



Research Paper

A Critical Analysis of Hypocrisies and Double Standards in Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* and *Tughlaq*

Ardra Therese Joseph and Jisha Jijumon

(Department of English (PG)

Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous, Bengaluru)

ABSTRACT: Hypocrisy and double standards have long since been a part of mankind and therefore, are even reflected in our literature. They have long been accepted by politicians as indispensable tools to gain and maintain power and in the domestic sphere, hypocrisy and double standards are used to exercise control over and oppress vulnerable targets. Double standards are shown in the garb of gender bias in the intimate spaces of one's home whereas in the sphere of politics, double standards are shown as the weapon for executing political strategies. This goes on, unhampered due to the conscious or unconscious support and acceptance of the society has already made its way into our mindsets. This research paper aims to analyse the hypocrisies and double standards as portrayed in Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* and *Tughlaq*, both of which deal with it in two different spheres of society. *Nagamandala* brings out the hypocrisy and double standards in the domestic space whereas, in *Tughlaq*, the focus is on it being prevalent in politics.

KEYWORDS: Hypocrisy, Double Standards, Manipulation, Gender bias

Received 26 April, 2021; Revised: 08 May, 2021; Accepted 10 May, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is a well-known name in the field of Indian Literature. He made remarkable contributions to folk theatre. "Karnad's approach is 'modern', and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouement" (Iyengar 735). Along with folk theatre, he has also tried his hand at a historical play and two such plays have been taken for this paper.

Nagamandala is a story within a story where a writer is cursed by a mendicant to stay awake at least one night of the month, failing which he would be dead. So, he decides to hear a story that would keep him awake all night. And thus begins the story of Rani, a young bride who is mistreated by her husband. One day, Kuruvva tries to help her out of her misery and gives her aphrodisiac roots that would make her husband be affectionate towards her. But she unknowingly makes a snake fall in love with her. The snake then takes the form of Appanna, her husband and spends time with Rani during the nights. The difference between her husband's behaviour – cold in the mornings and affectionate during the nights confuses her as she doesn't realize the swap. Later we see Rani being accused of adultery and to prove herself innocent she needs to go to extreme lengths by undergo trials of excruciating fear and pain. But she is able to do so with the help of Naga the snake. Having cleared those trials, she is seen in a new light and treated differently than before.

Tughlaq is based on Muhammad bin Tughlaq, a 14th century ruler who was known for his innovative but highly impractical ideas which led to disaster. In the play, Tughlaq is a tyrant who rose into power through the murder of his father and brother but he arranged the deaths to appear like accidents. To maintain power, he manipulated and trapped both his main opponents Sheikh Imam-ud-din and Ain-ul-Mulk in a single masterstroke. Sheikh Imam-ud-din was killed and the blame fell on Ain-ul-Mulk which weakened him. The most terrible of his reforms was the decision to change the capital of his empire from Delhi to Daulatabad. His subjects suffered intensely during the sudden migration but he tormented them further by equating the value of copper coins with that of silver dinars. This foolish decision led to rampant corruption and the economy collapsed. Many families were reduced to poverty and consequently, crimes increased. Towards the end of the novel, Tughlaq decided to replace copper coins with silver dinars from the treasury and to shift the capital again to Delhi. Barani, the last of his loyal men left him and there were indications that Tughlaq was on the verge of insanity

II. ANALYSIS

Rani, one of the main characters of the play *Nagamandala* whose name meant 'Queen', was considered extremely precious by her parents and hence named so. But little did they know that she would be treated anything but a Queen in the coming times after her marriage. She was married off to Appanna, a brute of a man who used to lock his wife up as if she were a caged bird. He did this because he did not want anyone to have any sort of communication with her. This can be seen as an act of over protectiveness or possessiveness. He locks up someone who is so innocent and he himself indulges in adultery which many in their village are aware about as well. The act of forcibly locking Rani up in her own domestic space would have inevitably been a traumatic experience for her.

Kurudavva, an old woman and a well-wisher of Rani reveals to her that her husband has a concubine who, she assumes, has bewitched him. She supposedly assumes and attributes Appanna's infatuation as the fault of the bazaar woman alone, which is merely an unjust assumption because if looked at the scenario without any prejudice or bias then we realise that both would be equally at fault. Such misassumptions, that is, it is a woman's fault that they lure men to themselves without any fault of the man himself or where the woman usually bears the brunt of the matter is quite common sight to behold. This tells us that people are judged differently according to their gender and hence shows the painful double standards and gender biasness of the society.

