

# ANALYSING GENDER EQUATIONS: “CHILDHOOD IN ANGUISH IN GIRISH KARNAD’S NAGAMANDALA”

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## Abstract

*Gender- Studies needs no introduction but it needs a thorough representation. Gender studies is inter- disciplinary field which aims at achieving the feminist goals of the recognition of woman’s experiences into the arena of knowledge. This paper would focus on Judith Butler’s term “performativity” (Gender, 2017) that questions the way that certain kinds of behaviours are said to be natural whereas they are actually imposed. The very thought about gender is an imposition. In her book, Gender Trouble, Butler aimed at “reformulating” (Butler, 2017) our understanding of feminism. As enumerated by Judith Butler, gender is a social and psychological construct. Butler’s inventory of the “heterosexual frame” (p.xi) that not only delimits the boundaries but also incapacitates one to question that frame, for the fear of losing one’s perception of gender. The goal of gender hierarchy has been subordination. Again, “performativity” (Gender, 2017), has been said to relegate one to the outer- boundary. It is something what one gets used to as a very natural part of one’s day to day life. It is also the body that is acclimatized as a result of ritualization through performativity. The “body” then is the cultural construct. As Judith Butler writes while quoting Simone de Beauvoir, “... the cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism.” (17) Butler says in Gender Trouble that with the passage of time, such rituals are “internalised” (p.xvi) so that they form a permanent part of one’s psyche. If gender designates only women then they deserve to be heard. It is very important to analyse gender equations and put back to shape what lies distorted.*

Moutushi Chatterjee, in her research paper, “Myth and Reality in Hayavadana and Nagamandala” (Mukherjee, 2008, 182- 187), talks about the existential dilemma of Padmini and Rani in the respective plays. Both the plays, present the sad predicament of the journey of life to explore the possibilities and complexities that one may encounter through it. (Mukherjee, 2008, 181-187) B.T. Seetha in her research paper, “Quest for Completeness in Hayavadana and Nagamandala” (Mukherjee, 2008, 188-198), presents the idea of interaction between reason and instinct. V.Rangan’s research paper, “Myth and Romance in Nagamandala or their Subversion?” (2008, 199-207) discusses myth, reality and folk tradition of the play. Santosh Gupta’s paper, “A Story of Marriage and Love” presents the experiences of a woman in a marriage. (Dodiya, 2009, 249-256) This paper attempts to give a due representation to the consideration of the tender- age of girls before thinking of their marriage. The play has not been looked at from the perspective of the child Rani married to Appanna without a mature thought by her parents. The paper attempts to look at Rani’s psychic space through the dream sequences. Patriarchal norms and structures have undoubtedly repressed women. As further enumerated by Butler, an individual is understood and recognised through the kind to which that particular gender is associated while adhering to the set- standards. (Gender, 2017, p.22) An individual is recognised only through the cultural context of intelligibility. Butler opines further that such an identity is established through gender. As also, mentioned in her book *Gender Trouble*, gender is actually singular which means only feminine whereas masculine is not said to be gender at all (Butler, 2017, p.27). If there is only the feminine gender then it is pertinent that this feminine gender is a category already separated out from that of masculine. The question of bringing equality raises doubts in one’s mind. This paper advocates this gender-asymmetry which is responsible for the psychic distress of the feminine. The thinking logical mind is associated with masculine and the body is associated with feminine. Further, performativity (Butler, 2017) is functional with body as its focus. This mind- body differentiation is bound to be there as the performing body cannot be dissociated from the performing mind. Butler’s words “gender melancholy” (Butler, 2017, p. xvi) can be made to refer to how we see and conceive the world and internalise the same as a very significant part of our internal psychic space. A reference to body takes us to the views of Beauvoir and Wittig as enunciated by Butler while referring to the word “gender” which when associated with woman is often analogous to the physical features of a woman with “gender”. There is a psychic and political subordination (Butler, 2017, p.17) that a woman has to undergo. With reference to the psychic built up as stated by Butler in her book *The Psychic life of Power*, the norms exist as a psychic phenomenon that serve to bind and constrict the possibilities of living in a social space. (Butler, 1997, p.21) This psychic containment is the realm of the conscience by which a subject starts considering itself as an

object. (Butler, 1997, p.22) There is grief and sadness which the subject fails to come to terms with both, the inner psychic space and the outer social stretch. The paper also takes into consideration a question well posed by Butler, "...What will qualify as the "human" and the "livable"?"

