CHAPTER - IV

EXPLORING HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

(*Hayavadana and Nagamandala*)

The significance of Karnard’s plays can be related to understanding the inner dimensions of human psychology. The two great innovators of modern psychology, Sigmond Freud and Carl Jung have both taken a profound interest in the phenomenon of unconscious. The innate discovery of the unconscious by the two masters revolutionized the self image of human beings as much as the discovery of relativity transformed the scenario of a physical universe. A part from psychologists and psychiatrists, the students and scholars of human society, sociologists and anthropologists, have recognized and analysed the collective myths of different societies. The Romanian historian of comparative religions, Mercea Eliada, has also examined in great length the relationship between unconscious and dreams. The integral relationship between dreams, myths and the unconscious is the bedrock of the disciplines mentioned above.

Long before the great exponents of twentieth century, poets in all cultures had recognized the role of unconscious in human interactions. The child in man is closer to the unconscious than the role of man. In English poetry William Blake’s *Songs of Innocents and Experience* dramatizes the conflict between the child’s vision of the world and that of a grown up
man. The innocence embodied in the child can also reside in the hearts of people who are close to the nature. Wordsworth has presented such innocence in the characters like Michael the Sheppard and the leach-gatherer in his poem. “The Resolution and Independence”. The landscapes untouched by human interventions often embodied the purity and innocence of unconscious.

The interest in dreams and unconscious can be pushed further back in history. Australian aboriginals believe in another dimension of human experience called dream time in which the temporal divisions of wakeful experience, the past, present and the future, have not yet appeared. Human mind in different societies has developed the language of myths to express the experiences of dream time. In other words dreams and myths are constituted by the same symbolic language and are therefore very closely interrelated. This is what Erich Fromm calls “forgotten language”. (The Forgotten Language, 25).

The language of dreams and myths are closer to the childhood of human beings and the cultures. As an individual grows up and as civilizations advances the rational structures of mind stemming from logic and linearity become more and more pronounced. It is because of this reason that many anthropologists considered the domains of myth and magic as pre-science.
In the cultural expression of pre-modern communities dreams and oracles play a dominant role. When confronted with insoluble problems, ancient Greeks consulted oracles. Oedipus resorts to the same in Sophocles’ play, *Oedipus the King*. In tribal societies Shaman is the link between wakeful realities of the community and the realm of myth. Magic and dream constitutes the unseen realms of reality. Dreams also figure prominently in pre-modern lives. In Shakespear’s, *Julius Caesar*, Caesar’s wife has a disturbing dream symbolic of Caesar’s impending death. In mystical traditions of the world, particularly among the Sufis, a great store is set by dream experiences. At the dawn of modern industrial civilization, romantic poets desperately try to go back to the dream world to resist what they saw as the invasion of machine civilization. The major invention made by Freud, as also by Jung was the discovery of the fact that dream and unconscious still play a decisive role in guiding human actions more than rational responses even in the modern world. Freud’s psychiatry and Jung’s ‘Analytical psychology’ became tools remedying mental illnesses and abnormalities.

The discovery of the importance of the unconscious made by Freud and Jung has replicated itself in the great works of modernism. Thus in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, the protagonists wakes up with nightmare of his own self being transformed into a cockroach. In other words a bad dream
has become more real than the real. Even Thomas Mann, the great German novelist who strongly believe in the rationalism, in his novel *Death in Venice* shows how an aged professor is unexpectedly gripped with a homosexual lust for a handsome young man staying in the same hotel. Unable to contain this unreciprocated lust for the young man he finally commits suicide. The emergence of stream of consciousness technique of fictional narrative in the twentieth century literature is also a tribute to the importance of unconscious as are the artistic expressions like the emergence of surrealism an Dadaism which revolutionized the languages of art and poetry.

The expressions of *avant guard* like stream of consciousness in fiction and surrealism in poetry are matched by the rise of similar trends in drama and theatre. Two early European poets, who mapped out the unconscious on the modern stage were Maurice Meterlink and August Strindberg. *The Blue Bird* by Meterlink is one such play in which dramatic plot was abandoned in favour of a dream narrative not held together by cause and effect relationship as is the Aristotelian plot. A master of many techniques Strindberg resorted to the mythical languages of unconscious in his last work, Dream play.

The non-realistic and non-plot play structure that began with early expressionism in theatre culminated in the theatre of absurd where again
causality is no more at work in the world around. Thus in Samuel Becket’s *Happy Days* a couple are seen boasting about their great time in the past without realizing the fact that they are being buried deeper and deeper into the earth. Though Brectian epic theatre was the last heroic attempt to hold on to the strings of Marxist rationality, the experiences that they narrate are not quite rational at all.

The impact of the unconscious expressing itself in myths and dreams has been vast and profound as much as in theatre as in other art expressions. It is not easy to find out a single answer to the question of what is the driving force of human unconscious. There are three widely different interpretations of the popular Greek mythical story of Oedipus. The basic tragedy in Sophocles’s play, *Oedipus Rex* issues from the fact that Oedipus has killed his own father, married his own mother and given birth to his own brother and sister. This disturbing story was so popular with Greek playwrights and audiences that all the three greats of ancient Greek dramatists- Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides-have written plays about Oedipus though text of the Sophocles play alone is extant now.

This myth of Oedipus whose different versions can be found in several other cultures of the world, has elicited widely different interpretations from psychiatrists and scholars. Freud’s Oedipus myth has an expression of mother fixation. According to him, every new born male
child is characterized by sexual desire for the mother because the body of
the mother is most closely connected to him. As the baby grows up this
expression of id (pleasure principle), the driving force of human behavior
becomes less pronounced gradually thanks to the enforcement of social
morality, which Freud calls super Ego. The psychological maturation
process involves the emergence of a mature ego that can balance between
the demands of id and super Ego. However, the trace of the early mother
fixation continues to exist in sub-conscious. Consequent on the non-
development of the mature ego the mother fixation of the early child hood
will survive in the behavior of people even in more advanced years
disturbing the adult personality. Further, because the mother fixation and
struggle against it is a process every male being has to through the story of
Oedipus, which is universally popular. Mother fixation is also called
Oedipus complex. It is obvious that Freudian interpretation of the above
episode stems from his fundamental conviction that pleasure principle or
erossis the driving force of all human behavior. The reverse of Oedipus
complex is Electra complex, the attraction of the male parent to the female
child.

Jungian interpretation of Oedipus myth is totally different. Accord-
ing to him Oedipus married Jocusta, his wife-mother, because of
sexual attraction. Because, according to primitive beliefs, the queen is the
symbol of the land. When the old king dies the new king has to marry the surviving queen because she is the symbol of land. So the meaning of the myth is not at all erotic. It is a manifestation of the unconscious mystical desire to enter back into the womb of mother nature. These two conflicting psychological interpretations of Oedipus myth can be contrasted with the anthropological reading by Claude-Levy Struass, the well-known French anthropologist and comparative mythologist. Struass draws our attention to the riddle of the Sphinx that Oedipus solves before being led to the thrown. This riddle of the Sphinx that Oedipus solves before being led to the thrown. This riddle points to the painful period that human beings have gone through when they moved from the cthonus to the auto-cthonus stage of human evolution. In cthonus stage animals walk on all fours as they are still clinging to the earth. After attaining the auto –cthonus stage they develop the strength to walk and two legs. So according to Strauss, Oedipus myth is symbolic of the struggle of man kind moving from cthonus to auto-cthonus stage. In Strauss’s view the driving force of human behavior is to become independent in relation to the earth.

