

**PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF WOMEN  
CHARACTERS IN SELECT PLAYS OF  
GIRISH KARNAD**

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## **PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN SELECT PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD**

Through the centuries, Indian women have tried to create their own space within a patriarchal society which regards them as primarily an adjunct to a male. Women have ruled vast households, have found voices in music, art and literature – and yet, by and large, they have unquestioningly accepted their subaltern position in society. The vast majority has regarded that position as inevitable, almost destined: they have interiorized the dominating patriarchal ideology so thoroughly that there was no scope for a critical re-evaluation. The purpose of this research is to analyze the Psychological realities of feminine characters of Girish Karnad [1938], one of the foremost playwrights in Contemporary Indian drama.

Indian writing in English has been recognised as a major contribution in English Literature. The imaginative use of English had won worldwide applause for the quality of writing. A large number of themes based on postcolonial concepts like colonization, decolonization, quest for identity, sense of alienation in one's own land, cultural Diaspora and psychological impact of colonization have been used by the writers of postcolonial age. Karnad holds a unique place as he created a large number of creative and plays of immense value.

In Karnad's plays, the play is not a sociological phenomenon, rather it is psychic. He sets himself seriously to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women. These women are tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. Karnad always unravels the subconscious of his highly sensitive protagonists. Girish Karnad turns his eye inward and writes about the flickering

psychic reactions. His themes are original and different from those Indo- Anglian writers as he is engaged in exposing the essential dilemmas faced by the Indian women. He portrays and analyses human relationships in the context of emotionally related kin, which is a fertile area of exploration.

As a perfect Playwright, Karnad offers a wide variety of psychological interpretations. Hence the following issues are largely treated in his plays:

- a) Love, Marriage and Sex
- b) Social Taboos and inhibitions
- c) Cruelty and violence to the female sex
- d) Patriarchal Ideology
- e) Recognition to female sex
- f) Dreams, Desires and Fantasy.

He portrays the complexities, passions and dilemmas of women in a very subtle style. Karnad's depiction of the inner thoughts of a woman's psyche reveals women's sufferings and their lives in a very distinctive way. When we try to undertake a psychological exploration of female protagonists of Karnad's plays, we find that the experiences of these characters are complex and many times perplexed owing to the burden of their suppressed feelings. The predominant aspect of their portrayal is their quest for identity and selfhood. He presents different shades of women in the contemporary period who have to face a psychological battle. They suffer being unable to get a strong foothold in the world and perplexed by the enigmatic nature of human relationships and their own desires to seek happiness. The author, through the inner reflections of her heroines, reveals their continuous efforts to seek inner peace and a quest to find their unique identity in this world, which would give meaning to their existence.

Karnad mainly concentrates on the dilemma of modern woman in this male-dominated society and her destruction at the altar of marriage. According to her most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility. Men are apt to be rational and matter of fact. Women are sentimental and emotional. Their attitudes, their interests are different. Naturally they look at things in different ways and react to the same situation differently. Not only is the man himself different, but as it often happens in the society of changing values, his family ways, his surroundings to which she is expected to adjust herself, are entirely different. The result is that there is a gradual erosion of marital relationship and marriage comes to symbolize for a woman nullification of everything she has come to cherish. She feels tied down. This affects her entire psychology and behaviour which soon destroys her sensibility and her very self.

The aim of present research work is to highlight the psychological explorations of women characters in the select plays of Girish Karnad. His plays reflect the psychological explorations, and the man -woman relationship in modern society. Most of his plays deals with the burning problems of sex and psychology. A close study of his plays reveals that he has projected women's quest for freedom, their status and role in the society. The thesis focuses on the psychological perspectives of women Characters through the concept of Dream interpretation. Sigmund Freud is the first psychoanalyst and many of his insights into the human mind are widely accepted. Dream interpretation in psychoanalysis is a tool aiding in the discovery of Psychic contents – repressed emotions and aspirations, obstructed instinct drives, etc. – within the unconscious mind.

This research is proposed to examine the neurons in fathomless avenues of the psychic of particular protagonists of Karnad with regard to the following three Plays:

- *Nagamandala* (1968)
- *Hayavadana* (1972)
- *The Fire and the rain* (1995)

This work is divided into five chapters and each chapter comes out with an interesting discovery of the mysteries behind.

Chapter I, Introduction briefly dashes the origin of Indian Writing in English and locates us through the map of literary details to the world of Karnad. In addition to that, it serves as a nutshell, right from the biographic details of the author to the minute details shared in the other chapters. Karnad has outlined in most of all the three plays, the problems and plights of miserable characters who are highly sensitive and emotional women, tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect which blooms into the theme of his plays. The characters struggle with their hard destinies in the shape of maladjustment in married lives.

Chapter II (Girish Karnad: A Playwright) affords us with his way of expression. Predominantly Karnadi's concern lies in exploring the psychic depths of his characters. He portrays them as individuals facing single-handed, the violent assaults of existence. It is clear that his concern as a playwright is a rational and a logical approach towards the feeling of inner experiences of life in individual men and women. To Karnad, it is not needed of any separate technique for the composition of the play but it is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings blooms into enticing symbols and images. Moreover, the painting of sequences in a picturesque manner

takes the front seat of the narration. Myths and legends serve as metaphor for contemporary situation in Karnad's plays. He employs them to discuss the different problems that a modern woman faces in the patriarchal society in India. Karnad paves a new way to Indian English drama by experimenting with folk traditions, Sanskrit drama, Brechtian techniques and strategies of avant-garde.

