The Dichotomy of Dual Existence – *Naga Mandala & Siri Sampige*

**Introduction**

This chapter discusses and analyzes two plays written by two different authors who follow the same plot but make significant and noteworthy changes in them that make interesting interpretations of the varied depth of both the writers. The two plays are *Naga Mandala* by Girish Karnad and *Siri Sampige* by Chandrashekhar Kambara. Both these plays have been strongly influenced by the Western ideologies like Existentialism and Freudianism. It is also interesting to note here that both these writers were strongly influenced by A.K. Ramanujan and the source material used for both these plays is from a recitation of a story theme by Ramanujan. This is the main reason for the similarity in plot of both these plays. As shared by Karnad about the source material for *Naga Mandala* in “Introduction to Three Plays”

*Naga-Mandala* is based on two oral tales I heard from A. K. Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women, normally the older women in the family- while children are being fed in the evening in the kitchen or being put in bed. The other adults present at these occasions are also women. Therefore, these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as a system of communication among the women in the family (Karnad:1994, 1).

Both these plays reflect the contemporary Indian culture and social life in terms of folk tales, myth and historical legends. Myth determines the nativity in Indian literature and the tales that have become tradition after being passed on from generation to generation. This inexhaustible love for myths, parables and legends
have patterned and defined Indian culture. Both these plays have used myth as a
perfect vehicle for embodying reality offering immense scope for the dramatists to
play with situations in multiple layers.

Myths and legends serve as a back-up for both these plays. Both the
playwrights have used similar mythical, historical and folk background to project their
vision and have brought together the eternal truths about human life and emotions by
borrowing from myth in fragments. Though some of the situations faced by the
protagonists in the plays appear to be fantastical it also gives new meaning and insight
by presenting a novel idea. As per A.K. Ramanujan by using folklore the playwright
and the audience can think more freely. He says: Tales speak of what cannot usually
be spoken. Ordinary decencies are violated. Incest, cannibalism, pitiless revenge are
explicit motifs in this fantasy world, which helps us face ourselves, envisage
shameless wish fulfillment, and sometimes ‘by indirection find direction out

In *Siri Sampige*, Kambara exposes the absurdity of life and man’s eternal
struggle to achieve perfection by using myth. He places the protagonists in direct
conflicts in different social situations and explores the psychological problem,
dilemmas that follow. *Naga Mandala*, a domestic drama, also portrays the agony and
confusion faced by both men and women with roles as adults but where they get no
space for self-development or liberty.

It is interesting to note that Girish Karnad who has been influenced by western
writers like Anouith, Comus, Beckett, Pinter, Satre and above all Shakespeare has
given his plays a richness and depth that is unsurpassed. This has also affected the
language and expressions of his plays which are more polished and sophisticated,
unlike Kambara who due to his purely native influence prefers the more rustic and robust language retaining the North Kannada dialect. His expressions are more direct, raw and basic in its treatment and more evocatively visual in its reference. But as both Karnad’s and Kambara’s childhood had been within the lively culture of oral tradition, they are both strongly influenced by myth, poetry, history, legend and folklore which form the core of their plays. As Shastri says, “Myth, at all events, is raw material, which can be the stuff of literature” (229-230).

**Naga Mandala: The plot in brief**

The plot of *Naga Mandala* works at four narrative levels. Within the story frame there are three other stories, each within the previous one. The first narrative of the frame describes a writer whose plays were so boring that he put the audience to sleep. As a punishment for this crime the writer was sentenced to death. The only saving clause being that he should be able to remain awake for one entire night before the end of the month. This last night which is also his last chance is best described in the below excerpt in the beginning of the play:

I may be dead within the next few hours.

*(Long pause)*

I am not talking of ‘acting’ dead. Actually dead. I might die right in front of your eyes.

*(Pause)*

A mendicant told me: ‘You must keep awake at least one whole night this month. If you do that, you’ll live. If not, you will die on the last night of the month.’ I laughed out loud when I heard him. I thought nothing would be easier than spending a night awake.
I was wrong. Perhaps death makes one sleepy. Every night this month I have been dozing off before even being aware of it. I am convinced I am seeing something with these eyes of mine, only to wake up and find I was dreaming. Tonight is my last chance.

For tonight is the last night of the month. Even of my life, perhaps? For how do I know sleep won’t creep in on me again as it has every night so far? I may doze off right in front of you. And that will be the end of me.

I asked the mendicant what I had done to deserve this fate. And he said: ‘You have written plays. You have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who come trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs, that all abused mass of sleep has turned against you and become the Curse of Death’ (Karnad:1990, 1-2).

Karnad through these lines seems to be mocking at the critics of his play. This interesting start of the play merges Karnad’s own subjectivity into the subjectivity of the character he has created. By using this style the playwright himself becomes a part of the play as one of the characters who is also a writer.

The playwright or the sutradhar of the play is in a ruined temple trying to keep himself awake. He hears some female voices entering the temple and hides behind a pillar. Karnad has added the folk element by showing these female voices as naked flames walking towards each other. Each flame is a female, a story teller, who
is sharing her observations and new experiences. Each flame has a story to tell, weaving a pattern of stories within stories forming the second level of the narrative. The group of personified flames is shown as gossipy women who meet at night after their day’s work is over and share their experiences with each other. Karnad has brilliantly tried to create an exclusively female context and content in the usual male-oriented folk tale by identifying the flames with spirited and vocal women who share stories with each other.

The third narrative level is added by the entry of a new flame who is greeted enthusiastically by the other flames and shares a tale. This tale has a very interesting mythical personification to it, about a woman who knew a beautiful story but refused to narrate or share it. One day when the old lady was sleeping with her mouth wide open, the story escaped and transformed into a beautiful young lady accompanied by a song that turned into a beautiful sari. The subtle meaning Karnad tries to show here is that a story is born to be kept alive and cannot be bottled up, but would escape at the earliest opportunity. By repeated narration the story grows vertically and horizontally. Its descriptive narration by the new flame is as below:

My mistress, the old woman, knows a story and a song. But all these years she has kept them to herself… This afternoon… The moment her mouth opened, the story and the song jumped out (Ibid, 4).

Now the story too reaches the temple and the flames offer to listen to her, but the story despairs that her tale would not grow or be shared as the flames cannot pass the story forward. To solve this problem the playwright comes forward and offers to share the story in the form of a new play. They reach an agreement by which the author promises to retell the story if it is interesting enough to keep him awake for the
whole night, thus keeping him alive which in turn will keep the story alive. The Story accepts his offer and here starts the narration of the story of Rani and Appanna. This forms the fourth level of the play which relates the life of Rani, the main character of the play *Naga Mandala*. Here Karnad has interestingly created an interaction between the narrator and the story through the structure of the play. The personified story, the narrators of the previous stories, the unfortunate Author and the Flames all are beautifully woven into the plot seamlessly. The Author-narrator of the first level, who has been listening to the second and third narrative levels, goes on to establish a dialogue with the story-narrator of the third level and he even suggests a name for the masculine character of the play as Appanna.

The plot or central story has Rani as the main protagonist who is adored by her parents, she is fondly called Rani-the Queen. Rani has long tresses and when her hair is tied up in a knot, it is as if a black king Cobra lies curled on the nape of her neck. Rani was married at a very tender age to Appanna, meaning any man. Rani is shown as entering the conjugal life with Appanna with many expectations like every girl; but is shocked with Appanna’s negligence as a husband. Young Rani is ignored by Appanna who visits her once a day that too for bathing and food and spends the nights with his concubines. He locks her inside the house and places a dog to guard her and to prevent her from talking to anyone. Rani feels very lonely, misses her parents and feels homesick. During her lonely nights, she indulges in dreams of her previous life.

The main twist to the story is introduced by an old blind woman Kurudavva who is always shown as being carried on her son’s shoulders. Kurudavva realizes Rani’s pain and gives her aphrodisiac roots which Rani had to grind and feed Appanna making him fall in love with Rani. However, Rani after making the potion
changes her mind and throws the potion on an ant hill. The anthill happens to be the dwelling place of a king Cobra, who consumes the potion and eventually falls in love with Rani. He visits Rani at night in the form of Appanna by entering the house through the drain in the bathroom. Rani is confused by the dual behavior of Appanna who is rude and indifferent during day, loving and attentive at night. However this relationship with the Naga results into Rani’s pregnancy. When Appanna learns this, he goes mad with rage and humiliates her in front of the entire village and demands justice from the elders. Naga intervenes and based on his suggestion Rani proves her innocence by accepting a snake ordeal and holding the king Cobra in her hand she proves her chastity. The cobra instead of biting her, slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. On seeing this the villagers revere her as a goddess and order Appanna to accept her without argument.

The story concludes by offering various endings to the play. The first end proposed that they live happily, Appanna who is still confused about Rani’s pregnancy accepts her, gives up the concubine and lives a happy life with Rani. In turn, Rani also gives up her dream of a lover who had awakened her and loved her as a woman; they together work as a family. But this ending is inconclusive and is objected to by the Author as it leaves many knots such as Kappanna’s disappearance, Naga’s concern and love for Rani, Appanna’s doubts remaining unresolved as well as those of Rani. For instance by now Rani must have realized the difference between the man who loved her then and now. Is it possible for Rani to forget her past and start afresh?

The end would not be complete if one doesn’t think about the Cobra’s feeling for Rani who is happy with Appanna and her son. The Cobra believes that Rani is
enjoying a happy conjugal life with her husband, has a son, home and status all because of him. His desire to have Rani or to kill her is aroused but his love for her stops him. He also regrets the fact that he is a not human and cannot possess Rani. So another ending suggests that Naga dies for Rani’s happiness where the ritual cremation of Naga is done by Rani’s son -the male child lighting the funeral pyre. And a third end of the story is where the Naga does not die but he is allowed by Rani to live in her tresses.

**Plot of Siri Sampige**

_*Siri Sampige*_ by Chandrashekhara Kambara is also based on a Kannada folk tale about a prince who has a human and a serpent form. The play is based in a place called Sivapura, which is ruled by the Queen Mother who was widowed at an early age and rules the kingdom ably while raising her only son. The play starts with an introduction of the queen and also a description of the curse which is the central theme of the play. The curse says that the Prince should not see his reflection and should be married as soon as his voice breaks, it was also predicted that he would die when his brother dies. The Queen Mother is relieved that as she had only one son the third dire prediction would not come true.

In the play the prince is shown to be in a perpetual search for the perfect woman. He refuses to marry because he has a vision of the perfect woman named simply as the Lamp Maiden, and awaits her entry in his life. The prince has a dream where he sees the Lamp maiden coming towards him and entering his body. Based on this dream, he insists that to bring the Lamp Maiden into his life he would have to split himself. He forces his relatives to cut his body into two pieces and put the pieces into 2 pots which should stay unopened for a certain time. When they finally open the
pots instead of the Lamp Maiden, a snake comes out of one of the pots and disappears in the garden. The prince becomes himself again, but fails in finding his perfect mate. Upset with all these happenings, the Queen Mother insists that he should marry the girl of her choice and forces him to marry Siri Sampige. Though the Prince gives in and marries Siri Sampaige, he is utterly disappointed. Instead of trying to come to terms with reality, he continues his search for the Lamp Maiden.