In the three varied interpretations of the same myth by three stalwarts, the interpretation derives from what they consider to be the basic human drive. According to Freud it is sex is (eros); according to Jung, the desire to go back to nature and according to Strauss it is the desire to free
oneself from the earth. In fact the meaning that one attaches to the non-rational language of myths, metaphors and symbols is traceable to one's view of what is quintessential to human behavior.

Girish Karnad is neither a psychiatrist nor an anthropologist but a playwright. But he has to decipher myths and symbols in his own way. Girish Karnad has directly worked on mythical material in other plays like *Yayati* and *Bali: The Sacrifice*. *Hayavadana*, written in the seventies was inspired by a novel by Thomas Mann, *Transposed Heads*, in turn, had been based on *Brthala Vikrama* corpus of stories from India. *Naga-Mandala* written during the nineties was based on one of the folktales collected and translated by A.K. Ramanajan—a story centering around transformation of a man into snake. Apart from Karnad’s play another Kannada play was also inspired by the same folktale. This was *Sirisampige* by Chandrasekhar Kambar. However, Girish Karnad’s treatment was widely different from that of Kambar.

*Hayavadana*, arguably the most popular play of Girish Karnad, has been studied in various ways by innumerable critics and researchers. It has been appraised as a modern classic though its credentials as a powerful play is also questioned at times. For example M.K Naik observes,

Karnad does not succeed fully in vesting the basic conflict in the play with the required intensity, but his technical
experiment with an indigenous dramatic from here is a triumph which has opened up fresh lines of fruitful exploration for the Indian English playwright (*Perspectives on Indian Drama in English.* 1967).

Thus Naik applauds the theatricality of *Hayavadana*, but thinks that the basic conflict of the play is not successfully investigated.

But the success of the play consists in the way that it presents the various dimensions of the basic problem though not focused on any one of the facets of its complexity. Though Karnad has a natural inclination to the myths, he never barrows them in their entirety. The choice of his myth is more based on contemporary issues. He wants to delineate in a highly personal and contemporary way. He is attracted to the myth of Somadeva’s *Katha Sarit Sagara* only because he found a medium for the analysis of the modern man’s predicament in it. Thomas Mann’s version of the same story *Transposed Heads* gave him confidence that it could be used for a modern play.

The original story of Somadeva’s *Katha Sarita Sagara*, poses a question for which the answer is quite eluding. When a wife transposes the heads of the two death bodies, one is that of her husband and the other is that of her husband’s friend, the questions of identity arises. Who is the right husband of the woman?. Is it the body with the head of her husband,
or is it the head with the body of her husband? The old myth answers that the head is the chief of the limbs and so the body with the head of her husband is the real husband. Thus the original story is an exercise in ingenuity. It is a test for man’s power of reasoning and logic.

Thomas man expands the scope of the story by depicting the woman’s craving for the missed portion of the body of her husband. He makes the two men symbols of spirit and body, the woman for the woman principle and the child for the aberration. Thus man asserts that the spirit and the flesh of a human being can’t be united harmoniously.

Girish Karnad uses the same story for analyzing many existential problems like the impossibility of possession in love, the illusion of friendship, the isolation and alienation of man, the difficulty of communication and the quest for identity and meaning in an uncertain and incomprehensible world. He has already analysed these issues in his historical plays and so its ability to discuss the psychological forces of the man makes it unique and significant.

*Hayavadana* is play which beautifully endorses Carl Jung’s view that myth represents the collective consciousness of mankind (*Jung on Mythology*, ed. R.A.,Seagal. 123). There are many theories of several disciplines to interpret and illuminate the myths. E.B. Taylor, an anthropologist observes that
Myths can’t be called untrue or outdated, but they ascribe a personal cause, as understood by myth-maker, to natural events and processes. Since the personal causes are neither predictable nor testable, there is uncertainty surrounding the significance of myths. (*Religion in Primitive Culture*. 107).

Bronislaw Malinowsky, another famous anthropologist argues that the “primitive people use myth to reconcile themselves to the aspects of the world that cannot be controlled, such as natural calamities, ageing and death”. (*Myth in Primitive psychology*. 137). Another sociologist Mircea Eliade Feels that “myth is not only an exploration but also a ritual recreation of a story that it tells”. According to him “the real purpose of myth is thus experimental encountering divinity” (*The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. 84).

Girish Karnad points out that the idea *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in his head “right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanth (who ultimately produced the play) about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre’s relationship to music” (*Three plays*.12). He further adds,

Western theatre has developed a contract between the face and the mask – the real inner person and the exterior one present, or wishes to present, to the world outside. But in the
traditional Indian Theatre, the mask is only the face ‘Writ large’; since a character represent not a complex psychological entity, but an ethical archetype, the mask merely presents in enlarged detail its essential moral nature” (Three plays, 13).

Karnad points out that the characters in *Hayavadana* have no real names as they are more representatives than individuals. He calls the heroine, Padmini, the best one of the four types of woman described by Vatsayana. The two friends are called Devadatta and Kapila meaning a formed stronger and a man of dark-complexion respectively.

Karnad also points out that the decision to make use of the masks led him to question the theme itself in greater depth. Thus he encounters the question of human aspiration to be perfect when he began the play with worship of Ganesha, a god who has an elephants head on a human body. Though the basic problem of the play, the conflict between the head and the body, is quite implicit in the from of the God, Ganesha, Karnad feels that it is unfair to challenge the thesis of the riddle by using a God. “God, after all, is beyond human logic, indeed beyond human comprehension itself” (Three Plays. 14). The figure of Lord Ganesha represents a perfect blend of there different worlds of experience-the divine, the human and the animal. Thus Lord Ganesha because an important aspect of the frame work
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of the sub plot as it foreshadows the character of Hayavadana. As Jocob George rightly observed,

Hayavadana’s problem is one of alienation as well as incompleteness. The incompatibility of his head and body and his inability to find his society, haunt him. He cannot join the world of divine since he is rejected by his father (Celestial being); the animal world is denied to him because he has not his mother’s advantage of having a complete animal body; and the equine face makes him a stronger among men” (“Myth as fulcrum: Lord Ganesha as Dramatic presence in Hayavadana” The plays of Girish Karnad: Critical perspectives, 216).

The Bhagvata Sets the tone of the entire play by invoking Lord Ganesha describing him as an imperfect and incomplete being. He describes,

An elephant’s head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly – which ever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Vakrathunda, Manakaya, with his crooked face and distorted body, is the Lord and Master of success and perfection? Could it be that this image of purity and holiness, this Mangala moorthy, intends to signify by his very appearance that the
completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend? (*Hayavadana*,1).

