



AS SHE LIKES IT: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH INTO GIRISH KARNAD'S WOMEN CHARACTERS AND THEIR DREAMS

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ABSTRACT

Karnad's plays reflect India's colonial heritage, offering a mix of Western and Indian theatrical traditions. Indian drama offers a different aesthetic approach from much of Western theatre. With Indian plays, storytelling is the focus as opposed to the action of story and often the action is described to the audience rather than depicted in the realistic mode of most Western performance. Indian plays are not imitations of life but rather representations of abstractions. All of Karnad's plays employ numerous folk theatre devices such as entry curtains, songs, puppets, masks, story – within – a – story plotlines, and a storyteller character. A scrutiny into his plays give the reader's one essential feature, an aspect that keeps revolving and linking all his plays: Dreams. Dreams have and had played a very significant role in his plays. His women character's dreams are simple, colourful and strange. Their dreams do not frighten them but gives a clear picture as to how the character looks into life without any estrangements of reality abounding with timeless action. The object of this study is to identify three variant angles. A psychoanalytic approach to Feminist identity, Freud and theories of the unconscious pervading into Karnad's characters in reference to their dreams and its peculiarities.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis – Feminine outlook – Karnad's women characters – dreams

Introduction

The concept of women is a quandary for many contemporary theorists. It is a dilemma of primary significance because the concept of woman is the central aspect of a feminist theory and it is this concept that is impossible to formulate precisely. The concept and category of woman are the necessary point of departure for any feminist theory and feminist politics, predicated as these are on the transformation of woman's lived experience in contemporary culture and the re-evaluation of social theory and practice from woman's point of view. But as a concept it is radically problematic precisely for feminists because it is crowded with over determinations of male supremacy, invoking in every formulation the limit, contrasting Other or medicated self-reflection of a culture built on the control of females.

Man has said that woman can be defined, delineated, captured-understood, explained and diagnosed – to a level of determination never accorded to man himself, who is conceived as a rational animal with free will. Where man's behaviour is underdetermined, free to construct its own future along the course of its rational choice, woman's nature has over determined her behavior, the limits of her intellectual endeavors, and inevitabilities of the emotional journey to through life. Whether she is constructed as essentially immoral and irrational or essentially kind and benevolent, she is always constructed as essential something inevitably accessible to direct institute apprehension by males.

Sigmund Freud is the first psychoanalyst and many of his insights into the human mind, which seemed revolutionary, are now widely accepted by most schools of psychological thought. Although others before and during his time had begun to recognise the role of unconscious mental activity, Freud was the preeminent pioneer in understanding its importance. Through his extensive work with patience and through his theory building, he showed that factors which influence thought and action exit outside of awareness.

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, contents pathological manifest in neurotic's symptoms. *Dreams are the royal path to unconscious*, as Freud holds. It is also Freud who first opened the road to the use of dream interpretation – analysis as a means of psychic investigation.

Feminist Identity in Relation to Freud’s Interpretation: An Analysis to Karnad’s Women Characters

This paper tries to convey an understanding of human psychology from the viewpoint of the individual, one who wishes to learn about self – inquiry. It implies getting practical knowledge to oneself. This does not mean a mere theoretical or ‘scientific’ knowledge of the make – up of the human being, nor does it exclude these. However, self – inquiry unavoidably involves us in the process of self – improvement, including the discovery and avoidance of personal psychic problems, as well as the understanding upon which all recovery of selfhood is based.

Children grow up in a male dominated society, channelled from the day they are born into pink and blue blankets, into playing with trucks or dolls, through books with sexist messages and a gender – differentiating school. Girls learn that they are supposed to be good and to please men, boys to be strong and so forth. “Society” expects that women will not achieve or to be active, so they are not. People respond according to the social situation they are in and the rewards they get. This was the argument made early by Betty Friedan, and, in her widely influential piece, by Naomi Weisstein. It is made repeatedly by many others. (362)

Emotional abuse includes verbal attacks, harassment, and belittling, excessive possessiveness, isolation of partner and deprivation of physical and economic resources. Emotional blackmail or threats to leave are also present in the literature. “Much of the literature on emotional abuse (...) reflects range of fifty-nine percent of physically abused women also reporting emotional abuse (...) many men abuse their wife emotionally; psychological abuse is destructive but less viable. The abuse of women is not confined to marriage.” (Packota)

Studies have shown that violence exists in parental homes, in-laws harsh treatments and at times violence among young and unmarried couples. Now the question arises: why does this abuse occur? Batterers have learned from their fathers or from any malefactors, beating up their wives is an effective way to exert authority. They tend to gain personal feelings of power and control. The passage taken for analysis is *The Fire and the Rain*, Act One. In this scene, we get a view of how *Vishakha* is being mercilessly ill-treated by her father-in-law. On one comes to her rescue except, her brother-in-law *Arvasu*. In Indian situations, a bride is married off to another

family and not to her husband. In this scene, we get a vivid image of a father-in-law's liberty to manhandle his son's wife.

