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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN EXAMINATION OF EMPOWERMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPTH IN GIRISH KARNAD'S NAGAMANDALA DRAMA

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Abstract

Girish Karnad is an Indian actor, film director, Kannada writer, playwright, and Jnanpith award recipient who has appeared in films in Kannada, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Marathi. His career has revolved around his predominant work, which has earned him widespread recognition as one of the most gifted actors in India. Indian literature is written in English and has a largely diverse tradition, which reflects the country's diverse history, culture, and language. Indian literature written in English was initiated during the British colonial era. Social reform and colonial rule were often highlighted in early works, leading to a flourishing Indian literature in English after India's independence in 1947. Girish Karnad's work on Nagamandala has earned him recognition as an Indian playwright, poet, and writer. The word 'Nagamandala' is composed of the words 'Naga' and 'Mandala', which mean serpent and circle, respectively. The serpent is considered a powerful symbol in Indian mythology and folklore and has different meanings. The serpent in Nagamandala symbolises transition and the complex intersection of reality and illusion. A mandala is a geometric design that portrays the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically. In the context of the play, it suggests a universe that is structured and intertwined, with intricate and interrelated parts. The Aim of this research paper is to study about The socio-cultural context of the situation that may contribute to the underlying theme of the clash between traditional values and modern aspirations. Develop the psychological complexity of the characters by exploring their inner conflicts, fears, and desires to create a nuanced and compelling portrayal of their journeys. To enhance the psychological complexity of the characters, uncover their inner conflicts, fears, and desires, and develop a layered and compelling portrayal of their journeys.

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Introduction:-

Girish Karnad's play "Nagamandala" is a complex and intricate piece that intertwines the concepts of tradition and modernity, examining the intricate relationship between these two aspects in Indian society. By utilising its

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characters, storyline, and symbolic elements, the play thoroughly explores the conflict and interaction between long-established cultural traditions and the ever-changing values of the present era.

Traditional roles and Expectations:

The play starts by immersing us in a world that is deeply rooted in customs and traditions. Rani, the main character, embodies the typical Indian woman who is expected to conform to societal norms and fulfil her family obligations. Her life is governed by the roles assigned to her: as a wife, she is supposed to be obedient, loyal, and submissive. These roles are reinforced by her husband, Appanna, who treats her with disrespect and neglect, reflecting the long-standing patriarchal norms in Indian society.

Kurudavva, the elderly blind woman, symbolises the reservoir of traditional wisdom and practices. Her knowledge of folk remedies and mystical rituals, like the magical root she gives to Rani, highlights the play's connection to folklore and ancient beliefs. Kurudavva's actions and advice are guided by a profound understanding of and adherence to traditional customs.

The Encroachment of Modernity:

In stark contrast to the traditional setting, there is a subtle infiltration of modernity that can be observed. This is most apparent in the character of Appanna, whose way of life embodies a fusion of old and new. While he outwardly upholds traditional values, his secret affair with a concubine suggests a more modern, albeit morally ambiguous, approach to personal freedom and desire. The presence of these conflicting traits in Appanna's character highlights the inconsistencies and contradictions often found in societies undergoing transition.

The influence of modernity can also be seen in the structure and narrative techniques employed in the play. Karnad utilises a play-within-a-play format, blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion, which deviates from the conventional storytelling methods rooted in Indian folklore. This narrative choice not only brings a contemporary touch to the presentation of the story but also challenges the audience to question the nature of truth and perception, themes that resonate with current philosophical inquiries.

Karnad proposes that tradition and modernity can coexist harmoniously. The play's conclusion implies a potential fusion of these two elements, where both old and new principles can exist side by side and enhance each other. The fact that the community accepts Rani, despite the unconventional nature of her story, demonstrates a forward-thinking and inclusive mindset that recognizes and honors tradition while also embracing progress and novelty.

Empowerment in Nagamandala:

The main idea of "Nagamandala" is empowerment, with a specific focus on the journey of the main character, Rani. The story takes place in a traditional Indian setting but deals with universal themes of gender, independence, and personal growth. Using symbolism, character development, and a unique narrative structure, the play explores different aspects of empowerment, highlighting how the protagonist goes from being oppressed to discovering her true self.

In the beginning of "Nagamandala," Rani represents the marginalised and silenced woman who is trapped within the boundaries of a male-dominated society. Her life is governed by her husband, Appanna, who neglects and mistreats her, reflecting the deeply ingrained gender inequalities in traditional Indian society. Rani's initial state of vulnerability and seclusion powerfully portrays the absence of control experienced by countless women, both in the past and present.

Rani's daily life is marked by routine and subservience. She is confined to the domestic realm, with her husband exerting strict control over her movements and actions. This lack of freedom and independence emphasizes the extent of her disempowerment, laying the foundation for her subsequent metamorphosis.

The arrival of Kurudavva, the blind old woman, marks the beginning of Rani's journey toward empowerment. Kurudavva introduces Rani to the mystical root, a traditional remedy intended to win back her husband's affection. This moment is significant as it represents the first instance of Rani taking active steps to change her circumstances. Although she initially relies on traditional means, this act signifies a departure from passive acceptance toward active agency.

The magical root, which inadvertently brings the serpent Naga into Rani's life, serves as a pivotal element in her empowerment. The Naga, who transforms into her husband at night, offers Rani the affection, attention, and respect she has been deprived of. This relationship, though shrouded in myth and fantasy, becomes a conduit for Rani's self-discovery and empowerment.

Rani's Transformation

As Rani's relationship with the Naga deepens, she undergoes a profound transformation. The Naga's nightly visits provide her with emotional and physical fulfillment, awakening a sense of self-worth and confidence. This newfound sense of identity empowers Rani to challenge the oppressive structures that have confined her.

