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**Magical Realism as Portrayed in Girish Karnad's *Metatheatre, Nagamandala***

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**Aiswarya Raj**

Department of English (PG)

Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous, Hennur Main Rd, K Narayanapura,

Kothanur (PO), Bangaluru, Karnataka

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**Abstract:**

The concept of magical realism has been an inherent genre of Indian literature from the very beginning. Nagamandala, a two-act play written by Girish Karnad, published in the year 1988 is an exemplary work on this theory. It was written in Kannada and then translated into English. The title Nagamandala means 'a play with cobra'. This story was inspired from a Kannada folklore which the writer heard from the poet A.K Ramanujan. This particular work can also be called a metatheatrical play as it simply depicts reality. The study aims to examine the blending of these two theories which adds to the techniques of the play.

**Keywords:** Magical realism, Metatheatre, folklore, Indian literature.

**1. Introduction**

Naga Mandala by Girish Karnad is a play where fantasy assumes control over the real world. Girish Raghunath Karnad is a contemporary Indian dramatist, entertainer and film chief in Kannada language. He is among the seven beneficiaries of Jnanpith Award for

Kannada, the most elevated scholarly honor presented in India. Girish Karnad composed the play Naga Mandala in 1987-88. The play depends on two oral Kannada stories he had heard from his coach companion and well – known writer, interpreter and philologist A.K.Rumanian, to whom Karnad additionally devoted the play. Through the fascinating mix of history and legend, he discusses socio-social issues of India.

The play depends on a rustic setting and based on the existence of Rani, who is the ordinary compliant provincial Indian lady who is offered to a man by her folks, who mastermind the marriage without contemplating her desires. Her better half is a rich man named Appanna (which means any man). The name is an image used by Karnad to feature that this is the truth of most weddings that happen. It is to show how marriage is a man centric organization that has consistently been uncalled for to ladies.

This play was later made into a movie with the same title in 1997 in Kannada language, directed by T. S. Nagabharana and was produced by Srihari L Khoday which depends on the same neighborhood cultural

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story and ritual. The lead roles were done by Prakash Raj and Vijayalakshmi. The film portrays a heartfelt plot between a lady and a snake in the mask of her merciless spouse.

The film, upon release, continued to win various grandiose distinctions for its substance and screen variety. The soundtrack, including 15 tracks, tuned by C. Ashwath ended up being acclaimed for the folksy touch. Vijayalakshmi won Filmfare Award for Best Actress – Kannada for her introduction in this film. The film was chosen for Indian Panorama at International Film Festival of India in 1997.

### 2. Nagamandala: An Overview

The protagonist Rani, the only daughter of her parents, got married to Appanna who always mistreated her as a wife. Rani was very well known for her long tresses. Appanna had an illicit relationship with another concubine. He often locked Rani up in the house at night and visited his concubine. He only returned back home in the morning where in Rani served him as a disciplined wife. All she longed for was the love of Appanna. We see that Rani becomes a mere victim of marriage which was a patriarchal institution of the Indian society which subjugated the female community to the core.

Rani was treated in a ‘subhuman manner’. All of her needs got neglected, the

society wanted her to stay within the feminine boundaries that has been set so that she was not able to question Appanna the way how he treated her. As the story progresses, we see how Rani’s emotional and sexual needs get repressed. She dreams of an eagle which takes her away from the earthly world. The particular dream symbolizes the repression of her desires. Now we see that Rani meets an old woman named Kurudava who offers her mystical roots, one long and one short, she instructs her to feed Appanna the same so that he will be completely devoted and in love with her. Upon the very same advice Rani cooks the root for Appanna and feeds him the first time after which he faints. Again she does the same the second time, but the portion turns into a terrible red color that she got scared of the same. She takes the portion and disposes it of in an ant hill nearby. There was a Naga in the ant hill who unfortunately drinks the same and falls in love with her.

He disguised himself as Appanna at night and started visiting her. He praised her long tresses, and listened to her when she spoke of her parents. Very soon they consummated their marriage. One fact which confused Rani was when the real Appanna returned back home in the morning and showed a different behavior than that he portrayed at night. In the morning he was mean and rude while at he

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turned into a sensual lover. Rani felt in love with the sensual lover- Naga.

The story takes a turn when Rani becomes pregnant with Naga's child. Appanna, her husband accuses her of being in a illicit relationship and says the child was not his. He even takes the matter to the village panchayat who orders her to take up a test of chastity to prove her innocence. Here we see how only a woman is questioned for her role in marriage since it was an open secret of Appanna courting another woman. The test which the Panchayat demanded was Rani to put her hand inside the ant hill and she would be asked a question of which she should answer nothing but only the truth, if not she would be bitten by the very snake in the ant hill. The public trial was meant to condemn her.

It was her Naga who was in the ant hill and when asked whether the child belonged to Appanna Rani said "Yes". It was an ironic situation which actually proved her to be a faithful wife. The village also witnessed how Naga made an umbrella above her head and then moves over her shoulder and appeared like garland. The whole panchayat was surprised and hailed her as a "Godly figure". Appanna realizes and begs for forgiveness to Rani. Even his mistress decided to serve Rani for the rest of her life.

The dramatist gives multiple endings to the drama and left it to his readers to decide upon the faith of Naga according to their wish. In one of the ending, we see Naga entering Rani's and Appanna's bedroom, Appanna spots the snake and kills it dead. Though Rani grieves for Naga, her lover, this very sacrifice of Naga paves way for the happy married life of Rani. While in the second ending, we see Rani realizing who her lover was and she saves the snake. Naga reduces himself to size so thin as the strand of Rani's hair and he crawls up to her head. Rani allows him to live in her long tresses for the rest of her life.