Lord Ganesh is considered *dwandwaathitha* and *gunateeta* philosophically which means that he is beyond the duality and he is the master of three gunas – *Satwa*, *Raja* and *tama*. Moreover he is also *dehaateeta*, beyond the three aspects of his body animal, human and the divine. Thus Ganesha, the God *dehaateeta* is perfectly associated with the *Hayavadana*’s predicament and so the myth of Ganesh has lot of significance to the theme of the play. It is not difficult to find out that the character of Devadatta is developed as a representative of *Satwa guru* and Kapila as that of *Raja guru*. The two-headed bird engraved on the door of Padmini’s house is a symbol of her duality. She craves for the intelligent head of Devadatta and virile body of Kapila. Thus the character of a common human being called *Hayavadana*, a man with the head of a horse, who grapples with the problem of perfection, and getting an answer that redeems the entire thesis of the play.

The folk theatre not only created the frame work of the play *Hayavadana*, but also provided room enough to question the traditional values. As Karnad avows, “The various conventions – the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds – permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative
points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. To use a phrase from Bertolt Brecht, the conventions then allow for ‘complex seeing’. Thus Karnad is able to present the psychological predicaments of the man in general as a part of the ‘complex seeing’.

*Hayavadana* contains two plots and the characters Hayavadaya belongs to the sub-plot *Hayavadana*. He has human body and a horse’ head. In the classical literature *Haya*, the *Aswa*, the horse is always symbol of power, strength and elegance. A human being is distinguished in the world because of his high intellectual power. Thus when a horse and a man are combined together, it turns out to be a combination of power and knowledge. As the conventional *Shastra* proclaimed, the head rules over the rest of body and so head in always regarded as the most important organ of a man.

*Hayavadana* has a craving not only for perfection but also for a sense of belonging. Born out of the irrational love of the princess of Karnataka and a hapless mute stallion, he never realizes that his inheritance of the dual qualities is quite natural. So he question, “where is my society? Where? (Hayavadana,9) Bhagavata describes *Devadatta* and *Kapila* as ideal friends in the beginning of the play. He relates,

> The world wonders at their friendship. The world sees these two young man wandering down the streets of *Dharmapura,*
hand in hand, and remembers, \textit{Lava} and \textit{Kusha, Rama} and \textit{Lakshmana, Krishna} and \textit{Balarama}. Two friends there were one mind, one heart. \textit{(Hayavadana,2)}. 

But the irony is that they are not like those mythical characters as they are common human beings. The mythical influences demands them to be ‘one mind and one heart’, but the human nature demands them to be two passionate beings. The very differentiation takes place the moment when a beautiful woman enters their life.

The ideal of the friendship expects \textit{Kapila} to treat the wife of his friend as his sister. But he can’t help himself drawing towards her and his yearning becomes intensive when she too gets drawn to him inspite of the traditional values forced on her by the marriage with Devadatta. And when Devadatta gets a suspicion of their attraction towards each other, their encounters became more dramatic and perceptive. The very first encounter with Padmini makes Kapila to admit,

I hadn’t thought anyone could be more beautiful than the wench Ragini who acts Rambha in our village troupe. But this one! You are right – she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvasi, Indimati – all rolled in one \textit{(Hayavadana, 16)}. 

Similarly Padmini slowly gets fascinated by Kapila’s physique. She says, “And what all ethereal shape! Such a broad back like an ocean with
muscles rippling across it – and than that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless” (Hayavadana,.25). And Devadatta laments,

What a fool I have been. All these days I only saw that pleading in his eyes stretching out its arms, begging for a favour. But never looked in her eyes. And when I did – took the whites of her eyes for their real depth. Only now – I see the depths – now I see these flames leaping up from those depth… (Hayavadana,26).

Thus the heads of their bodies demand them to be idealistic, but the passionate bodies crave for physical gratification. The dual continues till Padmini gets an opportunity of transposing the heads of the friends. The irritation of Goddess Kali when she comes before Padmini not only reflects her drowsy indifference but also her despair with the human reality. She admonishes Padmini.

Your spoke the truth because you are selfish – that’s all”. But she feels happy to find Padmini transposing the heads and so acclaims though indifferently, “My dear daughter, there should be a limit even to honesty (Hayavadana, 33).

Karnad shows how the nature of the man depends upon the intellect in the beginning and then by the body. When Devadatta and Kapila regain their life, they are extremely happy to find that their heads are transposed. When Devadatta exclaims, “All these years we were only friends,” Kapila
ecstatically joins him, “Now we are blood – relation! Body-relation! What a gift!” (*Hayavadana,35*).

But soon their happiness dries up as they have to decide who is the real husband of Padmini. When Padmini follows the traditional answer that the head is the important part of the body and thus follows the body with Devadatta’s head, Kapila finds out the true colors of Padmini. He rebukes, “I know what you want Padmini, Devadatta’s clever head and Kapila’s strong body….” (*Hayavadana .38*) But Devadatta supports her saying, “There is nothing wrong in it. It is natural for a women to feel attracted to a fine figure of man”. (*Hayavadana,38*). Thus the words of Devadatta reveal the true nature of a human being who always tries to mould his arguments according to his whims and fancies but not according to the established traditions.

The nature of the human beings is more clearly presented in the character of Padmini. That a man can never gets satisfied with one thing for ever is revealed in the way that she yearns for Kapila after living some time with the body that has Devadatta’s head. Moreover she tries to overwhelm Kapila by saying that she bore her son to the body which transposed Kapila’s head. She sympathises with Kapila for his agony of being tortured by the conflict between his head and the body and consoles,
Your body bathed in a river, swam and danced in it. Shouldn’t your head know what river it was, what swim? Your head too must submerge in that river – the flow must rumple your hair, run its tongue in your ears and press your head to its bosom. Until that’s done, you will continue to be incomplete. *(Hayavadana, 58).*

After the transposition of the heads, both Devadatta and Kapila are ruled by the body. Devadatta cannot take part in a wrestling Competition. He explains,

… there was a wrestling pit and a wrestler from Gavdhara was challenging people to fight him. I don’t know what got into me-Before I had ever realized it, I had stripped, put on the pants given by his assistant and jumped into the pit.” I felt – ‘inspired’! within a couple of minutes, I had pinned him to the ground *(Hayavadana, 42).*

Kapila has too the similar experience. He relates, “When this body came to me, it was like a corpse hanging by my head. It was a Brahmin’s body after all – not made for the woods. I couldn’t lift and axe without my elbows moaning. Couldn’t run a length without my knees howling. I had no use for it. The moment it came to me, a war started between us.” *(Hayavadana, 55).*
But finally it is the head that triumphs. Kapila begins to write poetry and Devadatta takes interest in wrestling. But the triumph of the head over a body which was tuned according to the original head proves to be disastrous. Kapila laments,

Do you remember how I once used to envy you, your poetry, your ability to imagine thins? For me the sky was sky, and the tree only tree. Your body gave me new feelings, new words – I felt awake as I had never before – even started – writing poems. Very bad ones I am afraid. (*Hayavadana*. 60).