The human in question is the simple girl 'Rani' in Girish Karnad's, *Nagamandala*. The play starts with a beautiful description of the beauty of Rani. Kuruddavva describes her beauty as, "Ears like hibiscus" (32) "Skin like mango leaves". (32). She is married to Appanna who brings her to his village. He leaves her alone in the house and locks the door. He just informs her that he will be back at lunch time. Rani is not aware of his whereabouts although the reader or the audience come to know through Kurrudavva, the blind woman that he goes to his concubine. This is where Rani plunges into a sad inner life. The girl left alone in a corner of the room talks to herself. She is unaware of the kind of a man that she is married to and is also unaware of his whereabouts.

RANI: "Where are you taking me?" (27)

Rani is soon immersed in a dream where she talks to an eagle who promises to take Rani to the far off "seven seas" and "seven isles" where her parents wait for her under a tree. The dramatist creates a very distressful picture of a lonely girl in strange house where there is no one except her. She wakes up from the dream with a fright. It is morning and she splashes her face with water and starts cooking for her husband. Rani serves food to Appanna who had come just for a meal. The poor girl fumbles for words and takes out courage to inform him how frightened she has been during the night. Appanna instructs her,

APPANNA: "Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you." (28)

He also warns Rani not to indulge in any more talk. He leaves the house to come again the next morning. The next night, in her dream, Rani is embraced by her parents. She cries. She imagines that her parents are with her and they are by her side and promising her never to leave her side. The next morning, Rani sits by the kitchen fire and cooking for a husband who will have a meal and leave again. Rani plunges into dream again.

RANI: "Then Rani's parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and caress her. At night she sleeps between them. So she is not frightened any more. 'Don't worry,' they promise her. 'We won't let you go away again ever!' In the morning, the stag with the golden antlers comes to the door. He calls out to Rani. She refuses to go. 'I am not a stag,' he explains, 'I am a prince'...(28)

Rani goes through what Butler states as "irresolvable grief" (Butler, 1997, p.22). Rani is very young to understand the direction of the flow of her life. Her dreams can be interpreted as a sense of loss of security which she had under her parents. The playwright makes it clear through her dreams of Rani how she slept cuddled between her parents which is again, contrary to the harsh realities of her new house after marriage. A young girl is married in such circumstances which she is least prepared to tackle on her own. The grief is a result of the "subjectivation" (Foucault, 2003, p.126) of her body and the inner psyche that was so far well protected under the love and affection showered on her by her parents. Rani is too young to encounter the strange problem of getting alienated in her husband's house. She is treated as a stranger. Her melancholia lands her in the kind of dreams in which she longs for the protection and care of her parents. Dreams and norms are two different entities. Dream is what we seek as a desire. Norms invade our mind by pounding hard on our innate longings. This is the hindrance to a soul's liveable reality. Kappanna raises a very important question to his mother Kurrudevva.

KAPPANNA: "what does it mean when a man locks his wife?" (30)

The above question is direct indicator of the amount of sufferings that a woman has to undergo as result of patriarchal forces prevalent in our society. Rani is kept under a lock which is a signal to isolate her from the rest of the world because as often seen in our social set-up, only the husband or the elder male member of the family decide the course of life for women members of the family.

RANI: "He will be back for lunch later in the day?" (31)

Rani plunges deep into her thinking mind. The words by Rani are symbolic of the disciplinary regime which the poor girl gets used to within no time because of the fear that Appanna's rough handling of her creates in her mind and heart. The body in this case is employed for its "docility" and "utility". (Foucault, 1977)

RANI: Mother started shedding tears the day I matured and was still crying when I left with my husband..." (32) Rani's words are reminiscent of the discomfort of the parents while marrying off their daughters which they must else it is a situation of discomfort for parents to live in a social set-up.

RANI: "I am so frightened at night, I can't sleep a wink. At home I sleep between Father and Mother. But here, alone- Kurrudavva, can you help me, please?..." (32)

The above make us aware of Rani's melancholic existence. Rani is at this stage full of fear. She is desperately looking for protection and care. This is the stage of what Michel Foucault discussed as the formation of the subject. The subject undergoes division and this where his or her "objectivation" takes place. (Foucault, 1994, p.126) Rani's identity is constructed by Appanna who represents patriarchy.