Chapter III (Patriarchal Ideology), Patriarchy as an age-old institution has silenced women without a voice of their own. It has also institutionalized all social systems and cultural traditions that strongly divide the world on gender lines, masculine and feminine, privileging the former at the cost of the latter. This social/historical/cultural construction of woman as man's other, the secondary role-player, has made her suffer from marginalization, victimization and subordination in so far as the male-formulated power structured relationships are concerned. Women's confinement in a traditional society within a Lakshman-rekha which permanently shuns them from being noticed/visible to the male gaze, causes their life, experience and emotion to linger in the background, invisible.

Karnad's plays represent the harsh and realistic situation faced by women in India. Being a conscious and sensitive dramatist, Girish Karnad envisages insightful changes in traditional, socio- psycho-cultural status of a woman and tries to create the identity of women in his plays. The lives of women have been manipulated by patriarchy in all ages and cultures undoubtedly in various ways by prescribing values, norms, gender roles and ethics to keep the male dominance at the top.

Karnad championed the cause of silenced womenfolk in Indian orthodox society through his plays. Karnad was well acquainted with feminist ideologies and the havoc wrought by patriarchal ideologies in Indian society. His plays abound with

subalterns especially women and lower caste people subjected since ancient time by patriarchy or upper hierarchy of the society. Karnad has not only exposed their subalternity but also fused energy in their lives so that they can speak; shifted their position from “margin” to “centre”. The chapter endeavors to analyze the plays of Girish Karnad from a feminist perspective. Theme/motif, characterization, image and psychology of the women have been targeted with the purpose to evaluate Karnad’s vision, attitude, concern and treatment of the feminine issue. His deep-rooted humanism and concern for the upliftment of Indian women have produced two sets of characters—one the traditional representing the gendered subalternity; another progressive which mark the evolution of womenfolk. Devayani, and Padmini in *Hayavadana*, Rani and Kurudavva in *Naga-Mandala*, Vishakha and Nittilai in *The Fire and The Rain*.

Chapter IV (Psychological exploration of Women Characters), tries to probe the deeper scars in the inner world of Karnad’s characters and thereby scanning the truth behind their eccentric behaviour.

Unlike the Western women, Indian women's identity is deeply embedded not in the marital twosome but in the entire family, caste, class and community. Her role in the family is either given a heavy white-wash or new roles are added to the existing ones. Contrary to western women, Indian women are committed to the idea of gradual change. While focusing on identity of Indian women in a traditional society, it is observed that, where and when tradition governs, an Indian woman does not stand alone; her identity is wholly defined by her relationships to others. In most societies, a woman (more than a man) defines herself in relation and connection to other people; this is singularly true of Indian women. The dominant psycho- social realities of her

life can be condensed into three stages: as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother to her sons and daughters.

This chapter focuses on the psychological problems, dilemmas, and conflicts experienced by the women characters of Girish Karnad's plays in their different social situations. It primarily deals with the way the women liberate themselves from a male-dominated society. Further, this chapter deals with the concept of dreams and how it helps the psychological development of the women characters in the select plays of Girish Karnad.

Chapter V is the summing up of the details spoken in the previous chapters. All the characters are introverts, unaware of facing problems. The study manifests the presence of a psychological or inner realism in most of the plays. Girish Karnad has a deep comprehension of the human heart. It is seen that the author does not idolize life. But he depicts the plight of human beings in their familial and social relationships. He analyses the reasons why life does not remain pleasant and amicable all the time. Therefore, the study reveals that he examines marital life and the causes of disharmony. It is seen that attitudes and ways of thinking clash. Domestic life is portrayed and in the process, the psyche of the protagonists is laid bare. The plays voice out the psychological turmoil of women who is ill-adjusted in their marital life. The actual human condition is realistically depicted in most of his plays.

Generally the emotional orphans of Karnad hail from fractured marital life. They miss their life either physically or psycho emotionally in their marital life. The empty space, which is meant to be filled with love, expands into a vacuum. This vacuum makes them to bloom into a character of indecisive, pessimistic and a solitary drifter of life in the journey of search for identity in want of love. Naturally, this vacuum tends to fill itself with the missing love and care from their husband. All these

fragile characters always at a look for some guidance in the guise of caressing them with supportive shoulders. As they have been weak in all their temperaments and insight towards life they tend to depend on someone who is strong both inward and outward. Thus these plays embody explorations of the feminine psyche by Girish Karnad, who has presented a variety of characters facing identity crisis in different situations and attempting reconciliation between illusion and reality.

Karnad has given prominent place to women in his plays an elevated their position by placing them in the centre of action, who struggle audaciously against patriarchy, male dominance and male favouring culture by adopting the 'discourse of gender'. He projects the tragic vision in his plays by placing his female protagonist in hostile situations. This discussion of various philosophical and theoretical aspects serves to explicate the female characters in his plays are generally obsessed females, highly sensitive and engaged with their dreams and thoughts and alienated from their environments. They often differ in their opinion from others and board on a long journey of thought in order to find the meaning of their survival. That is why that they suffer of their relationship more than others do. As a modern playwright, he has won a niche by exploring the emotional world of women, bringing to light the various deeper forces at work in feminine sensibility as well as psychology.