Devadatta also admits that he hates the body for what it gave him. He complains, “I wanted your power but not your wilderness. You lived in hate – I in fear” (*Hayavadana*, 60).

To live the other body’s life is also a problem of the twentieth century man. He always crushes under the burden of living the other’s life instead living naturally and spontaneously. His uprootedness from the nature may also be a reason for it. The alienation, rootlessness and loneliness are the products of such dislocation. Thus Devadatta and Kapila became the representatives of the contemporary period.

*Hayavadana* explores the obscure and unreliable nature of self. The self gets modified and recreated as it is not a definite one. Thus the old self of the person gets replaced, slowly and steadily, and the new one takes
its place simultaneously. That the body symbolizes the horse and the mind symbolizes the rider gets ironically transposed in the character of Hayavadana. The body of a man with the head of a horse craves for a perfection which means a harmony between the head and the body. The transposing of the head may bring harmony to a God like Ganesha but not to a person like Hayavadana.

Thus God Ganesha and Hayavadana, Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini are portrayed in different ways to present the contradictory forces act on a person, spiritual and materialist, the mental and the bodily, the rural and the urban, the pre-colonial and colonized, the traditional and modern, individual and racial and also male and female. Karnad artistically projects the various facets of the central dilemma and asserts the complexity of the human predicaments.

The study of the psychic features of the characters proves to be more fruitful and rewarding in the case of Hayavadana. The friendship between Devadatta and Kapila demands a parallel study of the Apollonian order and Dionysian impulse. Psycho-analysis divides the human mind into three organs; the id, the ego and the super ego. As M. Sarath Babu rightly remarks, “the id consists of instinctual drives and always seek gratification irrespective of external reality and cultural values (Pleasurable Principle). The ego perceives and responds to external reality (Reality Principle). It
being the leader, tries to satisfy the id and the super ego within limits of external reality. The super ego irrespective of external reality and biological impulse (the id) contains ideals, values and morals and urges the ego to lead an ideal life. When the ego wants to be ideal under the pressure of the super ego, the mind starts functioning independent of the body. This naturally leads to a split between the mind and the body. Consequently they become strangers to each other. This experience of the body do not reach the mind, and the feelings, of the mind do not spread through the body. The ego which causes this self-alienation is called Apollonian ego in which the soul leaves the body… On the other hand when the ego wants to be natural or really human and when the super ego accepts the biological reality (the id) the mind and the body work together. There is perfect harmony between them. The mind feels the bodily experience and the body rocks with the feelings of the mind (Dionysian ego in Hayavadana ‘The plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives. 230).

The dramatist portrays the strengths and weaknesses of the three major characters of the play at many times. Their journey to Ujjain is only one among the examples to it. Devadatta becomes absent minded as he is more preoccupied in enjoying the senery besides the river Bhargavi; But Kapila focuses his attention completely on Padmini. The human being
gets more preoccupied with the thing that eludes him rather than that he
gets. Padmini also has an inclination towards the Apollonian principle
though her Dionysian attributes formulate the action of the play till the
end. Unlike the eleventh century character of Kathasaratistsagara, Padmini
is conscious of her desire for both Devadatta and Kapila. The influence of
the existentialism and feminism may be responsible for Karnad’s new
insights into the character of Padmini. Thus Padmini, who craves for
Devadatta’s intellect and Kapila’s physical strength becomes an archetypal
figure. As S.Krishnamoorthy rightly observes,

The happenings in the Kali temple, where she transposes the
heads of Devadatta and Kapila, reveal her sub-conscious
desire. Padmini’s act, though unintentional, is indicative of
the incomplete ‘human beings’ silent cry for wholeness.
(‘Indian Myth in Girish Karnad’s Hayavadana’, Language in
India, 6 June 2011. 11).

That Padmini is an archetypal personage can be amply established by the
view of Freud also. While explaining Freud’s theory, Wilfred Guerin
observes, “Freud provided convincing evidence, through his many
carefully recorded case studies that most our actions are motivated by
psychological forces which we have very limited control” (A Hand book of
Critical approaches to Literature,172). Thus, symbolizing the
incompleteness of human desires, and also the unquenchable desires of a
man which lay dormant only because of the social taboos, Padmini can be compared with the great archetypal characters like Anna Kerenina (Leo Tolstoy) and Madam Bavory (Flaubart).

Padmini’s death at the end of main plot is glorified as Satī. The female chorees sing:

our sister is leaving in the palanquin of Sandal wood. Her matterss is studded with rubies which burrow and glow. She is decked in flowers which blossom on a tinder wood and whose petals are made molten gold. How the garlands leap and cover her, aflame with love the fortune lady’s procession goes up the street of labournnues, while makarandas the pennants and jacarandas hold the lights…. Good-bye, dear sister, dear sister go you with out fear. The Lord of Death will be pleased with the offering of there coconuts (Hayavadana, 58).

The traditional concept of Sativa appear disappropriate to the suicide of Padmini. Padmini’s quest for the experience with the qualities inherent in a person other than person than the husband never allow her to be a Satī from the traditional point of view. But the dramatist takes the side of the woman and condemns the dual moral code of the patriarchal world by calling her sati. As Sarath Babu rightly observes,
Padmini in *Hayavadaya* enjoys marital life with Devadatta who gets *Kapila’s* body after the transposition of heads. In addition, chastity is a patriarchal concept that has been used to oppress and weaken woman for ages (*The concept of chastity in Naga-Mandala, The plays of GK: critical perspectives* , 247).

That Karnad is more preoccupied in the psychological analysis of the central dilemma is also evident in the way that the religion is relegated to a minimum role in the play. As Revathi Rangal rightly points out,

> Although, in Indian context, most myths are related to religion, Karnad is interested in the non-religious dimensions of myths. Most myths have strong emotional significance and the audience have responses towards them. Karnad reinterprets these myths from a non-religious dimension and exploits their inherent potential to arouse and sustain human emotions. (“The use of Myth in Karnad’s Hayavadana”, *Critical Spectrum*, 32).

The very intention of the dramatist to capture the “complex seeing” becomes successful in the portrayal of the psychological dimensions of the characters also. Within the framework of a myth, Karnad works out a natural and realistic analysis of the nature of the man in general. It is obvious in one of the major stories he relates quite casually in the
beginning of the play. The past of Hayavadana, though read as a cock and bull story of the mythologies, throws light on the instinctual nature of the man. Hayavadana relates Bhagavatha that he is born to a women and a stallion as his mother fell in love with and married a stallion. In portraying the sensuality of a man, Karnad reminds the reader of the naturalistic plays of ‘O’ Neil like _Desire of Alices the Elms_. It is precisely because of this bold and ingenious method of Girish Karnad which make Hayavadana very popular and successful play. As Mohit Roy justifiably acknowledges, “the demystification and religious beliefs and practices – which must be seen as a reflection of modern society – is at its height in Hayavadana (“Hayavadana: A study of Karnad’s use of Source Texts & Folk Form” _Indian Writing in English_. 113).

As Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker rightly points out, Naga-Mandala is a ‘companion play’ of Hayavadana ‘as it creates variations of many of the same themes’ (_Collected Plays_ Vol.2 P. XXIX). Like the theme of Hayavadana, the theme of Naga-Mandala is also based on something the dramatist borrowed from other sources, but conceived according to his concept and hypothesis in a highly creative and artistic way. Girish Karnad acknowledges that the play is based on two oral tales he heard from A.K. Ramanujan. As these two tales are considered to be told by woman to the
children, and some times to the women of their acquaintance, they reflect the yearnings and ordeals of woman though at the subconscious level.

As these stories are told by women belonging to a traditional and patriarchal society, they automatically become critiques as well as portrayals of it. As the woman does not have a freedom to express what they want to, they are forced to be suppressed and coerced. More often they are accused of becoming hysterical and nymphomaniac. Thus many of these tales have a fantastical nature due to the fact of being the expressions of a subjugated creature.

The theme of *Naga-Mandala* has all the characteristic features of a folk tale and the final play shows how the dramatist moulds it to be a myth also. The very title of the play Naga-Mandala has a mystical connotation as the word ‘mandala’ reflects a certain enclosure or also a spell. The play is also labelled as a “story theatre”, a theatre whose action is based on folk stories. The first story that Karnad heard from A.K. Ramanujan is that of the gathering of the lamp flames in a village temple and discussing their experiences in the houses from which they came. The second story is about a woman who is visited by a king cobra in the form of her husband. Karnad finds out that the second story is handy for the delineation of the development of a woman and the first one as a spring board or a stage for the second one. Thus the amalgamation of these two themes provides the
scope for presenting the “complex seeing” from the human, abstract and magical aspects. By choosing an innocent girl married a few years back as the protagonist of the play, Karnad has given a strong feministic ring to the play.

Among the four narrative levels of the play, the first one introduces a dramatist who lives on a stark realistic plane but afraid of a curse by a mendicant. Thus the first level is an attempt of the dramatist to make the audience to realize that it is a story based on realism so as to prepare them for the reception of something beyond that. The second level deals with a group of personified flames meeting in the evening and discussing their experiences of that day. As the issues they discuss are also realistic, the audience will be slowly led to a mythical plane unawarely as the realistic experiences make them to overlook the mythical characters which relate them. The third level of the narrative takes them further to the mystical plane in which a story escapes from the mouth of a sleeping woman, who transforms into a beautiful woman with the song. The story of Rani and her husband is related by story in the fourth level. Thus the complex structural pattern involves interaction with the characters of all the four level in a highly dramatic way to present a world of realism and mysticism.

The names given to the characters once again reflect their role as the representatives rather than individuals. The protagonist is called Rani
which means a queen, her husband is Appanna meaning any man, Karudavva meaning a blind woman, Kappanna meaning the dark one and Naga meaning the cobra. In his interesting study of the mythical structure in the play, Dolors Collellmir brings out a geometrical pattern of the relationship of the characters. He says,

The characters of the main story …. Appear in two groups of three interested individuals that can be visualized geometrically as two interwined triangles; one formed by the three protagonists, Rani-Appanna-Naga, and the other by Rani, Karudavva (the old blind woman) and her son Kappana.

In Hindu traditional the intersection of two triangles, one pointing upwards and another one pointing downwards, indicates the union of the male and female principles, that is, the union between Shiva (the supreme consciousness) and Shakti (the creative force). Finally, a third triangle can be visualized, inside the other two, to represent the three endings that the play offers. (*Mythical structure in Girish Karnad’s Naga-Mandala*, 3).

*Naga-Mandala* is a play conceived as a critique of human psyche in the marital relationship. He chooses the protagonist Rani as an innocent, meek, Traditional woman to expose the cruelty of the patriarchal society and its double standards. To use the words of Bhagabat Naik, Karnad
“deconstructs the canonized socio-cultural programming of sex roles on the one hand, and displays the vulgar male power, male promiscuity, gender bias and religious fanaticism on the other, (Girish Karnad’s play. 108).

India and Hinduism is thick of myths associated with the snakes. Among the trinity of Hinduism, two of them have naga-association. Lord Vishu is considered to be a seshashayana, one who sleeps on the curls of snake and Lord Shiva is called Nagabharana, one who uses snakes as ornaments. Vasuki, the kind of the serpents according to the Hindu Mythology was used as a churning rope to the churn the mountain, Meru, in an ocean of Milk. Ksheera Sagara which finally produced many things including Amrutha, Kalakuta, Kalpavruksa, Sri Lakshmi, Chandra, etc.,… It is believed that the earth is borne by Adhisheshu, the king of the seperants and seshang is considered a symbol of eternity. There is always a belief in India about the immortality of the snake as it has the habit of sloughing its own tail. There is a general belief in India that killing a cobra is a sin and when a cobra is killed, intentionally or unintentionally it is buried ritualistically. The people are very much afraid of Sarpa Dosha a curse which will be carried over even through generations. Naga Panchami is a very popular festival throughout India, a day in which the people worship the mounds of the snakes and offer milk and eggs to the snakes.
The transformation of snake into a human being is very common thing in many myths and folk tales of India. The two folk tales which was the base for the play *Naga Mandala* belongs to them.

The prologue of the play *Naga Mandala* in which the flames come to a temple and discuss their experiences in their homes, introduces the plight of several woman which serve as a back drop to the main plot of the play. Their first of the woman has miserly husband who does not give any money to his wife as he thinks that she is extravagant and he always goes to bed early to save on lamp oil. The second women, an old ailing mother dies neglected leaving behind her son and daughter-in-law who feel free to indulge in conjugal pleasure afterwards. The husband of the third woman is a lustful man who always considers his wife as a means to satisfy his sexual desires. The fourth woman thinks that her husband is philanderer and epicurean and so she gets so agitated that she gets hallucinations. All the four woman are treated as chatte by their husband and they never enjoy individuality and freedom. They line a way passive life, as they do not even think of any ambition and desire. They do not have even the choice of selecting a husbands and they simply accepted who ever choose them as their wives.

In *Naga Mandala* Karnad deploys all the devices used in a folk tale and also a myth, like the imputation of super human qualities to human and
non-humans, the use of magic elements and extraordinary ordeals. The flames, the Naga taking the form of Appanna, the magic root, the imputation of divinity to a woman—all confirm to the needs of folk tale and myth. Karnad portrays the attainment of divinity by Rani with in the frame work of a folk tale. Moreover the gossiping of the flames provide a dream-like ambience quite essential for the enactment of the main plot of the play. As V. Rangam rightly says,

Surprised at seeing the dancing flames without the accompaniment of lamps and wickes, man extends the imitation to willingly suspend disbelief. That flames put out in one place gather at another place to gossip, is the frame work. Karnad provides the plot that will subsequently reveal the intimacies of marital love. Each flame with its distinctive characteristic like Kusbi oil, castor oil, Kerosene oil and so on is reflective of the hierarchy that is ubiquitous in the Indian social system. (Myth and romance in Naga-Mandala or their subversion? Girish Karnad’s plays: Performance and critical perspectives ed. 200).