RANI: "...So the demon locks her up in his castle. Then it rains for seven days and seven nights. It pours. The sea floods the city. The waters break down the door of the castle. Then a big whale comes to Rani and says: 'Come, Rani, let us go...' (35)

As noted from her words uttered above, Rani wants to escape from the clutches of loneliness and fear. The disciplinary institutions secreted a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of

conduct;...(Foucault, 1991) Rani's imprisonment in her own new house demands a certain code of conduct from her whereas her psychic surface is continuously asking for a release as yet the young bride is too naïve to understand what her marriage has in store for her. It is seen later in the play that she bears a child from Naga, who disguises as Appanna and her real husband drags her to village panchayat as he discards her after branding her a loose woman.

The term psyche for Butler or the soul for Foucault has been enumerated as a resistance located in the "unconscious" (Butler, 1997). As in Butler's own words "The psyche is what resists the regularization that Foucault describes to normalizing discourses."(Butler, 1997) This is exactly the meaning of the dreams that occupy the interior unconscious surface of Rani's psyche. The poor girl resists the norms and the new abiding way of life which she has never encountered before this. A further elaboration of psyche as a form of resistance leads to its relation with power as describes in the Foucauldian terms. The disciplinary measures invest the body with power both inside out. As mentioned by Butler that power "...pervades the interiority of that subject."(Butler, 1997) Butler insists that there is an "inside"(Butler, 1997) to the body that exists prior to its seizure by power. This is where we come a full circle to "performativity"(Butler, 2017) wherein the girl in question has already taken the norms in her stead that very automatically for a long period of time she fails to encounter him for the reason of his ill-treatment of her.

Rani's formation to "... the individual under the disciplinary production of gender..."(Butler, 1997, p. 85) is a clear indication of a kind of "performativity" (Butler, 2017). Rani has to learn to perform as demanded by her husband who signifies patriarchy. Rani, as seen in the play, is one who is required to act in a particular manner. She is definitely not the one who she really was. Her dreams are a psychic resistance to the destructive effects to which her body experiences through alienation and isolation. Butler in her long quote in the *Psychic Life of Power*, talks about failure being endlessly repeated and relived in the dreams and in this process the norms that bind an individual are pushed to the edges.(Butler, 1997, p.97) Rani is unable to figure out her predicament and in fact there is nothing that is in her hands. It is the playwright who invents the myth of roots to be administered to her husband through Kurudevva that the play starts going in a certain other direction.

The paper seeks to present Rani as a mere child at the time of her marriage to Appanna. The play is Rani's journey through trials and tribulations. Her encounter with Naga who in the disguise of Appannashowers his love on Rani helps her to realise the dignified self of her. Rani is able to learn the role of a wife and mother only through the introduction of the character of Naga. In the post- colonial aspect, we cannot rely on myths. Young girls like Rani will not have Nagas save them from the clutches of harsh patriarchy. Myth and reality are to be segregated. The play is a lesson and a reminder for all of us not only to identify the fissures in gender but also to prepare young girls towards handling their life on a sound footing. Marriage of a girl in her early years is not the answer to the question of settlement in her life. It would only mean increasing the gap of gender asymmetry. Without the administering of the root or without the introduction of the myth of the Cobra King, Rani would never have come out of the "psychic resistance" (Butler, 1997, p.98) and her mental anguish would have continued. We ourselves cannot be responsible for throwing our young daughters to harsh situations in life. Just as no amount of resistance can compete with the law similarly no "psychic resistance" (Butler, 1997, p.98) is beyond law. There is nothing that a girl would be able to do in the situation as well presented by the playwright in this play. The play is an indicator of the need for social reforms at grass root level where feminism is still not heard of in the remote areas or even in urban areas where traditional values still mean the daily worship.

"I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially."(Butler, 1997, p.104)The term performativity (Butler, 2017) can again be concluded in this quote and with respect to the predicament of Rani where she is supposed to learn how to behave and reshape her life as per the requirements of her husband Appanna, the social set- up of her village and the norms which any young bride is required to adopt and bow down both inside her house as well as in the outside world.

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