The king cobra named Kalinga sees Siri’s pain caused by the rejection of her husband and gets attracted to her, he follows her everywhere and eventually takes the form of the prince and joins with Siri Sampige. She becomes pregnant with Kalinga’s child, but when the prince comes to know about it he refuses to accept it as his child and publically challenges Sire Sampige. Consequently Sampige has to undergo a trial by ordeal to prove that the child is of the Prince.

Siri Sampaige takes the ordeal where she takes a king cobra on her body and swears that if she is a liar then the snake would bite her. The cobra wraps himself around her, and then goes away. She survives and hence the prince has to accept the pregnancy. The prince is not satisfied with the ordeal and he keeps Siri Sampige under strict watch to catch her lover. When Kalinga comes to visit her, the Prince barricades the room but does not find the man, but through further questions he comes to know that a king cobra had disappeared from the room. He puts all the clues together and realizes that this snake was the same as the one who had come out of the pot, and also climbed on Siri Sampige’s body. Following this Siri Sampige reveals that it was the king cobra who took the form of the prince, while being with her. In his anger he challenges King Kalinga and kills him in a duel.
The Prince who is now facing his own death based on the prediction that he would die when his brother dies realizes that the King Kalinga was none other than his other half and that it was his other self who was with Siri and he finally accepts her and the child and dies while requesting Siri Sampige to never allow their child to make the same mistake he had.

This play has a strong sub plot which runs parallel to the story and just like the triangle in the main plot is the Prince-Siri Sampige-Kalinga, there is a triangle in the sub plot between twin brothers Awali and Jawali and Jawali’s wife Kamala. These three characters are introduced in the beginning of the play itself. Awali and Jawali both want to marry Kamala but ultimately Kamala selects and marries Jawali. But Jawali always suffers from pangs of guilt for his brother and cannot have relations with Kamala. Frustrated with this, Kamala cannot understand why the brothers who hate each other so much also cannot exist without each other in thought or deed.

Awali also creates marital discord by trying to woo Kamala. Once, he even comes to her in the form of Jawali, but Jawali comes in the nick of time and saves Kamala. In order to save her marriage and have a child, Kamala takes the help of a seer. The seer comes to her in a dream and tells her to go to a certain place and place a garland of flowers on Jawali. On doing this ritual Jawali would become a snake and mate with her and she would then bear a child. Kamala follows these instructions. But Awali who was jealously watching them, kills Jawali when he was in the form of a snake and cuts his body into pieces and disposes him off. He tells Kamala that he is Jawali. Kamala believes him and starts following him home, on the way she starts laying eggs, on seeing these snake eggs Awali in sheer rage starts breaking the eggs.
Kamala on seeing this realizes that he is not Jawali but Awali and in her anger leaves him and goes into the forest.

On returning to the palace, Awali realizes that he cannot live without his brother as well as Kamala. He becomes very distraught and despondent. So he unburdens himself before the Prince who is also in the similar predicament. When the Prince was killing Kalinga, Awali commits suicide in the pond. At the end of the play almost all the characters meet a disastrous end and the present is destroyed leaving place only for the future.

**Element of Folk in *Naga Mandala & Siri Sampige***

Both the plays contemporize age old myths by reflecting certain lifestyle, cultural values, social institutions through the use of folk tradition of theatre and literature. Karnad’s admiration for the folk traditions can be felt in his own as explained in the Introduction to *Three Plays*:

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various conventions, the chorus, the music, the comic interludes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative analysis of the central problem (14).

Karnad’s basic format of writing has its birth in Natak and the Yakshagana performances witnessed during his childhood at Sisri. The technical aspects of these two varieties of drama are reflected in *Naga Mandala*, which is labeled as a story
theatre; a theatre whose action is based on folk stories. *Naga Mandala* is alive with numerous symbols, hidden meanings and moral lessons of life with the backdrop of folktale, like personification of the flames, songs by the flames, snakes, avatars, ordeals, the chorus, the cremation of the dead snake, and many more supernatural elements such as the magical roots, the yaksha females haunting Kurudavva and the cobra taking the form of Appanna.

In the same format Kambara has also written *Siri Sampige* in the form of Yakshagan. Narration is the soul of this form and it makes extensive use of song, mime and dance to create a total theatrical experience. He has also effectively used folk symbolism in a similar fashion as Karnad through the supernatural element of the Lamp Maiden who was never physically present but her very essence fuelled the play. The snake element was also similarly used in two instances when King Kalinga who is a snake takes the form of the Prince as also Jawali who takes the form of a snake. The supernatural folk element of Kamala laying eggs is also another novel concept in the play.

**Blend of Myth with Modern Relevance**

As said by Dr. Tuta Eswar Rao:

Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past, giving new meanings and insights reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an internal part of cultural consciousness of the land, with different meanings and it reflects the contemporary issues (84).
Naga Mandala reproduces the traditional mythic and folk elements by making use of magical elements right from the beginning of the play starting with the personification of flames, the story and is also woven across the plot like the roots making the Naga fall in love with Rani, the Naga taking the form of Appanna, the snake ordeal, the attribution of divinity to a woman. All these elements of play show Naga Mandala’s mythic characteristics. But Karnad has added a modern and realistic theme to the play where he reflects the playwright’s moral duties of passing the story further through the story of the sutradhar. He also condemns the socio-religious set-up of the society which allows locking a young bride into the limits of domestic duties without choice. As Jyoti Sahi rightly says, “Girish Karnad’s art can be described as a vision of reality” (123).

The name of the play itself also helps create a myth. For e.g., Naga Mandala is named after a cobra, and is also the central force in the play. By personifying the cobra, the songs, the flames and the story all together, Karnad has added to the mythic elements in the play.

Karnad in this play has borrowed heavily from myths and legends to create a new vision by linking the past and the present and extending it to a contemporary situation resulting into a new literary creativity. As Dhanavel says, the borrowed myths are “reinterpreted to fit pre-existing cultural emphasis” (58). Karnad has symbolically presented the belief that the new is recreated through the old through the ruined temple, where there is an implied suggestion that the past has been forgotten leading to the impulse to introduce, reshape or recreate something new out of the ruins. The temple thus becomes the ‘Mandala’ where the play would be executed. Though the idol in the temple was broken it is believed that the broken idol is that of
Ganesha because he is believed to remove obstacles and generates wisdom in man. Moreover, he is the first one to be invoked at the commencement of any work.

The mythical similarity between both the plays is the portrayal of the snake as a fertility symbol personified into a male. It is a common practice in Indian tradition that on a certain day of a certain month of a certain year, women perform the ritual of pouring milk on ant hills inhabited by a cobra. It is a belief that the cobra indirectly helps barren women to bear a child and unmarried women to attain good husbands. Kambara has beautifully woven this myth into the play Siri Sampige when he shows Kalinga as a strong, forceful and potent person who seduces Siri Sampige with his bold sexuality. Kamala, too mates with Jawali when he is in snake form to beget a child. Similarly the Naga of Naga Mandala is also believed to be a supernatural being and is thus fulfilling Rani’s desire for both a good husband and a child. The serpent plays an important role as in most such narrations all over the world. In Karnad own words: “We are forced to believe that there exists a theory that the mothers of great men in history such as Scipio, Alexander the great, and Augustus Cesar were all impregnated by serpents” (2005: 276).

Kambara has also introduced the mythical element of the Lamp Maiden in Siri Sampige which is interwoven into the play and is the central force in taking the play forward. Though the Lamp Maiden is not a physical entity in the play she is mythically represented. Another mythical element is the cutting into various pieces of the Prince’s body and placing it into the pots for a certain period followed by the creation of King Kalinga. The serpent has strong mythical connotations and is central to the theme of the play. Kambara has also played on the snake element just as in Naga Mandala the snake takes the form of Appanna to form a relationship with Rani,
in the same manner in *Siri Sampige* King Kalinga the serpent takes the form of the Prince to fool the Queen Mother and have a relationship with Siri Sampige. The additional element added in *Siri Sampige* is that Jawali too takes the form of a snake to mate with Kamala and give her a child, which in its very contrariness brings the myth to another dimension.

**Portrayal of women in *Naga Mandala* & *Siri Sampige*.**

Both the playwrights have made a commendable effort by using myth and the folklore to explore the world of women with all her emotions, insecurities and desires. While Karnad maintains the societal standards of providing Rani with a secured status of a wife and mother in the end, Kambara has not been so generous. Symbolically Kamala enters the forest and leaves the society with all its trials and tribulations. Both Siri Sampige and the Queen Mother lose their husband and son respectively and have to weather not only the destruction but also the future ordeals by themselves.

Although both the plays seem to uphold the traditional values, they also ironically question the same values. They focus and question the patriarchal moral code that demands the faithfulness from a woman for her husband but not the same from a husband for his wife. For e.g. Appanna spends most of his time with his concubine and the Prince too spends all of his time hunting for the Lamp Maiden. But both of them are not condemned for their indifference towards their wives. On the other hand, both Rani and Siri Sampige even though ignored and rejected by their husbands, have to take the trail by ordeal to prove their chastity.
In a patriarchal society myth and folk tales represent the male unconscious fears and wishes and are of patriarchal construction and male-oriented. Such stories do not dwell into or reveal the inner turmoil of woman. Her anxieties, fears or insecurities are never focused in such stories, nor is her suffering given any importance. Both Karnad and Kambara have made use of myth to not only give an alternative perspective but also glorify womanhood while at the same time explore the experience, emotions and reactions of man and woman in the psychologically transitional phase.

In the beginning of the play, both Karnad and Kambara have tried to establish a woman empowered atmosphere. By introducing the female-voiced flames, Karnad tries to bring forth the entire concept of storytelling which works as a system of communication among women in the family and is the only way for a woman to express her understanding of the reality around her. Kambara in the beginning of Siri Sampige introduces the Queen Mother as a strong, empowered lady who rises above her misfortunes and rules successfully as a Queen while raising a strong and virtuous son.

Karnad has gone one step ahead then Kambara by strongly presenting the bitter reality of women’s indifferent status through the female characterized flames in Naga Mandala. The prologue has the Flames discussing the day to day episodes of the family members with whom they live. And through these stories one gets an idea of the sufferings of many women in the Indian social setup where they are neglected, insulted and are devoid of the dignity they deserve. The first woman is a housewife and has a miserable life, her husband accuses her of being a spendthrift and does not even give her money to buy day to day necessities. The second flame is an old bed-
ridden woman who is ill-treated by her son and daughter-in-law. The third woman’s husband has no emotional attachments with her and just treats her as a convenient body for his pleasure. The fourth woman has a lot of unfulfilled desires which she cannot demand as she fears that her husband would replace her with another young woman. Karnad through these portrayals has shown his sensitivity to women’s plight in today’s world. Kambara, on the other hand, has not dwelt on these broad topics but has limited himself to the characters within the play and portrayed them as strong women who have risen above their circumstances and have tried to write their own fate.