Naga-Mandala presents the growth of Rani from an innocent girl into a responsible mother. By presenting the fancies and the hallucinations of her suppressed persona, the dramatist traces out her growth stage by stage. Her parents call her Rani as she is considered the queen of their house.
But she becomes a mere chattal the moment she becomes a wife. Like many woman of India, she gets married even before she knows what is love. She stays with her parents till she reaches her womanhood and then simply transported to the house of her husband. Her plight in her husband’s house is not different from the woman of her period, country and age. Her husband ‘neither loved nor used her’ (The Sun Shine Cat’, Kamala Das Ten twentieth century Indian Poets.25). As there were no human beings to communicate, she likes the woman in Kamala Das’ poem. The Invitation speaks with animals and objects. She imagines that she is speaking with an eagle. She mutters, “So Rani asks him; Where are you taking me?” And the Eagle answers: ‘Beyond the seven sees and the seven isles. On the seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under the tree, your parents wait for you.’ So Rani says” ‘Do they? Then please, please take me to them – immediately here I come’. So the Eagle carries her clear across the seven seas. (Naga-Mandala.7). Thus her hallucinations reflect her yearning to go back to her parents and thus Karnad perceptively presents the protagonists sense of alienation and estrangement after the marriage. In an interview with Tutun Mukherjee, Karnad describes, “I wondered if a woman in such circumstances would commit deliberate adultery. Would she accept her secret lover? The conservative Indian attitude would neither permit nor
tolerate this, of course. So how does she face the fact that the person who visits her at night”. (*Girish Karnad’s Plays*, 173).

These hallucinations help her to get away from the psychic collapse. Her husband is a true a representative of the patriarchal world. He is always tyrannical and ill-tempered. In the poem *The Sun Shine Cat*, Kamala Das relates, “Her husband shut her / in every morning; locked in a room of books / with a streak of sunshine lying near the door, like / A yellow cat, to keep her company” (*Ten Twentieth century poets*, 25). Rani would have denigrated to a half dead woman like the woman in Kamala Das’ poem if Karudavva wouldn’t have came to her rescue.

Karudavva plays a significant role in the myth of Rani. As A.Jaganmohanachari points out ‘she becomes the instrument of juxtaposition, like Kali in *Hayavadana.*’ (*Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala: A study in Post-colonial Dialectics, the plays of Girish Karnad: critical perspectives*, 1999. 35). The use of magical drug or a root to unite the lovers is a very common devise in the myths. Shakespeare uses the same technique to unite the lovers in *A Mid Summer Night’s Dream*. And the action of Karudavva has the similar consequence of that of Puck in Shakespeare’s play i.e. working differently. The food in which the root given by Karudavva is mixed is thrown into an ant-hill and the Naga living in it falls in love with Rani. Karnad portrays Rani as a sincere wife who
loves her husband despite the torments. After powring the paste of the root into the curry, he gets terrified to find it turning red. She laments:

   How do I know it is not dangerous? Suppose somethings happens to my husband? What will my fate be? The little piece made him ill? Who knows……… No, No, forgive me, God. This is evil. I was about to commit a crime. Father, mother, how could, I, Your daughter, agree to such a heinous crime? No, I must get rid of this before he notices anything

(Naga-Mandala, 37).

Rani believes that she is pregnant from Apanna. When the real Appanna accuses her of adultery she accepts to stand the trial. She knows that her husband has been going to the concubine everyday, but never tries to be disloyal to him.

   The use of horse in Hayavadana and the snake in Naga-Mandala is an attempt to present the realities of human existence from the naturalistic point of view. Karnad acknowledge his indebtedness of O’Neill also and so it is not difficult to trace out the creative use of naturalism in these two plays. As horse is a traditional symbol for virility and physical strength, snake is a symbol of procreation and venom. The Naga worship is very popular in the rural places of India and more frequently the woman worship the snake to get a child. Thus the mythical representation of the
visits of the cobra during the nights to the house in which Rani is imprisoned is presented as a critique on the patriarchal system. It ironically exposes the poisonous nature of the husband who is more dangerous than the husband. In the grab of the myth Karnad is able to present the credibility of the values like chastity and fidelity and the limitation of the so called crimes of the woman called morbidity and incest. Thus the position of Rani, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles – as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night.

The way that love fills the emptiness of Rani’s life is explained through the myth of ‘Naga’, a folk tale reflecting the culture of South India where it represents prosperity, happiness and fertility. Patriarchal society provides enough room for the man to be chivalrous and amorous where as a woman is denied of the same. It expects a man to be volumptuous but a woman has to be virtuous. The Naga in the guise of Appanna presents a choice for Rani, a choice to live a fuller and happier life. In a way. It is her expression of desire and also the fulfillment of her wish for love and her desire and to live satisfactorily. Thus Appanna becomes a demon in her life where as Naga became a prince to her. Naga represents a source of energy, positive elements and he becomes a cultural leader who is a
harbinger of social change. He creates a translocation not only in Rani but also in the entire society. Naga is a representation of the true life force.

By combining the human and supernatural worlds, Karnad exposes the duality of the patriarchy which forces chastity only on the woman. The dramatist portrays the man and the woman of the play, Rani and Appanna as victims of their sexuality. When the husband regularly visits the prostitute, the wife innocently spends her nights with Naga, who comes in the guise of Appanna. That love becomes simply redundant in the relationship between the wife and the husband and also that physical gratification is only the possible thing to have the psychic equilibrium is amply established in the play. As Bhagabat Naik rightly observes, “In the Rani-Appanna relationship body matters and mind revolts because man experiments with woman’s body and woman expiates herself through her suffering.” (Girish Karnad’s Plays, 113).

Thus the play can also be considered as a critique on the marriage, as a social institution which dwarfs the personality of woman. A mythical force like Karudavva only saves her form a terrible state. The dramatist presents the various shades of the personality of Rani before trying to administering the magical root to her husband. She hesitates to win him by dubious means in the beginning and then resolves to pour the red soup in the ant-hill. Her concern for the self respect, inclination towards humanism
and loyalty for the husband make her a lively character. Thus Karnad uses Karudava and the magic root as catalysts to bring out the true colours of the characters of Rani and Appanna. And Naga functions as a male sex surrogate to cure the frigidity of Rani.

As G.C. Behra rightly points out, “This love between human and snake like that between Arjuna and Snake Princess Ulupi, between Bhima and Snake Princess Nagabala romantically celebrated in The Mahabharata is common in our myths in collective consciousness, that lends credibility and comprehensibility to the story. (Appropriating Folk Culture: A Study of Post Independence Indian Drama, 11). Thus Appanna and Naga become two faces of one man, the male chauvinist husband in the day and the doting lover in the right. The way that Rani accepts the two sides of the personality as natural reflects the condition of a typical woman in a patriarchal society.