Rani's growing assertiveness is evident in her interactions with Appanna. She begins to question his behavior and assert her own needs and desires. This shift in dynamics is a stark contrast to her earlier passivity and submission. Rani's empowerment is not just about gaining control over her own life but also about challenging the patriarchal norms that have subjugated her.

Symbolism and Empowerment

The play's rich symbolism further underscores the theme of empowerment. The Naga, a creature of ancient mythology, symbolizes primal, untamed forces that disrupt the conventional order. Rani's acceptance of the Naga as her husband signifies her embrace of these transformative forces, allowing her to transcend the limitations imposed by her traditional role.

The climax of the play, the trial by snake ordeal, serves as a powerful metaphor for Rani's empowerment. Forced to prove her fidelity in front of the village elders, Rani boldly declares her truth. The ordeal, a traditional test of purity, is subverted by Rani's unwavering confidence and honesty. Her successful completion of the trial, and the subsequent revelation of her relationship with the Naga, signifies a triumph of personal integrity over societal constraints.

Empowerment through narrative structure

Karnad's innovative narrative structure, which employs a play-within-a-play format, further reinforces the theme of empowerment. By blurring the lines between reality and illusion, Karnad challenges the audience to question the nature of truth and perception. This narrative technique mirrors Rani's own journey of self-discovery, where she must navigate the complexities of her inner world and external reality to reclaim her agency.

The story-teller and the flames, who serve as the narrators of the play, also play a crucial role in highlighting the theme of empowerment. Their commentary and interventions provide a meta-narrative that contextualizes Rani's journey within the broader discourse on gender and power. Through their perspectives, the audience gains insight into the societal norms that Rani must navigate and ultimately transcend.

Rani emerges as an empowered individual who has reclaimed her autonomy and identity. Her journey from subjugation to self-realization is a testament to the transformative power of self-awareness and personal agency. Rani's story resonates with broader themes of gender empowerment, challenging the traditional roles and expectations imposed on women.

In "Nagamandala," Karnad masterfully explores the theme of empowerment, depicting the protagonist's journey as a microcosm of the broader societal struggle for gender equality and personal freedom. Through its rich symbolism, character development, and narrative innovation, the play invites the audience to reflect on the enduring relevance of empowerment in the face of oppressive structures.

Psychology Trauma in Nagamandala

Karnad's "Nagamandala" intricately weaves psychological trauma into its narrative, reflecting on the deep-seated emotional and mental struggles of its characters. This play, rooted in Indian folklore, portrays the lives of individuals entangled in societal and personal conflicts, where trauma plays a pivotal role. The themes of psychological trauma are depicted through the characters' interactions, the symbolism of the snake, and the surreal narrative structure, emphasizing the complex interplay between reality and fantasy.

Rani's Emotional Turmoil

Rani, the protagonist, is a young bride whose life is overshadowed by psychological trauma stemming from neglect and emotional abuse. Married to Appanna, she is confined to a house where loneliness and isolation exacerbate her sense of abandonment. Appanna's indifferent and harsh treatment of Rani, locking her up every day, symbolizes the patriarchal oppression that causes her significant emotional distress. Rani's dreams and fantasies become her escape from the oppressive reality, reflecting a common psychological response to trauma where the mind seeks refuge in an alternate reality.

Symbolism of the Snake

The snake in "Nagamandala" is a powerful symbol that embodies multiple layers of meaning, including sexual desire, transformation, and psychological trauma. The snake, which takes the form of Appanna at night, becomes a source of comfort and affection for Rani, contrasting sharply with her husband's coldness. This duality of the snake represents the internal conflict within Rani, torn between her need for love and the trauma inflicted by her husband's neglect. The snake's transformation also signifies Rani's own metamorphosis as she navigates her trauma, finding a semblance of love and identity in the fantasy.

The Intersection of Reality and Fantasy

Karnad employs a narrative structure that blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, reflecting the fragmented psyche of trauma victims. Rani's interactions with the snake and her experiences within her home are tinged with surrealism, illustrating how trauma distorts perception. This narrative technique highlights the psychological realism in Rani's story, where her trauma-induced fantasies are as real to her as the tangible world. The blending of folklore elements with the character's psychological state underscores the cultural context of trauma and its manifestations.

Patriarchal Oppression and Psychological Trauma

The play critiques the patriarchal structures that perpetuate psychological trauma. Appanna's control over Rani, his infidelity, and the societal expectations placed on Rani highlight the systemic nature of her suffering. Rani's trauma is not just a result of personal neglect but is deeply rooted in the cultural norms that subjugate women. The trial scene, where Rani must prove her fidelity through an ordeal by snake, epitomizes the intersection of cultural tradition and psychological torment. The trauma is compounded by societal pressures, showcasing how cultural practices can be both a source of and a response to psychological trauma.

Psychological Healing and Empowerment

By the end of the play, Rani emerges empowered, having navigated through her trauma. The acceptance of her relationship with the snake, the birth of her child, and her eventual recognition by Appanna signify a complex process of healing. Rani's journey illustrates that psychological trauma, while deeply scarring, can also lead to personal growth and empowerment. Her transformation is symbolic of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of suffering.

Conclusion:-

"Nagamandala" offers a profound exploration of psychological trauma, empowerment and tradition versus modernity through its rich tapestry of folklore, symbolism, and narrative complexity. The characters' struggles with emotional and mental turmoil reflect broader societal issues, particularly the impact of patriarchal oppression. Karnad's portrayal of Rani's journey through trauma and healing provides a nuanced understanding of the ways in which individuals cope with and overcome psychological distress. Through the interplay of reality and fantasy, and the power of storytelling, "Nagamandala" underscores the resilience and agency of individuals in the face of profound psychological challenges.

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