**3. Magical Realism as Portrayed In Girish Karnad's Metatheatre, Nagamandala**

The whole play is entangled with supernatural elements. Karnad's plays consistently propose the meaning of the Indian fantasies that could be utilized to address the glitches of current culture. He has given a new significance to these cultural stories and fantasies in the contemporary society. He has given a new importance to these classic stories and legends in the contemporary society. Karnad is verifiably an innovator dramatist, correctly a post-autonomy writer, where he attempts to associate to the provincial past and the post-pioneer present of India utilizing the assets of World Theater.

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'Metatheatre', coined by Lionel Abel, portrayed it as reflecting comedy and tragedy, simultaneously, where the crowd can giggle at the hero while feeling sympathetic at the same time. The strategy mirrors the world as an augmentation of human inner voice, not tolerating recommended cultural standards, yet taking into account more creative variety, or a conceivable social change. Metatheatre is a technique that emphasizes on the play as a play and not reality. (Simon, n. p. Web).

Naga-Mandala is seen to have the highlights of metatheatre. The play draws in the crowd and indicates to them that it is a play through the presence of the anecdotal writer, the flares and the account of Rani. The disheartened dramatist straightforwardly addresses the crowd in the start of the play. He is restless about the scourge of death upon him, as the vagabond forecasted. The explanation he gives for the revile is that his plays had caused numerous observers to work off during the exhibitions. He at that point guarantees to revoke his composition. Here, the crowd is caused to notice the circumstances of the creation of the play.

According to Richard Hornby there are five techniques in metatheatre or metadrama: a) Ceremony within a play b) Role-playing within a role c) Reference to reality d) Self-reference to the drama e) Play within a play (Zatlin, p.55). Few of

these aspects are seen in Nagamandala, The Naga disguises itself as Appanna, Rani's better half, to visit her at nights which can be viewed as role playing within a role. Here, the Naga transforms itself in the form of Appanna. The writer thus raises the Naga from the animal world to the human world through the technique of magical realism. The Hindu society considers snakes as God, Here; the Naga apparently has special powers which mirror the convictions of the Indian Hindu society.

Nagamandala is a play within the play, the first scene begins in a ruined temple where a playwright is being prophesied by a medicant about his death. He is to remain conscious the entire night to get away from death. He straightforwardly addresses the crowd. The explanation he is being rebuffed is on the grounds that, as a dramatist, he has made numerous individuals nap off during his plays and the manhandled mass of rest has betrayed him to turn into the Curse of Death. The presence of the writer what's more, his immediate location to the crowd reminds the observers that they are watching a play and not reality. This adds to the play as a metatheatre as per Hornby's strategies of metatheatre.

The writer frames the 'external play' while Rani's story is the 'internal play'. Myth says that the flames, after extinguished in the houses in the village, gather and spend

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the night together gossiping. It is the story, which transformed into the young woman, who narrates the story of Rani. As obvious; the play utilizes wizardry authenticity in which the myths are brought into a reasonable climate. The narrative of Rani has emerged from an old woman who hasn't at any point shared the story and the song she knew. The story, unfit to remain inside the woman any more, changes to a beautiful lady and the tune to a stunning sari and comes out to the world. This steady portrayal of fantasies and deceptions prompts the crowd to comprehend that it is not reality, but rather a play, a show-stopper. Therefore, the prophecy made by the mendicant about the playwright's death because of making his readers sleep is absolutely unrealistic.

From the play: Man:.....A mendicant told me: 'You must keep awake at least one whole night this month. If you can do that, you'll live. If not, you will die on the last night of the month.' Here, the flames are given human qualities of talking, the magical roots that Kurudavva offers Rani to grab Appanna's love and the Naga's transformation into a human are all examples of magical realism as well as metatheatre. The names of the characters are unique because each one of it represents different classification of people in the society. Rani means 'queen', Appanna means 'any man', who is a nothing but a portrayal of male hierarchy. Kurudavva

means 'a blind lady', she is given that name intentionally as she stood blind to the toxic male hierarchies happening around her. Kappanna who is another character means 'the black one' who represents the underprivileged lower class society. Rani, the protagonist of the story, is seen tending to the story multiple times in the story. It implies Rani knows about the presence of the story, mindful of her story being described. The creator utilizes these interruptions in the middle as update for the crowd, that it is a play, an execution. The dramatist doesn't need the crowd to sincerely connect with the characters, yet need a participatory crowd who could address and contemplate over the pertinence of the play in the social milieu. The dramatist needs the crowd to infer the inward significance of the play.

**4. Conclusion**

Nagamandala: Play with Cobra beholds a bundle of untied mysteries throughout the play. The unusual happenings of the play create one kind of curiosity in the readers as well as the audiences of the play. This particular work focusses on the dark side of eastern beliefs that is of myths. Karnad has actually tried to bring out topics like male hierarchy, mythological structures in Nagamandala by using Indian background and characters. Through this very play Karnad succeeds in openly criticizing the idea of chastity and the institution of marriage as portrayed in

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the Indian society. We see that Karnad made use of several mythical elements which helped to shape the play in the form as it is now. He explores the notions of cultural ideology, man woman relationship, fantasy etc. He included a subplot which actually resembles the abstract psyche of the human mind. He portrayed the society as it appeared to him but also made sure that he portrayed it in the novel of his that a typical freedom was given to the readers to interpret the same as how they wished to do.

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