Like the ‘Sun Shine Cat’ of Kamala Das, the watch-dog that Appanna brings to guard the house is a powerful symbol of the patriarchal world. The former reflects the hallucination required for a woman whereas the later denotes the powerful and ferocious values. The power of the patriarchal system is asserted when a mongoose replaces the dead dog. The impact of these acts and counter-acts leave an indelible mark on the psyche of Rani.
The tragedy of Rani is due to not only the cruel husband but also the lover who doesn’t stand by her side at the appropriate time. The sense of becoming pregnant gives strength and confidence to Rani. Her evolution from a girl to a mother, from frigidity to fertility make Naga-Appanna to be startled. So she questions,

I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But no I am woman, a wife and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot, not a cat or a sparrow ..... Why do you change like a chameleon from day to night? (Naga-Mandala 51).

Rani’s experience with Naga borders on a dream-like situation as sleep and dream constantly alluded to by her. She wonders whether her experience with Naga is real or a dream or a hallucination. The plight of a woman who has none to communicate, ultimate loses sanity and become historic quite often. She gets more bewildered when Appanna hisses like a snake and Naga speaks sweetly like a husband. V. Rangan rightly comments,

Naga in turn, employs the myth of life to educate her about sex. Sleep food and copnulation (Nidra, Ahara and maithuna) are common to man and animal. Naga as the phallic symbol performs as per his nature or swadharma and imitates her into sex. He comes disguised as her husband but he can not change what he is (V. Rangan.203).
Rani is so innocent that she can not understand what has been happening to her. She is more acted upon than acted. But the struggle of an individual caught in a cage that suffocates her individuality is perfectly expressed by her. She laments.

I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or sparrow. Why don’t you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like a chameleon from day and night? Even if I understood a little, a tiny bit, I could bear it. But now sometimes I feel my head is going to burst (Naga-Mandala, 51).

As the magic root is a catalyst for a chemical change in Rani, so is the pregnancy of Rani which brings out the true nature of Appanna and Naga Appanna. The husband accuses her of infidelity and the lover shrinks from the responsibility. Thus Karnad uses the myth not to illustrate the way in which the woman can get a solution but only to stress the rigid mould that suppresses and coerces her. The test of chastity forced on her by the village proves that the mythical Agnipariksha forced to Sita in The Ramayana has been continued in different names. She holds a cobra in her hands and pronounces, “Yes, my husband and this king cobra, except for these two, I have not touched any one of the male sex. Nor have I allowed
any other male to touch me. If I lie, let the cobra bite me” (Naga-Mandala, 58). Her words prove to be true and she is not bit by the cobra and all the villagers hail her as “Divine Being”. All these appear a ‘gimmick’ to round of the story. But the dramatist took precautions to give an open ending to the play.

Rani fails to understand the dual personality of her husband. Karnad portrays her as a representative of the innumerable women who have been passively bore the burden of virtue since the beginning. As Sarat Babu rightly says,

Her failure to discover the truth is the suppression of her reason by the injunction of Appanna and Naga not to ask any question (to remain ignorant). If she cornered the real identity of Naga, she could not allow her to enter her bedroom. As a typical woman, she is frigid, and despises sex. What she craves for in affection, which Naga gives her in plenty by functioning as a surrogate parent for a while. By using his erotic art, Naga cures her of frigidity. Because of this, later Appanna and Rani are able to enjoy marital life (Sarath Babu, 246)

The pathetic end of an innocent woman is depicted in various ways in the Hindu mythologies. Many of them found the final asylum in the earth. Sita
in *The Ramayana* underwent many ordeals and finally finds peace only in the lap of her mother, the earth. Rani in *Naga-Mandala* wants to commit suicide by jumping into a well. Radhiga Priyadarsini thinks that

Girish Karnad makes the earth erupt out in the form Karudavva, roots plough, and hills and a serpent to rescue Rani and avenge Appanna. Her nature is not indifferent to the human predicament and reacts definitely from how it reacted to *Sita* and *Sakuntala*. Karudea chides Rani when she wants to jump into a well. She says “Chi.. Chi.. ! You should not say things. I’ll take care of every thing (“Girish Karnad *Naga-Mandala: Anarchy as perspective*” Thunder on Stage: *A Study of Girish Karnad’s Plays*, 169-170).

By providing some ambiguous reactions of Rani and Appanna to the visits of King cobra during the night time, the dramatist has given a new dimension to the myth. Rani is taken aback when she finds out blood on the cheeks of Naga-Appanna on the day in which the watch dog was killed by the snake. Appanna suspects the night visits of the cobra and so brings a mongoose to kill it. Bits of snake skin is found in the claws of the dead mongoose and Naga-Appanna doesn’t visit Rani for nearly a fortnight. She finds out that his body was full of wounds partly healed when he visits her next time. She applies ointment on his wounds but never questions him about them. These descriptions pose a question to the audience whether
they signify that the characters know what has been happening. Thus the
dramatist intentionally and consciously leaves some loose ends to puzzle
the audience and also to give a complex ring typical of that of a myth.

The psychic disturbance of Appanna and Naga-Appanna is also
presented in the drama to a length that it helps the development of action
of it. Appanna is depicted as a typical representative of the male
chauvinism of the patriarchal society. He doesn’t love her and not even
treat her as a human being. But when he suspects a ‘foul play’, he brings a
watch dog to guard the house. He is clever enough to suspect the cobra and
so brings a mongoose of fight with it. But he gets completely bewildered to
know that Rani is pregnant. He admonishes her,

Are you not ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in,
and yet managed to find a lover. Tell me who it is. Who did
you go to with your sari off?.. You shame me in front of the
whole village, you darken my face, you slut! (Nagamandala,
52).

He wants her to abort the pregnancy. But the same man accepts her as his
wife after the trial. The drama hasn’t made it clear whether he accepts her
only for the sake of the social respectability or he is afraid of her divine
power. Irrespective of the reason, the shallowness of the husband is firmly
established.
The action of Naga-Appanna appears to be made artificial according to the exigencies of the main theme of the play. In the beginning he takes an active role under the influence of the magic root. He never reveals Rani that he is not the original Appanna. He kills the watch dog and the mongoose violently. But when Rani tells him that she is in the family way, he simply replies, “I am glad you hid the news from me all this time. Even now try to keep from speaking about it as long as possible. Keep it a secret” (Naga-Mandala,.32). He simply tries to evade the truth and stretch the relationship as much as he can. But he frightens Appanna by hissing when he was about to thrash Rani. He tries to keep the whole issue a secret by forcing Rani to take up the test and cleverly asks her to tell the truth. He helps her to regain the respectability of the village.

