understand the normal by pitting it against the abnormal. Foucault explained the word abnormal with respect to the classification of individuals into the human monster, the onanist and the individual to be corrected without the aid of law (Foucault, *Ethics* 51- 57). The thesis, inculcates the abnormal as stated in the third sense as the individual which is meant to be corrected. The patriarchal society continues with this kind of categorisation where, being a woman, calls for their segregation into an abnormal, right from her birth. Identities are formed as a result of this categorisation. Problematisation is the confrontation of a problem with politics. According to Kate Millet, "The term "politics" refers to power structured relationship of arrangements whereby one group is controlled by another" (Millet 23).

A woman is being identified as the 'other' who is someone lesser than man. An individual's behaviour determines his identity and in the case of a woman, the seeking of freedom is considered as a part of her abnormality. Foucault himself includes relations of power and relation to oneself and to others as the fundamental elements of any experience (Foucault, *Essential* 23). Identity is marred as well as shaped to suit the requirement by subjugation. The emergence of the problem of identity as a political issue calls for a consideration of disempowerment of women that bars them from moving beyond the fixed boundaries. The identity of a woman in a male-centred society is wrapped up in the norms prescribed by that very society. Foucault's works, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality: 2*, *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* are incorporated in this chapter. According to Foucault, power operates in the relationship between the individual and the institutions. An individual is the product of what an institution makes out of

him. The role of the social structures in the constitution of an individual was considered of a paramount significance by Foucault.

The power operating between the institutions and the individual resulted in manufacturing of particular identities. It is in such a manner that a woman's body becomes her very identity. Foucault infers, "She inhabited the outer edge of the "world," in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations" (Foucault, *History 1: 121*). Foucault's precepts stood as a direct challenge to the display of fallacious incorporations in everyday discourses. My humble attempt in this chapter is to show how a woman's body is a site where the problematization of identity becomes an urgent concern and the resultant disempowered existence that a woman has to put through in her life.

There has been a significant increase in the quantity of writing that is self-consciously feminist in tone, plainly supporting the principles of female equality, since the inception of the women's movement. Feminists have taken a fresh interest in researching early works by women authors and interpreting them in new ways in order to determine how women's writings have parallels with male literature and how much they are part of it. Women's perspectives and expressions about their own lives are the primary emphasis of feminist literature. If one considers the history of writing, only men wrote and expressed women's perspectives, so the feminists' primary goal is to place women at the center and elevate them to positions of authority so that they can express their own voices, be heard and believed, and exercise authority over their own lives and experiences. Feminists have taken many previous women authors seriously in order to explore them from fresh viewpoints in order to hear women's voices in literature. Take, for example, the Greek poet Sappho, whose work is primarily concerned with women's perspectives. Because it is about women, it was deemed

trivial at best and immoral at worst, and it has nearly completely vanished from the literary heritage. Christine de Pizan is an example of a fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writer.

*Le Livre de la cité des dames* (1405; *The Novel of the City of Ladies*, 1982) is her first book, and it conveys new notions such as the horrors of rape and domestic violence. She went on to refute the masculine stereotype that women aren't as clever as men. She contends that a man's assumption that women are incapable of managing money is incorrect. It was translated into English for the first time in 1982 and is now available to current readers. Since then, it has become a feminist literary classic. Even though the book is from the Middle Ages, this work serves as an example of how women's writing vividly portrays female opinions, experiences, and voices. The purposeful destruction of Sappho's work, as well as the publishing history of this book, demonstrate that women's voices have not been valued or deemed literary until today.

William Blackstone, a renowned professor of law at Oxford in the seventeenth century, defines marriage as a "civil death" for women. Millett cites his *Commentaries on the English Constitution and Commentaries on the Laws of England*, claiming that marriage unites husband and wife and that the legal existence of women is suspended during marriage or that her whole essence is absorbed by her husband. Everything she does must be done under her husband's supervision, protection, and care. (Millett, page 68).

Women's education, employment, and family roles and the interrelations between them have attracted increasing attention in last few years. Feminist have dispelled long held notions about "women's place" and the accepted myths about their nature and function. Over the last few decades there has been a tremendous change in laws, attitudes, and norms affecting women's status, roles, and development in society in India. As a result of which women have ventured beyond the traditional role of wife and mother, and have sought employment career outside the

home, and have actively participated in economic and social development of the nation. There is a restructuring and reorientation of women's role in contemporary society. However, not much empirical knowledge is available about these changes and the impact they have on women's behaviour, values or attitudes and identities. Rapid social changes in women's career and family roles are accompanied by a significant transition in their attitude towards career and family. Research in the last decade highlighted the complex relationships between women's objective roles and her subjective attitudes regarding these roles which affect her overall life satisfaction and sense of identity in society.

In the present era in the post-colonial literature woman has become the centre of discussion, not only in India but also in western countries. Amartya Sen in his "more than 100 million women are missing" mentions two main reasons for gender inequality, first thing is the cultural bias and discrimination while providing nutritious food and general medical treatment. Cultural biases always keep the male domination at the top. Silvia wallaby in her "theorizing patriarchy" depicts patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate oppress and exploit women.

plays are written and performed from time immemorial. The purpose was didactic as most of the plots revolved around the stories from the Puranas and epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Plays were written in a way that they could reach out to everyone, from the king to the peasant. The plots were interesting, the dialogues engaging and the lessons though simple, had profound significance. Indian theatre has evolved over the period of time as a result of foreign invasion, British rule and also independence. Different literary movements and different kinds of works from all over the world were introduced in Indian which had their influence on Indian drama. Different times brought different changes to the theatre: thematically, linguistically, structurally, and so

on. In the process of evolution the past and the present are interwoven strongly. Though there seems a great difference in the ancient theatre and theatre of today, it cannot be said that they have nothing in common. Among other things, the basic purpose remains the same, that is, to reach out to the masses in order to convey an important message.

