

## **SUBJUGATION OF WOMAN IN GIRISH KARNAD'S THE FIRE AND THE RAIN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Padmabhushan Dr. Girish Karnad, (1938) recipient of prestigious Jnanpith Award the highest literary honor conferred in India. And an outstanding playwright in Indian writing in English is studied by most of the critics on the basis of his sources like myth, history, legend, folklore etc. and its contemporary relevance to the present scenario. Dr. Karnad has deep sense of human nature. Subjugation of woman is always like a doll in male dominated society in and off India. Indian writers in English are trying to make free the doll from ones hand but still struggling. It is just like a sad Cinderella waiting for her shoe. Myths are always the source of Dr. Karnad's play, through these mythical approaches it is attempted to focus on the subjugation of woman. The present article highlights the subjugation of women characters in Dr. Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* at different places in different situations. Karnad has artistically woven women characters in the present play, because the leading character like Vishakha is from myth and Nittilai is fictitious creation of Karnad. The whole drama plays in and around the male characters, but the women characters are the core. Her asphyxiation is widely known for her delicate use in politics. It has been found that woman always a dramatic discourse in Karnad's plays. Tughlaq's step mother in *Tughlaq*, Rani in *Naga-Mandala*, Padmini in *Hayavadana*, The Queen and the Mother Queen in *Bali : The sacrifice*, Jagdeva's mother; Brahmin woman; Jagadeva's wife; Bijjala's queen, Basavanna's wife; Haralayya's wife; Madhuvarasa's wife; Madhuvarasa's daughter and queen's maid in *Tale-Danda*, Vishakha and Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain*, female Idols; Ruqayya Banu; Hasina in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Chandravati in *Flower*,

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Manjula in *The broken images* and Vidula Nadkarni, Pratibha Khan, Mother, Hema, Radhabai, Mira and Vatsala in *Wedding Album*. Vishakha and Nittilai are the two different characters reveal the play. Vishakha who belong Brahmin and Nittilai is from Dalit (hunter girl) by caste. It is said that woman always play vital role in the making of man, but at the same time it would not be ignored that woman is the real cause of one's demolish. So far subjugation of woman is concern, she always become a tool of man's hand.

**Key words** – subjugation, Cinderella, mythical, woven, core, discourse, asphyxiation.

### **Subjugation in the play :**

*The Fire and the Rain* is a beautiful translation of Kannad play *Agni Mattu Male* by Dr. Girish Karnad himself. The source of the play is myth within a myth of *Mahabharata*. Karnad who always used the sources like myth, legend, history, folklore etc. may be for the effective understanding which made instant relation with audience.

"The myth of Yavakri (or Yavakrita) occurs in Chapters 135-38 of the Vana Parva (forest Canto) of the Mahabharata. It is narrated by the ascetic Lomasha to the Pandavas as they wander across the land during their exile. "I have met Sanskrit scholars who were unaware of the existence of the myth: it is easy to lose track of a short narrative like this in the tangled undergrowth that covers the floor of that epic." (Karnad, collected, 289)

The whole drama emphasis on tussle of power between two brothers, Jealousy and ego are the two important human aspects dominate the play. Caste conflict is also the theme of the play. Raibhya and Bhardwaja are the two brothers. The play is about the tussle for power between Raibhya's sons Paravasus and Aravasus and Bharadwaja's son Yavakri.

Vishakha and Nittilai are the two important female characters of the play, *The Fire and the Rain*. Vishakha is wife of Paravasus and Raibhya's daughter-in-law. And Nittilai is a daughter of a hunter and beloved of Aravasus. Both are playing crucial role who dominated by male characters in the play. They belong to different backgrounds; Vishakha is from Brahmin category while Nittilai is from Dalit. Both are exploited for different reasons. Vishakha is subjugated by her lover, her husband and by father-in-law. For the sake of their passion for knowledge, power and avenge for each other she becomes a sexual weapon in the hands of the male. She suffocates herself only

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because men can determine the values and usages of woman in society. Vishakha gets trapped in the power struggles between Yavkri and her father-in-law as she maintains the sexual relations with her former lover who is considered as an enemy of her father-in-law. Actually she willingly submits her problem before Yavakri---"I am a married woman" (Ibid, 118). On the other hand Nittilai is subjugated at different level. She suffers from brahminical patriarchy. She loves Arvasu because of his good nature and humanism and not because of he belongs to high class. Mala Ranganathan admits her remark regarding patriarchic view in her article Woman as Director: Re-Redeasing *The Fire and the Rain*

"Whereas Vishakha suffers from brahminical patriarchy; Nittilai becomes a victim of another kind of patriarchy, the tribal patriarchy. The brahminical patriarchy in the play reduces the woman to sexual exploitation and neglect by men vying with one another for knowledge and power". (Mukharjee, 267)

Myths are always the source to redirecting human life in modern era. Woman is always subjugated by men. But it is found that woman is the real conspirator of the situation. The character images he portraits before audience which determines his artistic nature who cultivate the thought. Like Shakespeare Karnad gives space to woman characters, a device as a voice of the contemporary period.