A study of the Indian mythology asserts that a miracle has been mandatory to establish the purity of a woman, while a man’s mere world is taken for the truth. Sita in The Ramayana, Sakuntala in The Mahabharatha has to resort to it, but Karnad makes use to this mythical temperament in highly creative way. Rani plunges her hand into the ant hill pulls the cobra out and says, “Yes, my husband and this cobra. Except for these two, I have not touched any one of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me, If I lie, let the cobra bite me”. (Three Plays, 58) When the husband comes back to the wife after the testing, he begins to yearn for
her companionship and gets prepared even to hid in her curls of hair. Having denied of the love of the woman, he finally gets dejected, takes up a peculiar penance by crawling to her hair secretly and dies. Thus the actions of Naga does not have a clear psychological base. He becomes a live character only from the mythical point of view. Thus the myth and the character of Naga are used only to expose the tyrannical nature of the patriarchal system.

The inconsistency in the characters of *Naga and Appanna* has been one of the important points of debate by the critics. But the interesting interpretation to it comes from Rukhaya. Who says,

This offers ample proof that Naga is none other than Appanna as Rani can not has no scope for communication with outsiders. Naga is Appanna mimus his inhibitions. At night, he stoops the limit of taxing Rani for his own instinctual needs (*Identity crisis and split in personality in Naga-Mandala*).

But such inconsistencies are abundant in the myths as they are always based on imagination and memory more than factual truths. Moreover the exigencies of the theme of the play *Naga-Mandala* demands such in consistencies in those two characters. They also provide a myth quality which mesmerizes the audience for a while and leave them perplexed. It is
a way to attract the audience and to make them a part of the action. Karnad’s plays always entertain the audience while watching but make them think seriously after words.

Karnad provides three endings to the play Naga-Mandala. The first one is that of a fairy tale. As per the nature of a fairy tale everything comes to a happy ending, Rani is hailed as a ‘Divine Woman’ after providing her innocence and Appanna accepts her as a divine ordinance and forgets his concubine. The first conclusion is not logical as, on human level, Rani knows that the person with whom she begets the child is not Appanna and Appanna knows that he never has sexual relationship with his wife. Moreover the fate of Naga-Appanna is not considered in it.

The second ending focuses of Naga who can’t live without Rani and so commits suicide by hiding in her hair. As it is also a fairy tale ending, there is a need to for one more conclusion. The cobra is allowed to be alive in the third conclusion as Rani carefully hides Naga in her hair and tells her husband that he has escaped. But Naga-Appanna can’t live there forever but dies soon and slips off her hair when she combs. Then Rani tells Appanna, “We are not important. But our son is the blossom of our family. He has been saved. He has been given the gift of life by the cobra, as a by a father” (Naga-Mandala, 44).
These kinds of different conclusions make it a fantasy as it is not easy to convince the contemporary audience something which they feel obscene. It is the only way to treat adultery in the Indian contest. As Satyadev Dubey points out, “….Girish Karnad is the only playwright in the history of Indian theatre to have treated adultery as normal and treated adulterous woman sympathetically” (Performance, “Meaning and the Materials of Modern Indian Theatre” Interview by Aparna Dharwardker, New Theatre Quarterly, 11.44, 358).

Usually folk tales and myths end on a pleasant note. The supreme sacrifice of Naga at the end of the play, and the future of Rani which is quite promising is a suitable conclusion to the play. But the implied irony of Rani’s adultery and Nag’s nocturnal sexual adventures became obvious at the end. As a modern play Naga-Mandala presents the psychological complexities of sexual relationships. The absurdity of the situation is beautifully highlighted by the dramatist as it reflects a conflict between credibility and intelligence. A human being cannot bear too much of reality. Like Hedvig of Ibsen’s The Wild Duck, Rani is also happy to fill her life with half truths and partial knowledge, or to use the phase of Ibsen, “Life lies”.

But the conclusion Karnad has given to Naga-Mandala also becomes a critique on the patriached world. Karnad exposes the male
chauvinism and condemns the oppression of the woman by the man through generation. As Sarath Babu points out,

Myths, legend and folk forms function as a kind of cultural anesthesia and they have became used for introducing and eliminating, in our racial consciousness, cultural pathogen such as caste and gender distinctions and religious fanaticism. Like Jean Anouieh, Karnad makes us of myths and folk forms in his plays to exorcise social-cultural evils... He seems to suggest that matriarchy which according to Bachofen’s theory of Mother Right is the lost paradise of mankind will come again – (Sarath Babu – The concept of Chastity in Girish Karnad’s Naga-Mandala, 238).

V. Rangan argues that Naga-Mandala raises the issues of truth and illusion. According to him Rani, Naga and Appanna see the truth differently as they perceive it from their own perceptive only. Rani speaks the truth while holding the cobra in her hand and she has not touched any male except her husband and the cobra. As it is a truth cobra does not bite her. Thus Naga’s truth is different from that of Rani’s. Appanna’s has his own truth that he has never slept with his wife and so gets surprised when the cobra doesn’t bite his wife. Thus he was in a confusion as he doesn’t know whether to believe in his individual truth or to accept the verdict of the society. It is quite evident that a new truth dawns on her soon when
she lays with her husband as two men cannot make love alike. But she can not speak about it then as she is more circumspect by then. So finally Rangan questions if *Naga-Mandala* means coils of cobra that entangles Rani or is it Naga himself who is caught in the coils of love for Rani, so he surmises,

Sex seems to be road to salvation in the Karnad cannon and holds an important place in all his plays. It is an important *purushartha* that links *dharma* and *moksha* and obvious path of liberation in *Naga-Mandala*. Sexual repression makes Tughlaq behave strangely; the lack of it makes Padmini long for Kapila’s strong body; Yayati seeks his son’s youth to be able to enjoy pleasure of the senses. Sex is the knowledge that Karudavva thinks Rani must accept. Finally, sex is the supreme truth that teaches the lesions of life to Rani, Naga and Appanna. (*Rangan*, 206).

Karnad is a modern dramatist who presents a modern theme in the mode of myth as it is only possible way of infusing new ideas into the minds of an audience still overwhelmed by traditional values. A myth has the ability, to quote the words of A.K. Ramanujan, to speak of “What can’t be usually spoken. Ordinary Decencies are violated. Incest, cannibalism, pitiless revenge are explicit motifs in this fantasy world, which helps us face ourselves, envisage shameless wish fulfillments, and sometimes “by
indirection find direction out’. (“Telling Tales” Daedalus, Fall, 258). To expose the secular and spiritual maladies of a society, myth becomes a very powerful medium of expression. Naga-Mandala creates a fantastical atmosphere from the beginning and leaves an indelible mark on the subconscious of the audience. It is successful in destroying all boundaries, between the author and the reader, realism and fantasy and characters and audience. Thus besides being a powerful play dealing with myth, it has also encompassed some of the features of post-modernism.

Both in Hayavadana and Naga-Mandala, the action revolves around the concept of experience which is primarily a myth or a folk tale which in turn draw upon the collective cultural memory. Then they explore, understand and develop a thought, an individual, a psyche, even a culture. The two-tiered structures they have also a reason for their extreme popularity not only among the audience but also among the literary circles.

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