(He grabs her by her hair and starts beating her. Kicks her. *Arvasu* can't bear to see it. He rushes to help her. Holds *RAIBHYA* back.)

ARVASU. Stop it father. Please. Go away, Sister-in-law, Go – please –

RAIBHYA. Where can she go? I want the truth and I'll kill her if necessary. Let me go! I know how to handle her –

(Struggles to get out of *Arvasu*'s hold.)

VISHAKA. Let him go! *Arvasu* (Calmly) Yes, there was somebody else there. *Yavakri!* And he had come to see me. Alone.

(Long Pause. They stare at each other.)

RAIBHYA. You whore – you roving whore! I could reduce you to ashes – turn you into a fistful of dust – with a simple curse. But let that husband of yours clean his own shit!

The sense we make of adultery is a function of the social customs pertaining into marriage as well as sex. Take, for instance, Karnad's *Nagamandala*, a tale of a woman imprisoned at home by her husband when he is not at home. The woman, pining for man's love, is visited by a snake in the guise of her husband, and the resulting union leaves her pregnant. When challenged by her real husband about her fidelity to him, she is made to undergo a version of *agni-pareeksha*: holding the snake in her hand, she attests that if she has touched any male other than her husband and this snake, she may be bitten by the snake. When she is not, she is proclaimed *devi* by the village folk. In other words, the woman can either be a whore or a *devi*, nothing in between. And, as in the Ramayana, the test is only for *Sita* and not for *Rama*. The man is never criticized for his brutish behavior.

Or consider *Hayavadana*. Here, the heads of two men get transposed and the wife of one can now claim both to be her husband since one has her husband's head and other his body. While this means that she is accorded a degree of sexual freedom, the play is at pains to emphasize that

she remains ‘respectable’ till the end. In other words, to claim that the “subversion of patriarchy is all the more effective because there is no open challenge to it”, is a problematic formulation. Does the festival of *Holi* ‘effectively’ subvert rural class hierarchies? Dharwadkar argues that “women do have agency in the drama of discontent”, and she is, of course, right. But how do we relate to this ‘agency’? Are we to rejoice that woman having agency in the drama that often works to subjugate them further?

Karnad is able to portray the implicit and unspoken Indian norms without gender bias or any preconceived notion. At several angles of his plays we can find an unerring face, a mask of a woman who wants to be let out. In *Naga-Mandala*, Act One: *Rani* faces indirect oppression. Even though in the beginning her husband does not use any physical force she is locked in her room whereas, he is entitled to have all the sexual pleasures from other channels. *Rani* is *Appanna*’s lawfully – wedded wife but here she is his lawfully – wedded servant.

KURUDAVVA. You don’t mean, he’s home only once a day, and that too...only for lunch?

(no reply)

And you are alone in the house all day? (*Rani begins to sob*)

Don’t cry child, don’t cry. I haven’t come here to make you cry. Does he lock you up every day like this?

RANI. Yes, since the day I came here...

KURUDAVVA. Does he beat or ill treat you?

RANI. No.

KURUDAVVA. (*Pause*) Does he ...’talk’ to you?

RANI. Oh, that he does. But not a syllable more than required. ‘Do this’, ‘Do that’, ‘Serve the food’. (I.10)

Emotional abuse is one of the prevalent forms of abuse of against women by their intimate partners and its damage is unquestionably severe, undermining a woman’s sense of worth,

agency and independence. It also diminishes a woman's ability to care and provide for her children and to participate in the workforce. Emotional abuse crosses all social classes, ethnic groups, sexual orientations and religions. The common denominators of abusers are personal, social and psychological, not demographic. (Miller)

(Rani starts) here. Take this smaller piece. That should do for a pretty jasmine like you. Take it! Grind it into a nice paste and feed it to your husband and watch the results. Once he smells you he won't go sniffing after that bitch. He'll make you a wife instantly. (13)

Literature provides several definitions as well as several names for emotional abuse. These include psychological maltreatment, nonphysical abuse, psychological abuse, psychological aggression and indirect abuse. From a feminist perspective emotional abuse is a means of establishing power over the victim in addition to enabling the abuser to maintain a system of psychological abuse behaviours that reinforce this power and control. According to Deborah Sinclair (1989) entitled *Understanding Wife Assault*, she states that "underlying all abuse is a power imbalance between the victim and the offender."