Appanna and his doppelganger Naga were entirely different personalities and there was a stark contrast in the way they behaved to Rani. But they were similar in one aspect other than physical form: both controlled and subjugated Rani. Naga was a devoted lover but he posed many restrictions in Rani's life and confined her to her room to prevent the danger of Rani accidentally discovering his real identity. He said to her, "At night, wait for me here in this room. 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." (Karnad 45) He didn't deem it necessary to provide an explanation for his strange demands to her as it was expected of her as a wife to obey his every demand without questioning or opposing him. She was never provided with the chance to choose as he always decided for her. As he was in the disguise of the man of the house, Rani couldn't influence his decisions or control him in any manner. Naga restrained Rani to the house but he could move in and out of the house whenever he wanted to. Hence, this is an indication of double standards shown by Naga.

Later in the play, Appanna attacked Rani and attempted to mortally wound her after finding out about her pregnancy. He would have seriously wounded her if Naga hadn't interfered in time. Appanna was enraged because of her infidelity but he didn't even remember about his disloyalty to her from the first day of marriage. His anger intensified with the thought that she managed to find a lover despite the heavy restrictions imposed on her- "Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover!" (Karnad 52) He didn't feel any qualms of conscience about his betrayal while attacking the helpless woman. To his mind, she committed an unpardonable sin but he is devoid of any guilt and thus he displayed heights of hypocrisy through his impulsive actions.

Many in the village were aware about Appanna locking Rani in the house and visiting his concubine regularly. But no one questioned Appanna's infidelity. When Appanna raised the complaint of Rani's infidelity before the village elders, they decided to hold a trial to check her chastity and to punish her if she was found to be guilty. The village elders mention the tests of chastity underwent by other women who were accused of betraying their husbands- "The traditional test in our Village Court has been to take the oath while holding a red-hot iron in the hand. Occasionally, the accused has chosen to plunge the hand in boiling oil." (Karnad 55) The village elders chose to overlook the man's infidelity and considered the woman's infidelity as a heinous crime. Women had to adhere to strict codes of chastity while men could engage in adultery freely. These double standards shown by the village elders are relevant even in today's society.

The village elders waited impatiently to test her and to condemn her as an immoral woman. They were convinced that she sinned and they desired retribution. But when she survived the dangerous test of cobra which no woman had dared to choose before her, they were taken aback by shock. At once, she appeared to be beyond a normal woman, possessing superpowers. Their ignorance led them to the hasty conclusion that she was a goddess. One of the elders exclaimed that "She is not a woman. She is a Divine Being!" (Karnad 59) They even tried to convince the bewildered Appanna about his wife's divinity-

"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 very badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were the chosen instrument for revealing their divinity." (Karnad 59)

The elders revealed their double standards further by suddenly transforming a woman whom they were ready to condemn into a goddess worthy of worship and respect. Furthermore, they interpreted the suspicion of infidelity raised by Appanna as a means to reveal the divinity of the Goddess. Earlier they condemned her because they had more power over her but now, she seemed to possess hidden powers.

The play *Tughlaq* commences with a young man and an old man having a disagreement on the Sultan's efficiency. One feels that the earlier kings were rather trying to be superior to the basic notion of being a human being, while the other doesn't understand why the current King needs to put on such a show just to portray himself as to indeed being humane, and to show the world that under his rule he gives equality a lot of importance.

The Sultan seemed to give much importance to prayer, he brought about a new law which stated that if anyone does not pray five times a day, and then they would face the dire consequences dished out by the officers, as they would have broken the law. But the hypocrisy lies in the fact that he had killed his own father and brother during prayer time which was the most sacred time of all. Though the Sultan seems to pretend to be just and virtuous, he was a ruthless murderer with no values or ethics.