The main characters of Rani and Siri Sampige have been shown to have similar problems in life but their reactions and actions are different. While Rani is shown to be oppressed and dependent and her slave like lifestyle has put her into weak and fearful state, Siri Sampige is shown to be a woman aware of her worth and status as a Queen and takes opportunity in her own hands when faced with King Kalinga.

*Naga Mandala* begins with Rani married to Appanna who is chosen by her parents much earlier in her life and now that it is the right time, she has to live with him. The beginning itself is a very strong critic on the existence and identity of a female where her life is governed first by her father, later by her husband and finally by her son, as shown with the example of Kuruddava’s dependence on her son Kappanna. In this regard Sudhir Kakar rightly points out:

Dominant psycho-social realities of a woman’s life can be condensed into three stages. First, she is daughter to her parents;
second she is wife to her husband (and daughter-in-law to his parents): and third, she is a mother to her sons (and daughters) (5).

Rani’s married life is a greater satire which raises several issues of a woman’s self-respect, existential crises, and choices. The very names Rani and Appanna also suggest the situation of Indian culture where a girl is a Queen for her father but the husband is any man or every man who bears the same attitude of neglecting and ruling his wife. Immediately after marriage without any conversation Appanna leaves Rani all alone, locking her in the house and only visiting to have his bath and lunch. The lock symbolizes the patriarchal society which confines a woman and denies her the freedom of expression.

Appanna: Well, then I’ll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go.

(Rani looks at him nonplussed. He pays no attention to her, goes out, shuts the door, locks it from outside and goes away. She runs to the door, pushes it, finds it is locked, she peers out of the barred window. He is gone).

Rani: Listen…please…

(She does not know what is happening, stands perplexed. She cannot even weep. She goes and sits in a corner of her room) (Karnad:1990, 6).

Throughout the play Rani is shown to have no control over the circumstances or the situations being played. In the beginning she is mistreated by her husband and her plight ignored by society. Later after the Cobra trial, the same society reveres her as a goddess. Karnad has given a very clichéd end to the play in trying to show his
sympathy for Rani and through its extension towards the entire woman class when he establishes Rani as the actual Queen of her family in the end, getting all love and respect she deserves from Appanna and the society and living happily forever. In Kiranth’s words, “… an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can” (57). On the other hand Kambara has shown the women in his play to be equally strong and on equal footing with the males in the play, with each of them being in control of their actions.

Another point of comparison is the character of Kuruddavva and Rani. They can be compared for their ignorance and dependence, while Kuruddavva is visually blind, Rani is ignorant of her own sexuality and has no experience of a marital relationship. Rani’s dependence previously on her parents, later on Appanna and Naga suggest a parity to Kurudavva’s situation where she is absolutely dependent on her son. In *Siri Sampige*, the Queen Mother, Siri Sampige and Kamala are all shown to be assertive and self-willed. This is shown when the Queen Mother demands the Prince to marry Siri Sampige and again when she disbelieves the Prince’s claim that he is not the father of Siri Sampige’s child. She is not also blind to the faults of her son and tries to take corrective action. Siri Sampige too succumbs to King Kalinga advances, willingly and without fear and revels in her sexuality. Kamala also is shown to be the one who selects her husband between Awali and Jawali and demands reasons for Jawli’s ignorance of her. She also actively discusses her problems with her husband and tries to change his mind. She immediately acts upon her dream of the family god who had suggested a method to beget a child. All these examples show that Kambara has portrayed women as strong characters who are not willing to step down.
The Issue of chastity

In both the plays the issue of chastity and the trail by ordeal is almost similar. The entire issue of proving one’s chastity through a trial is quite disturbing; which raises questions as to why only a female is imposed with such trials to prove her chastity whereas in the same society, the male not only has the freedom to be polygamous, but also have the right to summon their wives and ask them to prove their chastity publicly. Karnad has subtly challenged the double standards.

Moreover in *Naga Mandala*, the sudden rejection of Naga from the situation and his thrusting of Rani alone in the web of accusations and trial reduce him to an ordinary male from a true lover. Whereas he knows that he is the cause of Rani’s trouble, yet he watches her being beaten from the window. Later on he approaches her at night and shows her the only way to escape the situation is to take a snake ordeal which would save her from the entire trouble and would unite her with her husband.

Rani: Why are you humiliating me like this? Why are you stripping me naked in front of the whole village? Why don’t you kill me instead?

Naga: Rani, the Village Elders will sit in judgment. You will be summoned. That cannot be avoided.

Rani: Look at the way you talk - as if you were referring to someone else. After all, you complained to the Elders about me. Now you can go and withdraw the complaint. Say my wife isn’t a whore.

Naga: I’m sorry, but it can’t be done. Rani, Listen. You do trust me, don’t you?....
…then listen to me carefully. When you face the Elders, tell them you will prove your innocence. Say you will undertake the snake ordeal (Ibid, 33-34).

This issue of chastity can also be compared to the story of Ahalya in *Ramayana* where Lord Indra is shown to have had illicit relations with her by impersonating her husband Rishi Gautam. When her husband finds out he curses her to a stone, in spite of her innocence. In *Naga Mandala*, too, Rani is innocent. It is the Naga in the form of her husband Appanna who makes love to her. She thinks that she bears her husband’s child and does not suspect Naga’s identity till the end.

The debate in these two situations of Ahalya and Rani of having committed the crime of adultery unknowingly, the question that arises is, who is responsible for the situation as it stands? Lord Indra/Naga, Rishi Gautam/Appanna, or the two women who were not aware that they were committing adultery? The issue of Rani’s trial for her chastity can also be compared to Sita’s trial (Agneepariksha) in the *Ramayana* as well.

Indian life and culture are based on the solid foundation of Myth and Epic and the interesting aspect of the stories in Indian Mythology is that they are usually meant to convey subtle facts, rules and maxims to guide the daily lives of people. Thus such mythological and historical doctrines that frame our society and the social set-up has played a strong role in woman’s subjugation and suppression and has subconsciously penetrated into society from such backdoors. Fortunately myth not only gives such examples where women are oppressed but also glorifies womanhood. For instance, when Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, which resulted into a massive battle leading to her return from Lanka, her chastity was questioned during her stay in Lanka and was
imposed with the trial of fire. Yet when she passed the ordeal, she was readily accepted by society. Likewise Rani’s predicament was not resolved until she agreed to take the snake ordeal which threatened her life. Thus in Naga Mandala there is a historical and mythological backdrop which supports such trials for women and gives liberty to men for being their judges. However the end restores and favours the good. Thus Indian myth indirectly proposes that some miracle is mandatory to establish the purity of a woman, whereas a man is never questioned for his indulgences. Through the trial of Rani, Karnad projects the age old follies that lie at the roots of Indian culture and society. With Rani’s successful ordeal, Karnad empowers the female gender and also tries to negate the injustice done to her in the name of duty and rituals. He also brings to the forefront the identity crisis that a woman suffers within the limits of marital relationship. The play also displays the emotional and psychological anxieties of a woman. Rani who is introduced as a loved daughter, neglected and tortured wife, later on recognized as a goddess due to the ordeal, is still confused about her husband’s behavior at night, one who forces her for the trial and one who rescues her by suggesting the snake ordeal.

Karnad has used the stories of Hindu Myth as an instrument in projecting women empowerment, as a woman’s transformation from a meek to a powerful personality and finally rebellious one fighting for one’s identity. A relevant example in Hindu mythology is the character of Sita the beautiful princess in Ramayana, who marries Rama. Rama is later exiled and during this time, Sita is kidnapped by Ravana. Though she is later saved by Rama, as she had stayed with an unrelated male albeit forcefully, Sita was accepted only after the fire ordeal. Even then once again Sita is accused for having stayed in Lanka for years with Ravana and thus exiled when pregnant. She shows here strength of character by raising single handedly her twin
sons and giving them the best lessons of life. The transformation from a tender princess to a bold mother includes a series of incidents that happen outside her control but mould, shape and train her. She grows into a strong woman who in the end, as a rebellion against the male dominating society which is always demanding trials and proofs of her chastity finally takes rescue into the mother earth. Thus her absolute withdrawal is an excellent feminist example where a female withdraws and ceases to survive rather than give explanation to prove her purity. Shakuntala in Abhigyanshukuntalam too, faces the same predicament and transforms from a tender bud to a strong woman who raises a bold son who plays amongst lions.

Kambara in his play has not at all dwelled on the issue of chastity and the trail by ordeal in its societal form, he has used this episode only as a means to take the story forward. In fact when the Prince demanded for a trail by ordeal neither his mother nor the elders were ready to believe him and also did not encourage it. This shows that for Kambara the issue of chastity as a social evil was not relevant or important. Unlike Rani in Naga Mandala who believed herself innocent and took the snake ordeal only because Naga suggested it, even then fearing the snake. Siri Sampige though fully aware of her culpability did not fear the snake but took the ordeal by her own suggestion, proving that she was arrogantly sure of herself and did not fear anything.

The Mythical Element of Naga

In Hindu mythology, Naga is regarded as a symbol of fertility and regenerations. In South India many houses have their own shrine reserved for snakes in the groves. Snakes are also the symbols of manliness, strength and fertility. Nagas are sometimes portrayed as handsome men or as the half-man and half-snake, the top
half a coiled snake. Karnad has made use of these folk tales by mixing the human and non-human world. Another example is in the act of the hood of the Naga being spread over Rani’s head, this also is a cultural symbolism from Hindu myth. The Pulluva community from Kerala of South India is believed to have descended from Dravidian clan whose totem is Naga. There is a folk belief that if serpent’s anger brings calamity, disaster and disease, it can be pleased by the Pulluva alone where the Naga is worshipped as a god, with the Pullauva women dancing, and who later on tell the fortune of the devotees and then fall unconscious. The process of transformation of Naga into human form is derived from such a belief.

In *Siri Sampige*, Kambara has beautifully described this myth through a dream sequence of Kamala where the family god guides Kamala for a progeny, in the following words:

My daughter, on the anthill, under the banyan tree, outside the city, there is a creeper of blooming jasmines. If you first worship, then pluck the flowers, make a garland out of them and pit it around your husband’s neck, he will transform himself into a serpent and unite with you. If you unite in this manner you shall have children, not otherwise (Kambara, 38).