**VISHAKHA:** Yes, Father was happy. I was married off to Paravasu. I didn't want to, but that didn't matter. The night of the wedding, my husband said to me: 'I know you didn't want to marry me. But don't worry. I'll make you happy for a year.' And he did. Exactly for one year. He plunged me in to a kind of bliss I didn't know existed. It was heaven – here and now – at the tip of all my senses. Then on the first day of the second year of our marriage, he said: Enough of what. We now start on our search.' And then – it wasn't that I was not happy. But the question of happiness receded into the background. He used my body and his own body, like an experimenter, an explorer. As instruments in a search. Search for what? I never knew. But I knew he knew. Nothing was too shameful, too degrading, even too painful. Shame died in me. And I yield. I let my body he turned inside out as he did own. I had a sense He was leading me to something. Mystical? Spiritual? We never talked. Only the sense pervaded the air. You are still lost in the fragrance of the jack-fruit, Yavakri. I have known that it is to grow heavy, burst open, drip and rot, to fill the world with one's innards. Then one day he received the invitation from the King. To be the chief priest of the fire sacrifice is only a couple of hours away from here. But in all these seven years he hasn't come back. I know he can't. But I look forward to having him home once the seven years are

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over. Alone, I have become dry like tinder. Ready to burst into flames at a breath, To burn thing around me at the slightest chance – (Karnad, *Collected* 122-123)

Vishakha is suffered by male dominance. It is observed that Vishakha was forced to marry Paravasu when she loves Yavakri. This is very basic principle of orthodox patriarch that girl's consent is not considered when her marriage settled. Vishakha's father gets her married to Paravasu against her wish. Even she had to follow her father's decision. In this manner father's decision has to be followed in patriarchy though Vishakha becomes unhappy. She says to Yavakri that

- YAVAKRI:** Your father must have felt relieved that I went away Paravasu was a better match. I was only his miserable cousin.
- VISHAKHA:** Yes, Father was happy. I was married off to Paravasu I didn't want to, but that didn't matter. (Ibid, 122)

Here actually Vishakha does not want to marry Paravasu but she was forced by father to marry. And Vishakha's father was very happy, because his daughter obeyed his orders. For the sake of father's impression her passion turmoil into pieces so as above mentioned female became a useful tool for male's hands right from the very beginning of her life. Here Vishakha is suffered from very beginning by male-dominated principles. Karnad shows women are considered as tools in the hands of orthodox men of male-dominated society. Vishakha's whole life suffers, she subjugate because of male-dominated tradition. Vishakha and Nittilai are the two major women characters in this play. Vishakha is belongs to Brahmin by caste and Nittilai is from Dalit (hunter girl) both are opposite to each other so far caste class system is concern. But both are suffered by males in a different situation and modes in their life from various corners in this play. **By caste they are opposite but suffering is quite common.** They also became the victims of the real and the romance. The real and the romance dominate their existence. It is found that sometimes male falsely blames on woman as she keeps extra-marital relationship because she cannot clarify it openly in the society; some male uses someone's wife to take revenge by seducing her. It is also found in Ramayana and Mahabharata, Sita was cunningly kidnapped by Ravana for the sake of his lust for beauty and sex and Draupadi was very brutally molested by Kauravas. Ramayana and Mahabharata are the fully male dominated epics. Therefore it is of no need to give any more evidences which are required from myths or legends.

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The play lacks its feministic approach. The words which are used for a daughter-in-law (Vishakha) by a father-in-law (Raibhya) are quite shameful.

**RAIBHYA:** You whore-you roving whore! I could reduce you to ashes - turn you to ashes- turn into a fistful of dust-with a simple curse. (Ibid 127)

Karnad is always uses women characters as a voice of wisdom in his plays. Here is also he tried to use philosophical cum ideal aspects that he wanted to show through Nittilai but, she also became a part of subjugation in his father's, brother's and lover's hands. She is virtuous and always wants to help others. She follows rich tradition of Indian culture. Actually she is illiterate; hunter girl (Tribe) a lower caste girl as compared to Vishakha who belongs to (Brahmin) a high caste society. But Nittilai has rich qualities like love for humanity this so called sacrifice, helpful nature which differs from high class society. Though she is tribal girl but she does not believe in orthodox principles of male dominated. She won't like to maintain any sexual relations before her marriage. Even she does not allow her lover, Arvasu to touch her body. Saying that "Not until we are married. Until then the girl is not supposed to touch her husband-to-be. That's our custom-." (Ibid, 111) Even as Dalit of the society, she knows and understands the real meaning of love and sacrifice.

Actually Vishakha is from learned family but suffers from the suppression of emotions and desires, and lacks the freedom. Karnad presents his female characters as the victims of power struggle in male-dominated society. But again the question raised here what could be the options before Vishakha as a young woman. Her sexual desire and freedom for love turmoil herself. Even she very aptly recognized male dominant nature, and she equally charge her husband on the one hand and lover on the another hand about her asphyxiation and injustice. She described that

**VISHAKHA:** My husband and you! He left no pore in my body alone. And you – you think a woman is only a pair of half – formed breasts. (Ibid, 123)

Nittilai is a traditional girl who cannot oppose openly in society but she just explains the bad condition of tribal woman. She blames to upper class when she says:

**NITTILAI:** So Father's to blame? Do you know why Father called the elder in such haste? He always says: 'These high-caste men are glad enough to bed our women but not to wed them. (Ibid, 114)

Nittilai expresses her wrath against upper class. In a male dominating society, women do not have any right to speak against bad practice of male dominance. "Nittilai, a character, purely created by Karnad, is a soft- hearted girl, stands in contrast with these high-caste Brahmin and their rituals. She loves Aravasu because of his humanism and criticism the secret manners of Brahmins."(Khatri, 198) The distinction here is not only between caste conflict but the passion suppressed in between Nittilai and her love towards Arvasu. Actually subjugation has an ancient tradition we see in Ramayana and Mahabharata, woman serve in king's private room as *dasi* and do complete all requirements of the king. She subjugates herself towards the king.

In this way Dr .Girish Krand uses women characters as a social discourse but who is considered as an objective manner to fulfill the contemporary requirements. Her voice has been marginalized since evolution of man but her role makes parallel with catalyst agent. Subjugation is always follows woman as her shadow in each class at a different level and having different purposes which cannot deny.

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