Another instance of irony is brought out when Aazam tells the disguised Aziz that, "... Brahmins don't carry daggers around like that" (Karnad 152) and "...Couldn't you have come like a proper Muslim?" (Karnad 152) Aziz was a Muslim who disguised as a Brahmin in order to receive personal benefits. He was aware of the strategy used by the King to showcase his sense of equality. In order to trick the people with his schemes, the King had to preferably put a show where justice is delivered to the ones of a different religion than his own so as to establish the fact that despite differences in religion, justice was served justly. The king also wanted to project himself as being so righteous that even normal citizens were allowed to file suit against the King. Aziz having realized all this took advantage of the fact.

The Sultan gave a dramatic performance of being genuinely concerned for his people but as the plot unfolds the readers understand what a tyrant he is.

"Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries...how dare I waste my time sleeping..." (Karnad 155)

While conversing with his step mother he calls the fact of him murdering his family members as a "piece of gossip". As if the deed committed by him and lying through his teeth wasn't unethical and heartless enough, moreover, he accuses his step mother of believing it, thereby projecting her in a bad light as someone who doesn't have faith in him and misjudged him and himself as someone who has been wronged. He does not stop there; he shamelessly keeps up with his lies.

Furthermore, he feigns his innocence under the pretext that neither parricide nor fratricide were mere acts of crime that anyone would have the will to execute. Again, his hypocrisy regarding prayer is depicted and his extreme level of cunningness is also seen when he craftily shifts the attention of Barani from him being the subject of the gossip to the supposedly, manipulative minds of the people, stating that it "horrifies" him thereby changing the whole perspective of the listener. He even tells on his mother to Barani, pointing out how even people of close relations suspect him of the crime.

Yet another instance of his hypocrisy is unveiled when the Sultan questions Sheikh Imam-ud-din whether he thought that he would have gone to the trouble of arranging the meeting if he didn't want his people to hear him. He fools everyone and we start seeing the pattern wherein he often employs such rhetorical questions for covering up his lies. He also mentions that he doesn't want his 'people to be dumb cattle' but in reality, he was indeed making them all blind to his deeds. This is revealed in her the later part of the play where we come to know that the "...soldiers went from door to door threatening dire consequences if anyone dared to attend the meeting." (Karnad 176)

The Sultan's pretence does not end here. He cleverly removes all the obstacles that cause a hindrance to him on his path. He next murdered Sheikh Imam-ud-din and puts on an act of remorsefulness, when he was in fact the one who plotted and executed the murder without raising anyone's suspicions until he had achieved his goal. Ratansingh calls him a 'scoundrel' who calmly murders a man and then pretends to be remorseful about it. The Sultan commented on the death of the Sheikh stating that it should have been him – "It was a terrible sight. They brought his body into my tent and I felt – as though it was I who was lying dead there and that he was standing above me looking at me. I should have been there – in his place." (Karnad 170) But the Sultan himself was the mastermind behind the idea of dressing up the Sheikh as himself and sending him to the battlefield in his own stead.

Next, we see Ratansingh confronting Shihab-ud-din, "You accuse the people of Delhi of cowardice and yet you won't raise a finger to correct an obvious wrong." (Karnad 177) Here, Ratansingh brings to the notice of Shihab-ud-din that he had earlier criticized the citizens of Delhi for not having the courage to turn up for the meeting to take charge of their fate and disapprove of the decision to move to Daulatabad but he himself didn't show enough courage to join forces with the Amirs and the others.

We also see that, Ratansingh makes an observation that since even the soldiers have to pray at the speculated time and they aren't allowed to carry arms then, it would be the perfect time for their attack. All except Sheikh Shams-ud-din agree to it. He gives the reason that it's a sacred time which can't be polluted with the stain of a Mussulman's blood and that they shouldn't do this to Islam. To which Shihab-ud-din counter questions him whether "... Islam work(s) only at prayer?" (Karnad 178)

Tughlaq is very skilful in cheating those who trusted him. His major political moves were based on cheating and manipulating others who believed him. Yet, his fury knew no bounds when he discovered that Shihab-ud-din cheated him. Tughlaq stabbed Shihab-ud-din's body ferociously even after his death and made an anguished, impassioned speech about the disloyalty of those whom he trusted – "Why must this happen, Barani? Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors?" (Karnad 185) He also ordered that the Amirs involved in the conspiracy should be beheaded and their bodies should be displayed before the public to serve as an example. This might be considered as the highest act of hypocrisy by Muhammad.