Karnad has also used the folk tale to expose the psychological divide of a person. Naga who is regarded as the symbol of male fertility and sexuality easily projects the truth and conflict of the protagonist. Naga talks in a honeyed way and it confuses Rani in the differing personalities of Appanna and Naga; which explores a very common truth that every husband is sweet and soothing during the darkness of night, harsh and rude during the day. Naga’s words to Rani are very suggestive:
Naga: No, let’s say, the husband decides on the day visits. And the wife decides on the night visits. So I won’t come at night if you don’t want me to (Karnad:1990, 22).

Moreover Appanna’s visit to Rani during the day and Naga at night represents a blend of dream and reality. Rani dreams during the day for a dream like reality of night and is tortured and shocked by the nightmarish reality of the day.

In both Naga Mandala and Siri Sampige, the Naga is a supernatural power who fulfills the desires of a devotee. Rani, the symbol of womanhood and desires, needs love and sensual pleasure from her husband Appanna just like Siri Sampige. When she is denied these pleasures from her husband, it is the Naga who fulfills them. One of the strong morals of the play is that when a devotee is in need, God appears to help. In Hindu mythology young unmarried girls offer milk to Lord Shiva and Naga for a better husband and married woman for a child, specially a son. In the play when Rani throws away the concoction with the magic roots on the ant hill, the Naga/Cobra consumes it and thus comes to her help. In Siri Sampige it is the restlessness of Siri Sampige which brings King Kalinga out of the neither world to look for her.

In both the plays it is the Naga who fulfills all the wishes of the women protagonists; not only her carnal wishes but also later on as in the case of Naga Mandala, Rani is given the status of goddess due to the snake ordeal where the cobra slides on her body and makes an umbrella upon her with his hood. It is only after this that Rani is gifted with a happy married life with Appanna, a beautiful son and status of wife and a mother in the society. All the desires of Rani reach fulfillment because of Naga. But in Siri Sampige the entry of King Kalinga brings destruction to the Prince as it brings the curse to self-fulfillment and destroys not only King Kalinga but
also the Prince. Similarly by turning into a snake Jawali also get killed by Awali and Kamala is forced to forsake the society. This is also a very important element of difference between the two plays wherein *Naga Mandala* the Naga is ultimately seen as correcting all misfortunes, and in *Siri Sampige* he is the begetter of all misfortune.

**Naming and its Relevance in both the plays**

Girish Karnad in *Naga Mandala* has given very generic but interesting names to his characters which have a deeper and more cynical meaning hidden in them. For e.g., the names like Rani – the Queen, Appanna – any man, Kurudavva – the dark one, and Naga the snake; all explore myth at generic level. The character of Rani is not a woman in person but a woman in effect which destabilizes her personality. Though the writers suggest her name as Rani – she is not assigned with any identity, except that she is the queen of her parents. Rani as a name represents how every common girl is also a queen for her parents. The myth of the name Rani is very significant because it makes her live a life like a Queen in the end but only after an ordeal and self-transformation.

**Story:** A young girl. Her name… it doesn’t matter. But she was an only daughter, so her parents called her Rani. Queen. Queen of the whole wide world (*Ibid*, 6).

Rani represents every girl – newly married, insecure, desperate and anxious. Rani’s long tresses and beauty also compliment her name. But her fate doesn’t. Rani’s husband Appanna which means any man is also very suggestive, as to how a wife desperately waits and longs for the company and love of her husband who is faceless. The lonely and sad atmosphere in which Rani stays in Appanna’s house also represents the daughter-in-law’s loneliness in the family where she lacks her
husband’s support. Thus the position of Rani in Naga Mandala can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in 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.

Kambara in Siri Sampige has placed more emphasis on the universality of the names, like the whole play is located in a place called Sivapura, the name of the Prince is Sivanaga and later on when he splits himself and gives birth to King Kalinga who is a Naga, this name takes on an added significance by the very nature of the split and the reformation of Sivanaga and Kalinga, the Naga. The name Kalinga also means a bird of prey.

Here it is important to mention that for Kambara, Sivpura has been his own personal Utopia which he had created in his first major poem narrative Helathena Kela (Listen, I will tell you 1964). Sivpura is god’s own country where Lord Shiva dwells, where Kailasa blooms in every little flower, where men speak in proverbs of ageless wisdom. It is a traditional world unaffected by organized religion and is made of folk cults of worship, feudal social codes which equate female sexuality with the earth’s fertility. An example of this is given in the description of Siri Sampige’s sexuality by Kalinga:

There she is, the girl over there. She is the one who stole my mind away! Even at this distance the smell of ploughed earth that her body exhales makes me tingle (Kambara 31).

The name of Lord Siva is the main dedication for Kambara in naming his characters such as the prince named as Sivanaga, the cobra as Kalinga, even the location of the play Sivapura suggests this similarity. Additionally the beginning of the play Siri Sampige is also significant in its dedication to Lord Siva:
Bhagavata (Dedication)

Before we speak, a thousand salutations
to you, great Lord Siva of Savalagi,
split in your divine play into man and wife,
dancing Nataraja Ardhanarishwara,
body and mind, spirit and matter you are,
split into two and beyond duality, hail Siva! On Earth,
shining Sivapura’s
King Nagar Raya is dead
Queen Mayavati lives and rightfully rules (Ibid, 6).

Thus we can see that for Karnad the character names were used to show a strong similarity in the status of all women and the sameness of marital discord. While for Kamabara the significance of the name of Lord Siva in its various forms is of more relevance.

The Significance of the Beginning of the Plays

A point of similarity between the beginnings of the plays can also be shared here. In Naga Mandala via the atmosphere of the ruined temple, the group of women portrayed as flames and sharing their sorrows, the song visiting them all combines to give the audience a pre-sequel of what to expect from the play. Naga Mandala is a story of the exploitation of woman and her eternal struggle to survive in spite of all odds, taking the emotional support of other women like her, this theme is carried forward with Rani and Kurudavva who understand each other’s plight and help each other to survive.
In the same fashion in *Siri Sampige* the dedication of the play given in the beginning mentions *Ardhanarishwara*, who is depicted as half male and half female, split down the middle. A basic break-up of the word *Ardhanarishwara* is *Ardha* (half) *nari* (women) *ishwara* (god or man). This again gives a hint of main theme of the play, the Prince who is literally and figuratively split into two, and always looking for his other half, the Queen Siri Sampige who is also split into two between the Prince and King Kalinga, and carried forward in the sub-plot where Awali and Jawali are shown as two bodies with one soul.

**The Importance of the Sutradhar**

In *Naga Mandala* the Sutradhar plays a very non-pivotal role unlike *Siri Sampige* where the Sutradhar Bhagavata is present in every scene and is the main character who takes the play forward by setting the flow of the scene with a prelude to each sequence. In *Naga Mandala* the sutradhar who is presented as Man, is present only in the beginning and is clearly a spectator who initially just listens to the flames and later interacts with the song to encourage her to share her story. But beyond this stage the sutradhar role is non-existent in *Naga Mandala*. Later he takes prominence towards the end of the story as he is not satisfied with the clean and amateur closure which leaves open to many questions to the audience. He takes control of the story at the end and gives alternative endings to the play to make it more palatable to the audience. This shows how Karnad has tried to show that life is like a story which has many endings if one looks at the options available and take its implications to create an ending which is acceptable. Also Karnad attempts to give the Suthradhar control over his own life through the story ending.
In *Siri Sampige* the Sutradhar clearly controls the play as also its players. Here Kambara has followed the true tradition of Natak where the Sutradhar enjoys the additional privilege of explicitly defying the frame of time and space. He can address the audience directly and speak to them in a familiar manner. Kambara has followed the tradition of folk theatre in its totality by giving a strong presence to the Sutradhar to freely orchestrate the prose, verse, commentary, description, narration and dialogic intervention. The play is a plurality and every aspect of the play is the play, this is true folk tradition unlike the more professional theatre’s realistic social drama that was followed by Karnad in *Naga Mandala* which is confined to a more aesthetic frame of performance.

**Character Comparisons**

In both these plays the protagonists have distinct similarity in terms of the situations that they face but the treatment of their reaction and the importance placed on a given situation in terms of stage enaction is very diverse. By taking each of the character and comparing them against each other will help understand the nuances that separate each play.

**Rani and Siri Sampige**

Both Rani and Siri Sampige are similar in their feelings of rejection, loneliness and frustration with their lives and worries about their future.

In *Naga Mandala* Appanna has his attachments outside and merely treats Rani as a caretaker, taking care of his needs. He comes once a day in the noon for bathing and eating. Every night Rani is lonely, feels scared and misses her parents. Dreams become the only source of relief, as she imagines an Eagle talking to her:
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 magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that 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…(Karnad:1990, 7).

Rani’s soliloquy and dreams help her escape from the difficult situation. As a playwright Karnad employs such dramatic techniques to reveal the inner turmoil of the characters and also by and by reveal Rani’s beautiful, secure past with her parents as against the fearful, lonely life with her husband. He also explores the Indian social set-up which puts a young girl into the web of compromises and adjustments, sacrificing all her happiness without any hope. The myth of a happy married life shatters for Rani leaving her in a hopeless and dejected situation. Rani here represents womankind passing through the same pangs of hopelessness and helplessness.

Naga Mandala expresses woman’s understanding of the reality around her, as a counterpoint to the patriarchal structures of classical texts. For instance the position of Rani can be viewed as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in a joint family where she yearns for her husband’s support. And the husband appears in two unconnected roles- as a stranger during the day and a lover at night. The empty house where Rani is locked in depicts the family she is married into and the loss of communication and lack of understanding.

In Siri Sampige also Sampige is rejected by her husband, who is always looking for his Lamp Maiden:

Bhagavata Siri Sampige he married
But she could not satisfy him,

Everywhere he went searching only for the

Lamp-maiden, (Kambara, 24).

But unlike Rani, Siri Sampige does not lament this rejection. Her plight is expressed either by the Sutradhar as shown above or described by the sympathetic Queen Mayawati. In Siri Sampige though the play is named after the heroine of the play, actually her role in the play is not given that much importance as of Rani in Naga Mandala. Siri Sampige though mentioned in the beginning of the play as a potential bride for the Prince actually enters the play in the scene VIII after the introduction of Kalinga.

Another point of difference is that when Rani faces Appanna’s accusation of being a harlot and having relations with someone in his absence, Rani fails to comprehend his behavior as it is only the Naga who knows the reality of the situation. When the Naga is first faced with the news of Rani’s pregnancy, he asks her to hide the news as long as she can. Here Karnad has tried to show the helplessness of Rani and her frustration of not asking questions and yet holds it:

Rani: (Blankly). Yes, I shall. Don’t ask questions. Do as I tell you.
Don’t ask questions. Do as I tell you. No. I won’t ask questions. I shall do what you tell me. Scowls in the day. Embraces at night. The face in the morning unrelated to the touch at night. But day or night, one motto does not change: Don’t ask questions. Do as I tell you” (Karnad:1990, 32).