KURUDAVVA. That's bad. This is no ordinary infatuation then. The concubine of his is obviously –

RANI. Who?

KURUDAVVA. Didn't want to tell you. There is a woman, a bazaar woman. She has your husband in her clutches. Squeezes him dry. Maybe she's cast a spell. There is only one solution to this – (15)

To libertarian and romanticist sexual ideologies we should consider those that are based on sexist and racist premises. These identity structures not only the perceived and actual consequences sound behaviours has for different individuals but also they are perceived causes. For example, a husband's adultery maybe perceived as the failure of his wife to please him, while wife's adultery maybe perceived as her failure to avoid temptation.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad uses woman not as mere chattels but as beings inevitable to society. *Nittilai*, a tribal woman, who is totally unaware of the sophisticated city life

but, is able to make herself useful to the travelling Actor-Manager and his family by finding food from the woods for his starving babies and seeking out for medicinal herbs without any difficulty.

NITTILAI. I'm sorry that your old man had to go. But it is lucky that he chose that day. How's your brother?

ACTOR-MANAGER. His foot is much better, thank you...

NITTILAI. (Pleased) Good. I'll get him fresh herbs (...)

ACTOR-MANAGER. What an extraordinary girl!

ACTOR-MANAGER. Lucky for you that she's here. Don't you ever forget that...

ACTOR-MANAGER. I don't know what you are to her. Not that I want to know. Any fool can see you two belong to different worlds (...) You were lucky that she turned up soon after and it's she who's been nursing you. Mopping up your vomit, wiping your bottom. Like a baby. I'm grateful to her because my babies were starving when she came and now they get a bite to eat every day. Where she gets the food from, I don't know – but she knows the woods (...) We're just waiting to leave with her but she won't budge till you're better.
(Pause)

Something about you worries me. She's a good girl. Don't hurt her.

In his play *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad employs all his weapons to fight for woman for a just cause. His respect and genuine abstemiousness for woman is clearly reflected in these lines. Without crossing any boundaries of culture, Karnad had proved that woman are not 'lesser men' but individuals who can displace and restore men to whatever positions they might be, if they find out that the so-called 'strong' gender is a weakling.

Dreams: Relation to Waking Life and its Function

The study of dreams had a profound impact on man from prehistoric times by primitive races and what effect dreams may have had upon the formation of their conceptions of the world and

soul. A work of literature can only get if it is reviewed through a critical analysis. This thesis presented can be viewed into the light as “a secondary revision”. Karnad’s plays present a flamboyant of variety characters. His women character’s dream, they dream about the infinite, the possibilities and its reality. Even though Karnad did not bother to hold his character’s into a psychoanalytic perspective, he unconsciously was able to bring out the factual stand of Indian women in an Indian scenario. His women are not ill - treated but respected; they are given positions not forgetting the ‘fact’ that they are second only in comparison with males.

Let us take a look at *Rani*’s dream in *Naga-Mandala*.

- ... So *Rani* asks him: ‘where are you taking me?’ And the Eagle answers: ‘Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the seventh island is a garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you.’
- Then *Rani*’s parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and caress her. At night she sleeps between them. So she frightened anymore. ‘Don’t worry’, they promise her. ‘We won’t let you go again ever!’ In the morning, the stag with golden antlers comes to the door. He calls out to *Rani*. She refuses to go. ‘I’m not a stag’ he explains, ‘I’m a prince.’
- ...So the demon locks her up in his castle. Then it rains for seven days and seven nights. It pours. The sea floods the city. The water breaks the door of the castle. Then a big whale comes to *Rani* and says: ‘Come, *Rani*, let us go...’