When the soldiers surrounded Shihab-ud-din and the Amirs, Tughlaq waited until his prayer was over to gain control of the situation. Even though he was highly excited, he kept up his pretence of being a devout man. He used prayer twice as a favourable opportunity to kill his father and brother. He gave undue importance to prayer and pretended to safeguard the purity of it until the betrayal happened. When he discovered that he had been impaled upon his own sword, he couldn't tolerate it. He went as far as to ban praying in the kingdom. Prayer was favoured when he was benefitted by it but he later banned it when he understood that his enemies gained advantage over it. He showed double-standards even towards prayer.

Aziz gave the excuse that no one can save the child when Aazam, his friend, urged him to allow the woman to seek treatment for her ailing son. But he earlier told the woman in a low voice that he would allow her to go if she gave money to bribe his senior officials. Aziz might have cooked up a story to calm his conscience-stricken partner in crime. He would have eagerly allowed the woman to pass if she had appropriately bribed him but he showed no mercy when she requested with empty hands. As an extremely selfish person who only cared about his interests, he frequently used double-standards.

Barani tried to persuade Muhammad to give up torturing his subjects for the smallest offence. He wished to see the Sultan as an idealist. But Muhammad only preached about caring for the misery of his subjects. He was only concerned about his loss of glory as the ruler of a ruined land. He still couldn't accept that he was the cause for the ruin of his empire. He provides the feeble excuse of waiting for an opportunity to prove himself by offering something to teach, which can change history. He was only a hypocrite who pretended to have some noble invention for the world but in reality, only wreaked havoc in his kingdom. None of his measures helped his subjects in any way.

In the last scene of the play, Barani grew so dissatisfied about the Sultan leaving Aziz scot-free that he suggested a variety of cruel punishments for him. When the Sultan points out that even Aziz wouldn't have thought of so many tortures, Barani realises his hypocrisy. But one can find that even Barani, the soft-hearted historian acted like a hypocrite in the passion of the moment. He was afraid of being more influenced by his close friend and requested the Sultan to let him go- "Your Majesty warned me when I slipped and I am grateful for that. I ask Your Majesty's permission to go while I'm still safe." (Karnad 220) When his close friend Barani also ran away from him, Tughlaq had a clear idea of how much low he had sunk as a ruler.

III. CONCLUSION

One among the many techniques employed by Karnad to shed light into different evils of the society is by using hypocrisies and double standards. In *Nagamandala* we can see that gender plays an important role in determining how a person is judged. The rules that applied to men didn't apply to women more often than not. This can be attributed to the fact that men committing the same errors were turned a blind eye to as it was supposed by the others to be expected of them, but when a woman is a subject to such matters, they aren't even given a chance to say their side of the story and are expected to bear, both mentally and physically, painful trials that would decide their fate of being guilty or not. One can also infer that a woman, according to the different positions that she assumes in the society is treated differently. The same woman, who is accused of adultery, when seemed to be like a Goddess is treated in ways poles apart. The mouths that curse her would be the same mouths that praise her. But yet another aspect to be noticed is that this worth of different positions is often solely determined by the existing norms and notions of the society.

In *Tughlaq*, Karnad exposes the use of hypocrisies and double standards as a part of political strategies for rising into and maintaining power. Tughlaq only viewed prayer as a means to aid the murders of his father and brother for gaining the throne. Later, he destroyed this facade by banning prayer throughout the empire in a fit of rage when he realised that his enemies took advantage of it. Tughlaq feigned respect towards prayer when it aided him but furiously banned prayer when it was used against him. As we have already seen he shows double standards even towards prayer. True to the claim made by Aziz when Tughlaq sees through the disguise, he was Tughlaq's true disciple as he imitated the manipulation and double standards of Tughlaq to attain his goals. Aziz's exploitation of the poor Hindu woman reflects the double standards prevalent among corrupt officials. When bribes are handed over, every inconvenience and hurdle disappear. Bribery happens even today. Some politicians and even people of other fields thrive by hypocrisy and double standards even in the contemporary society.

WORKS CITED

- [1]. Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writings in English*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1997.
- [2]. Karnad, Girish. *Three Plays Naga-Mandala Hayavadana Tughlaq*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.