Rani’s sudden outburst shows her confusion and frustration toward both for not asking questions and accepting the situation the way it is. Karnad has tried to
show Rani’s helplessness as every woman’s helplessness. For the want of her husband’s love, she suppresses and ignores all her doubts about her husband’s dual behavior.

Siri Sampige in Kambara’s play had a relationship with Kalinga knowing that he was not her husband and when she falls pregnant it is her decision to claim the unborn child as the Prince, there is no question in her mind about her culpability in this matter. Yet she holds fast to an untruth with a bold face.

In *Naga Mandala* Karnad has focused on Rani and has shown the evolution of Rani from a girl to womanhood and takes the readers through her change in the personality. She is introduced as a little girl who is newly married and is afraid of everything and everyone. She imagines being with her parents when she ought to dream about a prince charming wooing her. Her relationship with Naga, ushers her to womanhood and later to motherhood. Her resistance against Appanna about not asking questions and abiding to his advice shows that she is no more the same girl who feared a male’s touch.

Rani: 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 a 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 to 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! (*Ibid*, 32).

While she trembles at first at the name of snake ordeal, later on she shows uncanny strength, terrible courage and un-shattering self-confidence when she finally
takes the ordeal. When she realizes that she is left all alone against the village, where her today’s strength and courage will determine her and her child’s future, she transforms from a timid woman to a courageous one. At once she pulls the cobra from the ant hill and speaks boldly:

Rani: Since coming to this village, I have held by this hand, only two…

Rani: My husband and….

Rani: And this cobra (Suddenly words pour out) Yes, my husband and this cobra king. Except for these two, I have not touched anyone of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me. If I lie, let the cobra bite me (Ibid, 39).

With these words the cobra slides up from her shoulders and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. The crowd is surprised and overwhelmed at this miracle. This is the greatest transformation in Rani’s life and personality.

Elder I: A miracle! A miracle!

Elder II: She is not a woman. She is a divine Being!

Elder III: Indeed, a Goddess!

(They fall at her feet. The crowd surges forward to prostrate itself before her. Appanna stands uncomprehending) (Ibid, 39-40).

This single event portrays myth leading to ethnic cleansing of the society at large. It is not only the transformation of Rani’s character but also reflects the transformation of the entire society including her husband Appanna, as well as his concubine who chooses to serve Rani as her maid for life as compensation.
Elder I: Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate. Don’t grieve that you judged her wrongly and treated her badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were the chosen instrument for revealing her divinity.

Elder II: Spend the rest of your life in her service. You need merit in past lives to be chosen for such holy duty.

Elder III: Bless us, Mother. Bless our children.

Appanna: Forgive me. I am a sinner. I was blind… (Ibid, 40).

After sometime, Rani gives birth to a beautiful son. This fulfills her desired circle of marriage with a loving husband and a son to call her mother. Thus it marks transformation in Rani at various levels. She is respected by all the villagers and also blessed with divine motherhood which completes her as a woman. This restoration of order is how Indian myth always works towards maintaining order and equilibrium in the process of eradicating social errors. Rani’s victory strongly suggests that the voice of women should be heard and cannot be ignored. Women are not commodities and they too have importance and the right to speech. When Rani questions Appanna and boldly faces the Elders, it depicts her critical, analytical quality. One right, bold decision by Rani gave her the right position as a wife and mother and channelizes her life towards happiness. Thus Karnad aptly uses Myth as a vehicle to build cultural and social norms leading to regeneration. He develops Rani’s character from a submissive girl to an assertive woman, a mother and a goddess as well. Thus her journey from innocence to experienced maturity is complete. Myth enables this transformation supporting a woman’s respect and status in society.
Karnad has emphasized Rani as the main character of his play, and the trials and tribulations of Rani form the heart of the play. Siri Sampige in Kambara’s play is not the central character, and the description of her pain of alienation and the trail by ordeal is not taken in great depth. Though both Rani and Sampige go through the same trail by ordeal with the snake and in both cases the snake also happens to be the lover. In *Naga Mandala* the snake ordeal is the main turning point in Rani’s life and she gets all the marital bliss based on the success of the snake ordeal. Karnad has used the snake ordeal to show the fickleness of society which converts a harlot into a goddess in a fraction of a second. In *Siri Sampige* after the snake ordeal Sampige is also revered as an angel and is given respect by the elders, but following the snake ordeal the Prince still does not accept her words as true unlike Appanna who has to bow down to the demands of society and accept Rani’s words as true. So for Rani the snake ordeal marked the turning point of her life and for Siri Sampige the snake ordeal was just a means to an end.

Thus, Rani in *Naga Mandala* is shown as a weak woman who accepts all the injustice heaped upon her but still emerges the victor, while Siri Sampige is shown as a strong woman who accepts her sexuality and is willing to step out of the binds of marriage with Kalinga. She is shown to willingly lie to her family and elders in the snake ordeal but still after all this she loses everything in the end except the child in her womb.

**Aapanna and the Prince**

Just as Siri Sampige has a lesser role to play in comparison to the Prince, Aapanna also has a lesser role to play in comparison to Rani. The main idea behind *Naga Mandala* for Karnad was to challenge the double standards of patriarchal
institution; a male is not accountable for his social or moral conduct while a woman is always accountable for whatever she does. Appanna visits his concubine without any moral or social restrictions and is never required to prove his integrity either to Rani or the society. Unlike Rani who is an obedient wife and fulfills all her duties without complaining but is still a victim of subjugation, alienation and repression owing to her status of a mere slave than a housewife. Domestic slavery is an outright concern of the play. Karnad objects to it as something un-natural and a social product. The issue of ownership of Rani, first by her father and later by her husband, reflects the dehumanized system of our society where a female is treated as an entity and not a human being. In support to this argument, a statement of Imam Ul Haq in the Quarterly Newsletter of Aurat Foundation can be cited, “The girl is a liability; at an early age the girl child is made aware that she is only a temporary member of the family. Any skills she learns will benefit not her own family but her in laws” (19).

Karnad through the description of Appanna’s reaction to Rani’s news about her pregnancy shows the marital cruelty present in our world, when Appanna pushes her and kicks her to the floor and abuses her.

Appanna: Aren’t you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off?

Rani: I swear to you I haven’t done anything wrong!

Appanna: You haven’t? And yet you have a bloated tummy. Just pumped air into it did you? And you think I’ll let you get away with that? You shame me in front of the whole village, you darken my face, you slut….!
(He beats her. The cobra watches this through a window and moves about, frantically. Neither notices it) (Ibid, 33).

Kambara in *Siri Sampige* has shown the trials and tribulations of the Prince in vivid detail. He has shown the dilemma of the prince, a man who exists in a dual form- a prince and a serpent. A duality which is the result of his splitting himself into pieces in hope of producing a female form who would complement him to perfection. Through the surrealism of the Prince’s imagination, Kambara has tried to reflect on the conundrums faced in life- the congruency we strive for between who we are and who we wish to be; who the other is and how we want them to be. Amidst the psychological friction, the prince kills himself by murdering his alter ego- the snake.

Kambara through the central character of the Prince has tried to expose the nuances of self-love and its destructive force. Likewise Karnad through Rani has tried to expose the duality of marital relationships and the sufferings of women within its bounds.

The scene for the duality of the Prince and its destructive force is shown in the beginning of the play itself by Bhagavata:

Our family God spoke through an oracle, and foretold his future.
See! Two dangers threaten: When his voice breaks he may become a monk. When his brother dies, he also dies (Kambara, 7).

This is again alluded to by the Queen Mayavati when Jawali tells her how the Prince spends his time at the pond and looks at his reflection which the Prince thinks is the Lamp Maiden. It is here that the curse is connected to the Prince’s obsession with the thought of attaining the Lamp Maiden.
Mother: Listening to your tale has made me afraid, son. What should not have happened, what I was guarding against for sixteen years, has happened now out of my sight. The only difference is that he, who should have become a monk on seeing his reflection, is now thinking of the Lamp Maiden (Ibid, 27-28).

The Prince is shown to fall in love with a Lamp Maiden who comes to him at night and enters his body, though everybody disbelieves this story of the prince, there is one duality which is significantly mentioned in the play, where the Queen Mother acknowledges that since the night of the dream the Lamp Maiden who was a statue in the palace is no longer there:

Mother: They say he is haunted by a female spirit. It may be true, because the day before he was split in two he said that the Lamp-Maiden of Indranivas Palace had come to life and danced before dissolving into him. What is surprising is that the statue has also vanished since that day (Ibid, 25).

Kambara through this has tried to infuse a sense of mystery into the play which makes the audience question the veracity of the Prince’s story as fact or fiction.

Kambara has brought to the fore the blindness and willfulness of self-love through the prince who sacrifices his marriage to Siri Sampige and ultimately his life in his aim to attain a mythical other half which is a reflection of himself. Also, Kambara through the description shared below, of the Prince gazing into the pond and on seeing his reflection perceives that he is seeing the Lamp Maiden shares with the audience the self-love of the prince.
Prince: In that case, listen. Today I was beside a pond. She was inside it. She was swinging in the waves and ripples, glittering like a fish, moving her tiny arms. ‘I must cast a line to catch her, I thought. ‘No’, I thought, ‘I can catch her in my hand’, and I stretched out my cupped hands. When my breath touched the water in my hand’ – do you know? – she trembled for love? Slowly she dripped down again between my fingers. Saying ‘Silly girl!’ I pinched her cheek. She laughed – do you know? – like lines running in the waves. Seeing her I laughed too, and I spoke. She also spoke as I did. Everything I did she did too, or everything she did I did too, there was so much harmony between the two of us that like two halves coming together we had become one. Gradually we became, both together, an indivisible zero, transcending form, becoming the Sivalinga, becoming God. Nor did the shadow of imperfect sorrow linger around this new god. Both of us together became this new god – ah! – it was like air, it was like light, it was like the blue of the sky, it was like empty space – it seemed it was impossible for anything physical to touch him. After seeing that god, I realized what beauty is and what ugliness is. Suddenly I felt that there is something lacking in this world we live in. Ah God! It is a puzzle how we go on living with so much lacking in this world.

Jawali: Friend, is that god just sprouting a moustache?

Prince: Yes.

Jawali: And is there a dark mole on his right cheek?
Prince: Yes, how did you know?

Jawali: How could I not know? What you saw was your own reflection.

Prince: Ay! Blast my foolishness in arguing with an ignorant person like you.

Seeing one’s reflection and becoming one with it means seeing the shape of the soul. But you can’t understand all this. You are stuck to the body. People who refuse to see any further than the body cannot understand such things (Ibid, 29-30).

Through these lines, Kambara has beautifully expressed the duality of man, how we try to achieve perfection within ourselves. Through this episode and another episode near the pond which is more destructive in its essence, Kambara has tried to mirror the dissidence that we confront as societal beings wanting to attain perfection by looking for that missing something that complements us and survive as the best. And in this effort we invite our own destruction.