Girish Karnad is one of the many writers in India who are inspired by the past. He is a Kanada playwright, author, actor and film director. He grew up watching regional folk dramas and had many friends and colleagues in the literary field. He learnt about the Puranas, acting, plays and theatre from these experiences which became deeply rooted in him and have a great influence on his thoughts and ideas. He went to Oxford University as a Rhode scholar but decided to come back to India and write in his mother tongue, that is, Kanada. His background with the Indian roots and association with the foreign writers intersected in his plays. He was brought up in an unorthodox environment which helps him to have an open mind about gender and sexuality. Thus he consciously writes about the condition of women and their right to choose over accepting what is given. He has contributed immensely not only to the Kanada theatre but also to the Indian theatre. He has won many awards for his works, some of the major ones for literature being: Padma Bhushan (1992) and Jnanpith Award for contribution to literature and theatre (1999). Some of his important plays are: Yayati (1961), Tughlaq (1964), Hayavadana (1972), Nagamandala (1988). For this article, the focus will be on the women characters from Hayavadana and Nagamandala.

Girish Karnad was one of the great Indian dramatists, steadily made successful dramas on myth, folk tales and historical plays. He has marked his success in both written as well as stage performance. His plays serve as a good reference for exploring the feminist writings. Karnad's plays tell different stories in a different plot but everything related to the traditional societal issues. He focuses on the problems faced especially by woman in the society. He

gazes at the domestic issues in all his plays and tries to give solutions through the plot. He has mixed several aspects in his plays including the concept of existentialism, epic theatre technique, historical and mythological stories in a folk plot which deals with the contemporary socio-political problems and domestic issues which grabs much attention from the critics as they usually paid much feminist design in his plays. His portrayal of women characters speaks about his understanding of Indian women in a better way.

He has made his female characters subjected to all the critical stages of life especially guiltiness. Almost all his plays are in some way dominated by the female in it. He used his full freedom to describe the role of women in his stories. He has introduced several other techniques of portraying both the traditional and modern archetypal female characters in plays. There are four main varieties of plays written by Girish Karnad and the picturization of women in all these types varies according to the need and plot. In historical plays women are made as subservient characters because during the ancient times women were not subjected to socio-cultural, political and economical issues. This point is well evidenced in his most famous plays Tughlaq and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan.

The past story of Hayavadana is built only by his mother „the princess“. The character of the princess is constructed as the stubborn character here. Whereas in another plot of the same play, Karnad moves the whole plot with the Padmini character who loves Devadatta's soul and Kapila's body. She boldly messed up the condition by changing the heads of both the men. She didn't miss the chance to live with the soul of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. This is in a way an illicit relationship but she justifies it through her arguments. Devadatta never suspected her for the happenings but he fights with Kapila till the end. Padmini never gave her senses to the chaos she enjoyed her life to the fullest. Even she decides the death of both the men.

Girish Karnad's plays are extremely important

from a feminist standpoint. As a living legend in contemporary Indian English drama, he is regarded as one of the most important Indian dramatists. He assesses all of his female characters critically. There is a lot of room for them to express themselves. They go above and beyond social norms in order to fulfil their desires. They are the embodiment of strength, directness, and a protestor against the social structure that oppresses women's positions.

Gender bias in society and patriarchal oppression of women are important themes in Karnad's plays. Karnad depicts the condition of a typical Indian female in his plays, who is ruled by patriarchal order and bound by tradition, but whose spirit remains unbounded. Karnad, as a humanist, sincerely attempts to give a voice to the silenced majority through his plays. Yayati's Devayani, Sharmishta, and Chitrlekha, Hayavadana's Kapile and Padmini, and Nagarani mandala's and Kurudavva. Tribals, such as Mitilai and Vishakha in *Fire and the Rani*, Mahout in *Bali*, the Sacrifice, Chandravati in *Flowers*, Malini in *Broken Images*, and Rahabai in *Wedding Album*, represent Karnad's effort to give them a voice.

Girish Karnad is internationally recognised as a play right, but he is also a highly skilled communicator and a person of diverse accomplishments and interests. Based on his serious explorations of folklore, mythology, and history, the subjects of his plays reflect contemporary problems and challenges, and he strives to forge a link between the past and the present. As the creative intellectual that he is, he obviously draws inspiration for his plays from his own experiences and uses them as a medium to communicate his own-independent and original feelings, thoughts, and interpretations.

### Conclusion

Girish Karnad's plays, on the other hand, all represent feminine aspects that are oppressed in male hegemonic patriarchal society. However, in order to analyse it thoroughly, his six plays *Yayati* (1961), *Hyayvadana* (1972), *Bali: The Sacrifice* (1980), *Nagamandala: Play with Cobra*

(1988), *Wedding Album* (2009), and *The Fire and The Rain* (1998) were chosen. The chapters that follow are concerned with female issues in the family, in marriage, and on a physical and social level. Finally, Girish Karnad presents a New Woman who is an ideal human being, and her image awakens patriarchal society's males. All women characters in Karnad's play suffers in male dominated society. Their repression is more severe because they attempted to cross the line in the maledominated social structure. Males have a voice, presence, and power, whereas females are silent, absent, and powerless. Karnad was successful in reducing the great injustice done to women in patriarchal society by providing strength, allowing them to follow their internal words by opposing social norms, rites, and rituals in a deeply rooted male dominated social structure. It concludes with some of Amartya Sen's suggestions in his "more than a hundred million women are missing" to improve the status of women in a male-dominated society.

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