

ROLE OF RANI IN NAGA MANDALA: A FEMINIST STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of Rani from a feminist perspective and explores how her character reflects the problems of patriarchy, the suppression of the female voice, and the search for identity. Feminist criticism analyzes the position of women in society and how literature represents their struggles within patriarchal structures. In Nagamandala, Rani represents the condition of women in a male-dominated society. She is initially portrayed as innocent, silent, and obedient, yet her character gradually gains strength through her experiences. As the narrative progresses, Rani undergoes a significant transformation when she experiences love and care through the magical presence of the serpent. This encounter awakens her sense of self-worth, desire, and emotional fulfillment. Over time, she evolves from a passive victim into a more confident and assertive individual who subtly challenges societal norms.

Rani's journey highlights themes of identity, desire, and the quest for dignity. By the end of the play, she attains respect and authority, not through open rebellion, but through a complex interplay of truth, illusion, and social beliefs. Through Rani's character, the play portrays both the suffering and the inner strength of women. Her life reflects the harsh realities faced by many women, where silence and submission are expected virtues. Ultimately, Rani symbolizes the resilience of women and their ability to negotiate power within restrictive social structures.

KEYWORDS: *Feminism, Patriarchy, Identity, Resilience, Transformation, Patriarchal Structure.*

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Introduction

Nagamandala by Girish Karnad is a significant work that blends folklore, myth, and social reality to portray the condition of women in a male-dominated society. The play presents the story of Rani, a young bride who is neglected and controlled by her husband, reflecting the oppression faced by women within traditional social structures. Her character becomes a powerful medium to explore themes of gender inequality, desire, identity, and transformation. Feminist criticism has become an important approach in literary studies, as it examines the representation of women and their position within patriarchal societies. It focuses on how literature reflects gender inequalities, silences women's voices, and reinforces or challenges traditional roles. Through this perspective, literary texts can be reinterpreted to understand the lived experiences, struggles, and resistance of female characters.

This study aims to analyze the role of Rani through a feminist lens, focusing on how her character reveals the oppression of women while also demonstrating their resilience and capacity for self-assertion. By examining her journey, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and the representation of women in modern Indian drama. From a feminist perspective, Rani's journey is not merely personal but symbolic of the broader experiences of women who struggle against silence, subordination, and lack of agency. Although she begins as a passive and obedient figure, her experiences lead to a gradual awakening of selfhood and inner strength. Her transformation challenges rigid social norms and highlights the complexity of female identity within patriarchal constraints.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the representation of women in Nagamandala.
- To explore Rani's character through a feminist lens.
- To examine the portrayal of patriarchy and gender inequality in the play.
- To investigate the theme of female desire and identity.
- To assess Rani's journey as a symbol of resistance and resilience.
- To examine how the play challenges or reinforces traditional gender roles.

Feminist Approach to the Text: Nagamandala

Feminism in literature examines how women are treated in society and how they struggle for freedom and identity. In many traditional societies, women are expected to be silent, obedient, and loyal. Rani's

character clearly reflects these expectations.

At the beginning of the play, Rani is a simple and innocent girl. She believes that marriage will bring her happiness. However, after marriage, she realizes that she has no freedom. Her husband, Appanna, treats her like a prisoner. Through Rani, the play highlights how patriarchy controls women's lives.

1. Rani as a Victim of Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a system in which men hold more power than women. In Naga-Mandala, Appanna represents male authority. He marries Rani but does not care for her. He locks her inside the house and visits another woman every day. Rani cannot question him because society expects her to obey her husband. Her life shows how women often suffer silently in marriage. She has no friends, no freedom, and no voice. Even when she is unhappy, she continues to follow her husband's orders. This reflects the helpless condition of women in a patriarchal society. Society supports Appanna's behavior where no one questions him about his negligence. Instead, people blame Rani when she becomes pregnant. This shows that society judges women more strictly than men.

2. Rani's Silence and Lack of Voice

An important feminist idea in the play is the silence of women. Rani does not speak against injustice or share her suffering. Her silence represents many women in society who are not allowed to express their pain. The play uses storytelling and magical elements to express what Rani cannot say directly. The cobra (Naga) comes to her in the form of her husband and provides love and care. This reflects her emotional need for affection, which she cannot express openly. Through Rani's silence, the play shows how patriarchy controls women both physically and emotionally.

3. Rani Represents Female Desire

In traditional society, women are not allowed to express their desires. They are expected to remain loyal and pure, even if they are unhappy. Rani faces this situation as well. She longs for love and attention from her husband but does not receive it. When the Naga comes to her in the form of Appanna, she experiences happiness for the first time. From a feminist perspective, this shows that women also have emotional and physical needs. However, society does not accept this truth. When Rani becomes pregnant, she is forced to prove her purity. This highlights how society controls women's bodies and questions their integrity.

4. Rani's Trial and Transformation

The trial scene is crucial in understanding Rani's character. She is

asked to take an oath while holding a cobra to prove her faithfulness. This reflects the injustice of a patriarchal society, where women must prove their purity while men are never questioned. During the trial, Rani shows great courage. She speaks confidently and faces danger without fear. This moment marks her transformation from a silent girl into a strong woman. After the trial, society accepts and respects her as a pure woman. This change suggests that women can gain strength through suffering. Rani becomes a symbol of patience, endurance, and survival.

Use of Folklore and Patriarchal Meanings in the Text: Nagamandala

Key Folkloric Elements:

- Narration by Flames: Stories are personified as flames gathering in a temple-reflecting the oral storytelling tradition where tales are “alive.”
- Mythical Elements: The cobra (naga) that transforms into a man introduces supernatural folklore tied to Indian myths about serpents.
- Traditional Motifs:
 - » Magic roots and love potions
 - » Shape-shifting beings
 - » Trial by ordeal (like the snake ordeal)

These elements create a fantastical layer, making the story engaging while also allowing Karnad to explore serious themes indirectly.

Patriarchal Meanings in the Play

While folklore provides the structure, the core of the play critiques patriarchy.

1. Control over Women's Bodies and Sexuality

- Rani, the protagonist, is trapped in a forced marriage with Appanna, who neglects and controls her.
- Her desire and emotional needs are suppressed, reflecting how patriarchy denies women autonomy.

2. Double Standards

- Appanna openly visits a concubine without social consequences.
- Rani, however, is accused of infidelity and must prove her chastity.

3. Trial by Ordeal

- Rani undergoes a snake ordeal to prove her purity-highlighting how society demands extreme proof of female virtue.
- Ironically, folklore saves her: the cobra (her lover) does not harm her.

4. Silencing and Voice

- Rani initially has no voice or agency.
- Through storytelling and supernatural intervention, she gains power and recognition.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Nagamandala by Girish Karnad stands as a powerful exploration of women's condition within a patriarchal society, skillfully blending folklore, myth, and social reality. Through the character of Rani, the play presents the lived experiences of women who are subjected to control, silence, and inequality, yet continue to endure and evolve within restrictive social structures. Nagamandala challenges conventional gender roles while also revealing the complexities of female existence within patriarchal boundaries. Rani's character symbolizes the strength, patience, and resilience of women who navigate oppression while seeking identity and agency. The play thus contributes significantly to feminist literary discourse by highlighting both the struggles and the subtle forms of resistance that define women's experiences.

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