The prince as shown by Kambara is a very self-aware man, he knows his limitations and is strong enough to accept his failings and acknowledge his mistakes. He is a true prince in his essence. Karnad’s Aapanna is shown as a shallow man who has no true identity, he is a typical stereotype who lives within the dictates of society and follows the rigid societal standard of marital conduct.

**Naga and Kalinga: The Mythical Male**

In *Naga Mandala*, against the selfish, callous, dominating, male chauvinist husband Appanna, there is Naga who represents the loving and caring male, whose existence can be counted as a myth in the patriarchal society. Yet his relationship with Rani also reflects the patriarchal dominating attitude, where a female is always expected to obey without asking questions. Rani could never ask Appanna about his
whereabouts during the whole day. She never dares ask about his visits to his concubine though she is informed by Kurudavva. Naga too makes use of the same patriarchal belief, to silence Rani from asking questions though he claims to love Rani from the bottom of his heart. He too uses his male authority and silences any doubts that Rani may have.

Naga: (Seriously) I am afraid that is how it is going to be. Like that during the day. Like this at night. Don’t ask me why” (Karnad:1990, 23).

Naga: “….Listen, Rani. I shall come home every day twice. At night and of course again at mid day…when I come and go at night, don’t go out of this room, don’t look out of the window. Whatever the reason and don’t ask me why” (Ibid, 25).

In both these conversations what is remarkable is “don’t ask me why”. These words not only limit Rani’s reasoning abilities but also challenge her existential value as a wife.

Naga takes Appanna’s shape at midnight and behaves in a very loving and caring manner which surprises Rani very much. Naga at first tries to comfort Rani who is scared of his presence, acknowledges her beauty and calls her a ‘tender bud’ and tries to come close to her. Rani is confused with this duality in Appanna’s behavior who hisses like a snake during day and loves her at night. The irony of the situation is that one who should be loving, hisses like a snake and the actual Naga who should hiss is loving like a husband. Rani’s experience with Naga borders on a dream-like situation; where sleep and dream are constantly alluded to by Rani. She is constantly under confusion whether her experience at night with Appanna is an illusion or a reality. Naga, in turn, employs the myth of life to educate her about sex.
Sleep (*nidra*), food (*ahara*) and copulation (*maithuna*) are common to man and animal. Naga as the phallic symbol performs as per his nature and initiates her into sex. He comes as the husband but he cannot change what he is. This is beautifully described by the playwright:

Naga: Frogs croaking in pelting rain, tortoises singing soundlessly in the dark, foxes, crabs, ants, rattlers, sharks, swallows – even the geese! The female begins to smell like the wet earth. And stung by her smell, the King Cobra starts searching for his Queen. The tiger bellows for his mate. When the flame of forest blossoms into a fountain of red and the earth cracks open at the touch of the aerial roots of the banyan, it moves in the hollow of the cottonwood, in the flow of the estuary, the dark limestone caves from the womb of the heavens to the dark netherworlds, within everything that sprouts, grows, stretches, creaks and blooms- everywhere those who come together, cling, fall apart lazily! It is there and there and there, everywhere (*Ibid*, 25).

The passage also recalls the creation myth of Uranus and Gaea, and of Heaven and Earth, coming together; of the first male and female, Purusha and Prakriti. It is this law of life that Rani is ignorant of and which Naga tells her about. He initiates her into this entire new world. Rani enjoys Naga’s company so much that she wants the night to last forever:

Why don’t these birds choke on their own songs? Who has given them the right to mess about other creatures’ nights (*Ibid*, 25).

By loading Naga with the feelings of genuine love and making him a sorrowing lover separated from Rani, Karnad de-mythicizes the husband-wife marital
love as described in all Indian cultural texts; and re-mythicizes the Beauty-Beast myth. The classical example of husband-wife marital love and faithfulness is found in the *Mahabharata* through this beautiful story of Savitri and Satyavan. Amongst the five Satis of Hindu mythology, Savitri depicts the image of a loyal and devoted wife who could bring back her husband from Yama (the God of Death) with the power of her dedication and commitment. When Satyavan is taken away by Yama, Savitri follows Yama and pleads with him for her husband’s life. To keep her from following him, Yama grants her a final boon and she asks for hundred sons. Out of distraction, Yama granted the boon. Savitri instantly asked Yamraj how she could give birth to 100 sons without Satyavan? She is a Sati and can bear the child of no other man than her husband. This caused a dilemma for Yama and he granted life to Satyavan and blessed Savitri’s life with eternal happiness. From then Savitri has always been idolised as the ideal woman who used her wits to win back the life and riches of her husband. Her love, divinity and determination have always been the inspiring element for women in India. She selected a noble young man as her husband, knowing that he had only a year to live and married him with all confidence. Even the God of Death had to surrender, and bowed to her love and devotion.

Naga suffers from the pangs of separation like a human lover after the snake-ordeal. He also realizes that he can no more take Appanna’s form and meet Rani. Moreover a relationship between human and non-human was impossible. Therefore, he commits suicide so that Rani may live happily ever after.

In the same fashion Kalinga in *Siri Sampige* is shown to have initiated Siri Sampige into the world of sensuality with his bold words and strong personality. He, too, suffers from the pangs of separation:
Kalinga: Just one moment. Give me a chance to talk to you once more, Sampige. Look what has happened to me. My eyes have had no sleep. I do not know where the boundaries of my kingdom are, I just sit around forgetfully wondering ‘Will she look at me once at least?’ the walls of the fortress you have built to keep me out are growing taller (Kambara, 54).

Though Naga claims to be in love with Rani, he is not overtly concerned about Rani’s well-being, as without counting the consequences he enjoys physical relations with Rani and puts her into terrible difficulties later. When he learns Rani’s pregnancy he is shocked and leaves her to face the consequences alone. In *Siri Sampige*, too, Kalinga also enjoys physical relations with Siri Sampige. Though Sampige tries to deny him in the beginning and threatens him with dire consequences he persists in pursuing her with lustful words. When she calls the queen mother in retaliation, he takes the form of the Prince. Thereby fooling the queen mother and indirectly getting her blessings by leaving him alone with Siri Sampige.

Both Naga and Kalinga are portrayed as selfish males who will go to any lengths to attain the women they desire even if it is against societal norms and culture. And when they have to face the consequences of their action they disappear like a snake.

On the other hand, when the trial by ordeal resulted into Rani and Siri Sampige being revered as goddesses, both Naga and Kalinga feel ill-used. Naga feels that it was because of him that Rani is revered as a goddess and accepted as a wife and also the reason behind her motherhood. But in return he has received only rejection and is relegated to being an outsider. In the same fashion Kalinga too feels
that Siri Sampige has used him and later rejected him. This emotion is aptly described by Kalinga’s rant to Siri Sampige:

Kalinga: Remember, my goddess. Remember the dark boy who played with your hair. Sometimes you would say, ‘Kalinga, dear snake!’ and sometimes you wanted me to become the Prince. Using both of us you set your womb alight. Wooing my mind with smooth talk you won your trial. Now, after using me, do you want to throw me away, like a spent firebrand? (Ibid, 55).

Another notable point of similarity between both the plays is the introduction of the Naga and Kalinga in the play through a mythical element. In case of Naga Mandala it is the magical roots which Rani pours into the anthill which introduces the Naga into the play and who ultimately is the cause of her supremacy in the play ending. In the same way in Siri Sampige, it is the using of the mythical element of cutting of the Prince into two and placing of the pieces in pots for a certain number of days that leads to the reformation of the Prince and Kalinga who appears from one of the pots and disappears. Just like the magical roots introduces the Naga into the play, the mythical splitting of the Prince leads to the birth of Kalinga. The point of difference being that Kalinga is the cause of the destruction of the Prince unlike Naga who comes as a redemption for Rani.

Kurdavva: The Dependent One & Queen Mayawati: The Independent One

In Naga Mandala, the portrayal of the dependence of Kurudavva upon her son is also a subtle irony of today’s world where a mother is so much dependent upon her son’s goodwill. The fact that Kurudavva is blind and sees the world through her son’s eyes and the son carries his mother on his shoulders everywhere as he does not want
to slow his gait by making his mother walk, makes her not only blind but also inefficient to walk. Through the example of Kurudavva and Rani, Karnad cites a woman’s pitiable plight of not only being dependent but also being helpless.

Kurudavva, though blind, becomes a leading guide to Rani’s life. She is old because she is worldly-wise and blind because she represents Rani’s unconscious blind self, i.e. Rani’s unconsciousness towards her beauty, sexuality and physical pleasures. Kurudavva makes Rani realize her sexuality by giving her the magic roots to lure her husband. A noteworthy point here is that the magic root also hangs on a myth—the myth of Kunti from the Mahabharata. There is a parity between the virgin Kunti and Kurudavva where Kunti gets magical powers from a mendicant for serving him devotedly and similarly Kurudavva is blessed with the magical roots. Kunti shares the power with Madri, the second wife of her husband. Kurudavva shares it with Rani. Whereas Kunti has Karna as her son, Kurudavva has an equally powerful son, Kappanna. One may later on compare Kurudavva to Gandhari, when she loses Kappanna mysteriously in the end. Gandhari’s lament for Duryodhana can be equated with that of Kurudavva. Kurudavva in the play tells Rani that she is ‘mother-like’ to Appanna. In short she is the mother of all males and it is her duty as the mother-in-law to initiate Rani into family life. And towards this end she gives Rani the magical root to cast a spell upon her husband to fall in love with her. This superstitious hook in the story is a mythical situation which leads the story further. Rani who cooks the roots but throws it away out of fear in an ant hill and thus casts a spell aimed at Appanna on the cobra who falls in love with the beautiful Rani.

In Siri Sampige, Queen Mayawati on the other hand is shown as a strong woman whose forceful personality is defined in the very beginning:
Mother: Hear! I am Mayawati, rightful wife of King Nagara Nayaka of Sivapura city, whose virtue shines upon the earth. My reverend husband, after a long and virtuous reign, was borne away by time into timelessness. Since then I, like my reverend husband have continued to look after the interest of my subjects without the slightest flaw in my attention to them (Ibid, 6).

Queen Mayawati is shown to be very sure of her position in the overall scheme of things, she has lived life on her own terms and has carried out all her responsibilities ably and without any dependence on a male, unlike Kurdavva in Naga Mandala who is shown as an extremely dependent old woman.

While Kurdavva was dependent on her son in Naga Mandala, in Siri Sampige the Prince is dependent on the goodwill of his mother and listens to her guidance in all things.