These three illusions of *Rani* are in fact not dreams but hallucinations. According to Freud:

The transformation of ideas into hallucinations is not the only respect in which dreams differ from corresponding thoughts in waking life. Dreams construct a *situation* out of these images; they represent an even which is actually happening...we appear not to *think* but to *experience*; that is to say, we attach complete belief to the hallucinations. Not until we wake up does the critical comment arise that we have not experienced anything but merely been thinking in a peculiar way or in other words, dreaming... (79)

Our heroine was, in fact, capable of a power in dream-construction which Freud chooses to call “phantasy”. To him ‘daydream was something analogous to it in waking life’. In all the three images she views three imaginary or superficial beings: an eagle, a whale and a stag with a

pair of golden antlers all having the capacity to talk; then a demon. Taking into reference, the study of dreams, we come to know that ‘wild beasts...employed in dreams represent the passionate impulses of which the dreamer is afraid, whether by his own or those of other people.

In *Naga-Mandala*, *Rani* is afraid of her husband. She pictured her husband, *Appanna* as the demon who refuses to talk and takes his house as the ‘castle’ in which she is locked up. She fantasies the appearance of a ‘prince’. According to Freud, “the Emperor and the Empress as a rule really represents the dreamer’s parents; and a Prince or Princess represents the dreamer himself or herself. Her dreams are her ‘wish-fulfillments’, even though weak in body, unconsciously, she was devising ways for her escape.

The next image given is a flying dream; this image is found appropriate by the mind as an interpretation of the stimulus produced by the rising and sinking of the lobes of the lungs at times when cutaneous sensations in the thorax have ceased the conscious. In other words, the mental build of *Rani* at that moment is dejected into anxiety and depression.

Nevertheless, in Freud’s perspective, dreams all bear the same significance. Dreams of flying, for example, fall into this category and explained by sexual type contents too:

...Dreams can represent the sexual organ as the essence of the dreamer’s whole person and make himself fly (...) have to be interpreted as dreams of general sexual excitement, as erection – dreams...And do not make an objection out of the fact that women can have the same flying dreams as men. (428)

The water images can be interpreted as *Rani* unconsciously wanting of a third person into her lonely and miserable wedded life – a child.

The next dream analysis is *Hayavadana*. In Act two, we see *Padmini* dreaming. She is dreaming of *Kapila*, whom she had to forsake for her husband. Even though she has lost all contact with him, she still remembers and longs for his presence. The dream is told aloud by two dolls that have the capacity to communicate with each other and *see* what a human is dreaming.

The first significant issue to be taken into consideration is *Kapila’s* appearance into *Padmini’s* dreams in which the process can be called as ‘wish – fulfilment’. In an Indian society,

seeing another man other than one's own husband is not lightly entertained. If at all the situation is to take place, she can see the 'stranger' in the presence of the male members in her family. In Padmini's situation, even though *Kapila* was *Devadatta's* bosom friend, her husband did not wish for his friend's appearance.

Dreams are physical acts as much significance as any others; their motive force is in every instance a wish - seeking fulfillment; the fact of not being recognizable as wishes and their many peculiarities and absurdities are due to the influence of their formation ... (571)

The researcher's argument focus on why feminist must incorporate an understanding of Freud into their theory and practice should make response here is obvious. First, Freud made gender and sexuality central to his theory. Psychoanalysis makes a feminist argument that women (and men) are made and not born, that biology is not enough to explain to sexual orientation or gender personality. It shows that women and men and male dominance are reproduced in such generation as a result of the social division of labour in which women - mothers are subjected to child development. The second psychoanalytical objection, that psychoanalysis does not take any sides about anything whereas, feminism is value - laden and by definition takes sides. Psychoanalysis is not a behavior or a medical sign but a value - free positivist description and explanation of behavior.

Karnad's women characters, from *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*, range from variant angles. A closer study of these women characters gives us the plain genuine to our search. All women characters psychologically are same. His characters are striving for an identity, grouping to find a place in society, crying out for attention and trying to fit into the so - called position of mother, step - mother, daughter, wife, and sister. A note - worthy feature of Karnad's women is that they are kind, compassionate, loving women who do not forget that the future of the next generation lies in their capable hands. To these women characters, the male factors in a society must be an individual who could strive for life; strong emotionally and physically. In other words, to Karnad, ideas of superficial morality does not bother him the least.

To **conclude**, the "horse" in *Hayavadana* sings the national anthem, he evokes the empty regurgitation of nationalist feelings following independence. For Karnad the happy laughter of

Padmini's boy within society is a crucial alternative to the idea of national pride. His characters finally seek happiness at whatever level of “completeness” they are able to achieve rather than continue to seek one unified source of identity for themselves or the entire nation. When horses want to be men and women wants brains and brawn from their husbands, and then disappoints and disorder are in store. Resigning oneself to live as best one can in one’s current circumstances is in Karnad’s view the only road to happiness and contentment.

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