A point of similarity is that in the same way as Kurudavva was indirectly responsible for the Naga to enter into Rani’s life, in the same fashion the Queen Mayawati is also responsible in giving indirectly her blessings to the union of Siri Sampige and Kalinga

**Some Unique Points in both plays**

Though both the plays follow a relatively similar plot, there are some marked differences in each play which needs to be noted but are exclusive to each play. For e.g. the title and open endedness of Naga Mandala and the depiction of self-love of the Prince and the sub plot of Jawali – Awali – Kamala which follows the similar pattern of the main plot in Siri Sampige.
Naga Mandala: Title representation

It is curious to think why Karnad named the play after Naga and not after Rani or Appanna. The whole play is a complete mandala in a graphic form. A mandala imposes order over chaos and leads by means of concentric geometric figures to a centre and resolution. In the same fashion the play also depicts the chaos in Rani’s marital life and the Naga who brings order and resolution in her life.

The plot of the play interestingly appears in two groups of three intertwined triangles: one formed by the three protagonists: Rani-Appanna-Naga and the other by Rani-Kurudavva (the old blind woman) and her son Appanna. In Hindu tradition the intersection of two triangles, one pointing upwards and another one pointing downwards, indicates the union of male and female principles, which is the union between Shiva and Shakti. Finally a third triangle is visualized, inside the two which represent the three endings of the play. This understanding of the play at three different levels helps us understand the title of the play Naga Mandala.

Also, the title is very significant in the sense that it reflects the importance of the person around which the plot is weaved. Thus the Cobra acts as a centripetal force in the play. Moreover there is a desire to humanize mythic or folklore element by various examples like the cobra taking the form of Appanna, the Story becoming a woman and the Song becoming a sari. Just as the story has to be told by someone to somebody for its fulfillment, likewise Rani also attains fulfillment, only through the Cobra-who can be treated as a key myth of the play whereas the Flames represent Agni and the Story can be termed as a reference or complementary myth.

Naga Mandala: Open-endedness of the play
In *Naga Mandala*, at the end of the recitation of the story the Author challenges the stereotyped happy ending. He claims that though the end of the play may be convincing from a moral and social point of view, yet there are issues which require some thought. For example, did Rani never doubt Naga as Appanna? It is difficult for Rani to be just a wife or a mother. Such demarcations are not possible. When the real Appanna gets physically intimate with her would Rani not come to know that the man before a few months was not Appanna? Would she not be able to sense the difference as a woman? Through these questions the Author gives space to his characters to come to life in the play and challenge the status quo as handed over to them through life and the society they live in.

The play has several occasions where Rani would have her doubts about Naga not being Appanna. Yet it appears that Rani ignores this on all occasions which are spread across the play – It is difficult to guess exactly when Rani starts differentiating between Naga and Appanna. When she accidently sees him in the mirror of the first aid box, she is shocked to see a Naga’s image instead of Appanna, or when Appanna comes with wounds at night and no scars at all the very next day. When she is treating his wounds, she feels his blood cold as a snake. Several times she found Appanna’s presence and escape from the house without unlocking the doors. This leads to the conclusion that even if she doubts the duality of Appanna’s identity, she turns a blind eye and continues to play the role of an ignorant woman as she was not ready to sacrifice the love and care that she was receiving:

No two men make love alike. And that night of the village court when her true husband climbed into bed with her how could she fail to realize it was someone new? Even if she hadn’t known earlier? When
did the split take place? Every night this conundrum must have spread
its hood out at her (Karnad:1990, 41).

The same suspension of disbelief applies to Appanna as well. Though Rani
proves her chastity through the ordeal, only Appanna knows that the child in Rani’s
womb does not belong to him. It was really very difficult for him to accept the myth
of Rani being a goddess knowing this truth. He too has to submit to the collective
pressure of the villagers and accept Rani and her child, but this conundrum will keep
troubling him and he will spend the rest of his life solving this mystery and would be
in misery. He can neither reject the child due to social pressures nor can he accept the
child wholeheartedly as he knows that it is not his. Therefore the same confusion of
mind applies to Appanna and Rani, which is expressed by these words in the play.

Appanna : What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I
sinned so much that even Nature should laugh at me? I know I haven’t
slept with my wife. Let the world say what it likes. Let any miracle
declare her as a goddess. But I know! What it likes. Let any miracle
declare her as a goddess. But I know! What sense am I to make of my
life if that’s worth nothing? (Ibid, 41)

Thus his life is struck between the identity of Rani which oscillates from
divinity and humanity.

The first end proposes that they live happily ever after is again a myth. By
saying this, we push many troubling issues of life under the carpet and suppress them
firmly within our heads. But still these issues survive under every suppression and
they need to be explored. Such as Kappanna’s disappearance, Naga’s concern and
love for Rani, Appanna’s and Rani’s doubts remaining unresolved all these concerns
lie unanswered in the first ending. Thus the Story offers the Author another end seeing that he is unconvincing with the previous one.

The open endedness of the play suggests how life has many choices and yet is so difficult; and also how life is shaped by epics, fictions and other narratives. The multiplicity of meanings suggests the elusiveness of truth and also how nature and narratives change as they change mouths. The open endedness of the play also suggests that there cannot be one single truth. One has to construct one’s own truth for which each one has to struggle and be responsible at an individual level. Just like Rani’s struggles to understand the duality of Appanna’s behavior, Appanna struggles to know what reality is when faced with an unpalatable fact and lastly in the end even Naga struggles for redemption!

It is not possible to have a single end for such a confusing story. Just as one cannot categorize something as an absolute truth, likewise one cannot have an absolute end also. The open-endedness of the play stems from multiple levels of readings which the text offers. Naga Mandala depicts the relationship of man and woman, who pass through several stages of doubt, uncertainty and also failure before they actually learn to live as husband and wife in harmony. However both Rani and Appanna grow up as individuals, putting aside their personal feelings about selfhood, fantasies and dreams about love and freedom and also learn to surrender and succumb to the circumstance. Appanna who is still confused about Rani’s pregnancy accepts her, gives up the concubine and lives a happy life with Rani. In turn, Rani also gives up her dream of a lover who had awakened her and loved her as a woman; they together work to unite as a family.
The end would be lacking if one doesn’t think about the Cobra’s feelings for Rani who is happy with Appanna and her son. The Cobra believes that Rani is enjoying a happy conjugal life with her husband, has a son, home and status all because of him. His desire to have Rani or to kill her is aroused but his love for her stops him. He also regrets the fact that he is a not human and cannot have Rani. He mocks at his existence!

Naga: My love has stitched up my lips. Pulled out my Songs. Torn my sac of poison… Yes, this king Cobra is now no better than a grass snake. That’s what I am, and I had forgotten that. I thought I could become human. Turn into my own creation. No! Her thighs, her bosom, her lips are for one who is forever a man. I shed my own skin every season. How could I even hope to retain this human form? For me-yes, only her long locks. Dark, jet-black snake princesses (Ibid, 42).

The first end that they lived happily ever after is always doubted because: is it really possible for a person to be completely detached from one’s feeling, completely dry up the hidden, suppressed desire for greater and personal fulfillment? For instance by now Rani must have realized the difference between the man who loved her then and now. Is it possible for Rani to forget her past and pave a new way? Thus the double endedness of the play keeps the way open for Rani, and also supports the duality of her mind. Though at social level she is not permitted to dwell on the past, at emotional level it is not so easy for her to cut out absolutely from her past.

The second ending suggests that Naga dies for Rani’s happiness where the ritual cremation of Naga is done by Rani’s son -the male child lighting the funeral
pyre. This end is very significant which restores the Indian Hindu mythological beliefs of preserving the marriage at every cost and giving up every personal choice for general restoration. Yet the ritual cremation of Naga does not denote the end but is an integration and acceptance of Naga into the society as the father of Rani’s child.

The third end of the story is where the Naga decides to kill Rani but stops because his “love has stitched up ‘his lip’ (Ibid, 42). He decides to live in her hair and so he “becomes their size now. Enter her tresses! Make love to them” (Ibid, 43). Rani feels something heavy in her hair. She asks her husband to comb her hair. When he combs, a Cobra falls down. Both of them are frightened to see it. Appanna acknowledges Rani’s goddess-like qualities and says that: “Your long hair saved us” (Ibid, 44). Appanna goes out to find a stick in order to kill the snake. Rani recognizes the snake and lets it “climb into” (Ibid, 44) her hair because the relationship between Rani and Naga is like a salvation that sustains her through the break-up of marriage. She can neither leave nor betray Naga as Naga was the entity which marked her as the goddess. So in the third ending the Naga, does not die. He is allowed to live in her tresses, her dark tresses, implying that her lover is always with here within her family.

This end where Rani allows the Naga to reside in her hair forever is very ironical, depicting the weak nature of a marital relationship. Though one may compromise but the lover always exists between the husband and wife. The dutiful and the loyal wife may observe the social, moral code in its entirety, yet within herself, lives the memories of the perfect lover who has given her the first emotional and erotic experience. These desires may haunt her or may lie dormant within her. What makes Rani admire her lover is that the relationship introduces her to love rather than sex. The presentation of Rani’s unconscious desire for an obedient male-sexual
partner is depicted through her acceptance of Naga without question. Thus Naga becomes the wish-fulfillment husband to Appanna’s real one. As rightly said by Dolors Collellmir in her paper, “Mythical Structure in Girish Karnad’s Naga Mandala: “Karnad can be seen as an author who presents the character of the married women, within an unconventional perspective” (6). Here, through the use of myth and folktale, Karnad provides his female characters with enough space and opportunity to thrive as a separate identity free from male oppression. Through Rani’s character, Karnad challenges the patriarchal constructs of chastity and ideal womanhood, where women are made to follow and live only to serve.

Thus the multi endedness widens the horizons of understanding of not only the limits and role of literature but also enables the realization of the depth of man-woman relationship which requires faith, patience and courage to sustain. Karnad uses the folk-tale in its feminized form to present the problem faced by both man and woman in a marriage and the process of transformation of an immature and emotionally under-developed person into a mature and fully grown adult. Thus the structure of the play retains the individuality of the female narrative, centralizing the woman’s experience within the marriage.

One may conclude that though Karnad’s Naga Mandala provides aesthetic pleasure, yet it also reforms the taste of the people and also makes an effort to change the attitude towards life and people. Karnad through Appanna’s character, negates the male chauvinism and also shares a message of man-woman equality in society. Through Rani’s victory over both the society and Appanna, Karnad favors woman emancipation. He also raises the level of ancient myth by blending it with contemporary issues which teaches us social values and moralities of life. Thus myth,
legends and folk are a medium to fight the vices within society such as racial unconsciousness, gender discrimination and religious fanaticism. Thus literature turns out to be a mirror, to see one’s follies through the characters and also inspires with remedial steps. The play may appear to be based on Indian mythology but extends eventually to a sociological study of Indian woman and it would not be an exaggeration to call it a feminist play!

Kambara suffered from no duality in the ending of his play, though his play is focused on the duality of man. In the end in *Siri Sampige*, there is no ambiguity, as there is no Prince and no Kalinga, no Jawali and no Awali. There are no loose ends, the destruction of one leads to the destruction of the other. In *Siri Sampige*, in the end all is destroyed and Kambara only gives a hint of the restoration of hope in the future through his son:

Prince: Listen. See to it that our son does not split himself. (He dies) (Kambara, 65).

*Siri Sampige: Theme of Self Love*

The theme of self-love has preoccupied Kambara’s imagination more than any one of his contemporaries. Some of his finest poems written during different phases of his career have been about this theme. His one act play *Narcissus* ranks among one of his great achievements. There cannot be many instances of a one act play taking up such a complex theme and treating it so effectively. Kambara’s intense metaphysical probing of dualities of existence finds a near perfect dramatic expression in *Siri Sampige*. He shows the follies of self-love through the prince, when the prince sees his own image in a pond and believes that it is either god or his own true self. At a later stage in the play when the prince admits to his wife that it was indeed his corpse
which he sees in the pond he shows the transitoriness and destructive nature of self-love.

By showing the prince’s self-obsession while he is lost in his pursuit of fulfillment of self-love, Kambara also describes Siri Sampige’s yearning for fulfillment and the upheavals in her life due to the prince’s obsession. When the cobra pursues her, she yields to him. Her defense is that the prince has not consummated the marriage, leaving her incomplete and pining for fulfillment. If the prince had the right to look for fulfillment outside the marriage, then why not Siri Sampige:

Siri Sampige: That is your ill fortune. My immorality started, my Lord, when you forgot the body and began craving for the god, and slipped away from your bed. I who was lying on the bed, counting the rafters in the roof and signing, never noticed when you slipped away I searched for you, but wherever I searched, in the palace garden, or in the words you spoke, you were not found. In the end you saw the god by taking handles of water from the pond. I too took a handful of water, and there was a god in my handful too, but if he turned out not to be the same god as yours is it my fault? *(Ibid, 58-59).*

Kambara has also expressed this duality in Siri Sampige’s life due to the Prince and King Kalinga here. He challenges the futile pursuit of man to find the perfect complement to himself. The below line expresses these sentiments very poignantly:

Siri Sampige: I am already a half widow, my Lord. You can’t understand the grief of one who is always half a widow? When you
split yourself, you split me also. When you are before me, my body is widowed; when I am with him, lying with him, my mind is widowed. Thus I am always half widow. There is nothing equal to such torture. My sorrow is that no one understands me, I am alone. Afraid of loneliness, I search for a companion. But all the companions to be had are half men. Was I born for half men? I was born for and I am seeking the wholeness of the linga of the god Siva. But what fell to my lot was a child born illicitly to an incomplete being. A child born to a widow. You have come here to kill the woman who gave birth to an illegitimate child? Look, I am ready! (Ibid, 59).

When the painful realization comes to the prince also that he is incomplete and that separating his body from the soul was a grievous fault, he realizes that he has not only ruined his own life but that of Siri Sampige’s too for no fault of hers. He now understands that the body does not sin unlike the soul which does. The agony of the Prince when he realizes that cleaving the human personality into body and soul corrupts both is best described in the following pond scene as described by the Prince to Siri Sampige:

Siri Sampige: You need rest, my Lord. If you sleep a little while, and have beautiful dreams…

Prince: So I should still close my eyes, is that what you suggest? Well, you have dreams, you are fortunate. In reality you are a Queen and in your dreams you are a lover. You can handle the
selves of two worlds. But I – the day I was deceived by the god, I lost my dreams too, Lady.

Siri Sampige: What does that mean, my Lord?

Prince: Rejecting my body, leaving it with you, I went to the pond to see the god. What came floating in the water was neither the Lamp maiden nor a god. It was not even my reflection, Lady it was my corpse. And that was what I held daily on my lap and ate of. The more I ate, the hungrier I felt. I ate more and more of it and by the time I realized it was a corpse, it was too late. When I repented and came back, my body itself had vanished. In the meantime someone had entered it and gone with it. Now I am almost air. Lady, I cannot even make your skin feel my touch; I don’t exist except as air that speaks. I need a body to show myself in. My hunger for life is growing, Lady, I need a body. Please help me (Ibid, 43).

It is after the above lines that the prince challenges the cobra to a duel, kills him and thereby brings about his own death. Kambara here metaphorically shows that what one strives so hard to attain in life like success, power, and money is like the corpse. What we hunger for more and more, thinking it is the other half of us, actually consumes us and it is only later we realize that we have nothing of our soul to call our own.

Though Kambara has brilliantly portrayed the tragic self-destructive, self-love of the Prince, but the play deliberately leaves the tragedy of human beings being unresolved, cursed with the duality of body and soul.
Siri Sampige: Sub plot of Awali-Jawali-Kamala

The sub plot of the play involving Awali and Jawali, the twins reinforces the theme in the low mimetic mode. The two pursue Kamala, who marries one of them. But the other one usurps the twin brother’s sexual claim over Kamala. Like Sampige, the half-widow Kamala is also made a victim of male sexual jealousy. Disgusted, she leaves and walks into the forest.

The expression of anger, jealousy, frustration and ultimately grief of the love-hate relationship of the twins Awali and Jawli can be best expressed in the below collection of lines from Siri Sampige:

Bhagavata: there is a girl, will you marry her.
Both (Awali and Jawali): Oh, yes
Bhagavata: There is only one girl, how can both of you marry her.
Awali: Oh, you are right. Elder one, Jawali, you get married.
Jawali: Well, say I got married. Since you resemble me so much, my wife may go to bed with you mistaking you for me. What then? No, No, you marry.
(Ibid, 11)

These lines express the feeling of insecurity and jealousy that the twins feel for each other. It is also a pre sequel to showing the troubled path of Kamala’s marriage to Jawali where Awali was a constant shadow. Jawali fear also of Awali taking his place in the marriage bed also almost comes to pass.

Also Kamala’s frustration with her husband and her anger at the interference of Awali in her marital life is clear in these words:

Kamala: Sir, this has gone too far.
Bhagavata: What?

Kamala: You got us married. But instead of making love, all he does is remember his elder or younger brother and pine away for him.

Bhagavata: Hey Jawali, I got you married thinking you a gentleman. If you go on doing this, I will have to change my opinion of you.

Jawali: What shall I do, sir? As soon as I look at Kamala with desire, my younger or elder brother appears in both her eyes. I think of making love with the light off and our eyes closed, I get scared that he, who has hidden in her eyes, may rise up. That is why my eyes sting when I think of love (Ibid, 23-24).

The sub-plot faithfully follows the main plot with slight differences allowing for more depth. Just like the Prince was two souls in one body similarly Awali and Jawali are shown as two bodies with one soul. But the dilemma and frustration of Siri Sampige and Kamala remains the same.

The underlying thought in the sub plot is the potent mix of jealousy, envy, hate and anger that Awali and Jawali feel for each other. This mix is further tortured by the fact that as they are twins who are physically similar, this feeling of hate for one’s own mirror image adds a fine element of self-hatred to the mix. This self-hate is shown to be equally destructive in the end. Thus, just like the prince dies when his other self Kalinga is killed, Awali who killed Jawali for Kamala, looks at his own shadow in the deep pond, and believing the shadow to be Jawali, jumps in to kill Jawali and drowns. This is expressed in the following words cited from the play:
Servant: Awali died, my Lord.

Prince: Awali died? When? How?

Servant: When you were fighting, Awali came running to us shouting, ‘Alas. I am tripping over her hair, free me, free me.’ We, who are busy watching your war did not pay any attention. Moreover, his feet were not tangled with hair, he kept running and went towards the lake which your visit every day. Meanwhile as expected you killed the enemy. I too ran towards the lake to tell him this joyful news. Awali had already begun to climb the tree on the bank that bends over the water. This tree’s reflection was in the water, Awali’s reflection had appeared too. Suddenly, he remembered Jawali and the quarrel and he thought that the one in the water was Jawali. Seeing jawali too laughed to show that he was not afraid. He too laughed and raised his arm, threatening to strike. The other did the same. He clenched his teeth and indicated that he would strangle the other. The other did the same, he became extremely angry and determined to kill, he jumped right into the lake. I watched all this, standing on the bank. I thought that he was probably miming your fight. But he drowned after having drunk so much water. He did not come up at all, my Lord (Ibid, 62-63).

The elements of confusion between the negative feeling for the other twin and its reflection on the self is best expressed in these lines during a confrontation between Kamala and Jawali:
Kamala: You keep talking about Awali, why did you let him go?
Jawali: I wanted to finish him off. But what to do, the wretch is so much like me, you see, I thought, ‘let me respect myself, at least’ and let him go (Ibid, 23).

Awali and Jawali question their existence without each other, in these expressions:

Awali: Am I a image? A shade? Or are you my image? A shade?
Jawali: Without me you are not there, is this true. Or, without you, I am not there, is this true?
Awali: Apart, we two may be. Yet, down below the tree’s root is one.
Jawali: Between us is glass. When broken, the two ends and we are on,
Awali: If two ends, do you get one? Or, is it lonely we get?
Jawali: Melting into each other. Can we live, in the mind doesn’t the glass remain? (Ibid, 39-40).

And when Awali through nefarious means kills Jawali in a fit of jealousy over Kamala, Bagavata expressed these lines:

Bhagvata: Without the elder the younger brother died.
‘Life has no meaning any more;
From now on I cannot live’ Awali said and wept (Ibid, 50).

This is similar to what the Prince faces after killing Kalinga, when he realizes that he had killed his own other half:

Prince: I am to die together with my brother is that not so?
Mother: Yes.
Prince: Suppose I have no brother.

Mother: Then you will not die.

Bhagavata: Splitting ourselves we became two body and mind became separate

Prince: No other may have been born from your womb, but when the one son who was born from you split himself in two, did not the other part which came to life become my brother and the sharer of my inheritance, Tell me, Mother, the other who came to life when I split myself, who was he? When I asked all of you said it was a devil, an evil spirit. Was it not the Snake King Kalinga, Mother?

Mother: (stricken) Yes. What came out of the pot before you was a snake

(Ibid, 64-65).

This sort of parallel flow within the same frame is challenging but at the same time supportive as it opens up dual possibilities and an opportunity to pose two different flow of thoughts at the same time. Kambara has employed drama and harsh reality with all seriousness and complexity in dealing with different themes ranging from the exploitative nature of the feudal system to the dualities of life.

Though Naga Mandala and Siri Sampige derive from common folk themes, eventually they are extremely divergent in the issues that they address, the treatment of the story line and the characterization of the theme. It is an interesting outlook at the way two similar story line can give such marked takeaways. Thus with the same plot, Naga Mandala turns out to be strongly based on woman and her role in the society, whereas Siri Sampige takes a close look at the duality of man and his destructive quest for a perfect world. But both the playwrights have used myths to
reveal the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Vanashree Tripathy has said that “Literature and Myth merely dramatize, heighten and highlight what is theoretically possible in nature and science” (89).
Works Cited

Primary Works


Secondary Works


Journals, Magazines and Newspaper Articles

