

Research Article

Unveiling the Pain of Women's Suffering in *Naga-mandala*: A Psychotraumatological Study

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Abstract: Through the prism of Psychotraumatology, this research paper examines the complex agony experienced by women in India's most famous playwright Girish Raghunath Karnad's play *Naga-mandala* (*Play with a Cobra*). This paper examines the psychological harm inflicted by patriarchal tyranny, disability and cultural constraints through the experiences of the female protagonist, Rani, and another female character, Kurudavva. The study intends to shed light on these women's internal and external conflicts, coping strategies, and the effects of their trauma on their relationships and identities.

Keywords: Psychotraumatology; patriarchy; suffering; identity; relationship

Introduction

This research paper employs a qualitative approach grounded in the critical theory of trauma and close textual analyses of the play *Naga-mandala* by Girish Karnad. To elaborate on the analyses of the topic and to justify the objectives of the study, this paper incorporates trauma theorists' ideas, such as Pete Walker's concept of traumatic responses and Dori Laub's notion of how trauma makes people speechless and the definition of vicarious trauma to understand the psychology of the character of Kurudavva.

Psychotraumatology is the branch of psychology that focuses on how traumatic events affect mental health, physical health, and behaviour. The term was initially introduced in the 1995 book *Psychotraumatology* by George S. Everly Jr. and Jeffrey M. Lating. This area aims to illuminate the causes, symptoms, and lasting effects of trauma, to inform the development of effective treatment strategies. It also examines how individuals adapt to challenging situations. Through the application of diverse psychological perspectives, Psychotraumatology investigates how trauma affects memory, emotions, and individual identity.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this research paper is to demonstrate how patriarchal society affects the mental and emotional well-being of women and how these mindsets contribute to traumatic circumstances. To illustrate this objective, the female protagonist of the play from *Naga-mandala*, Rani, is examined. Another main objective of this paper is to explore the connection between disability and trauma, and to achieve this objective, the female character of the play *Kurudavva* is chosen. Furthermore, from healing the disability trauma, how *Kurudavva*'s son *Kappanna* is focused and how his absence impacted her character more traumatically is shown.

Rani's psycho-traumatic conditions in *Naga-mandala*-

The very word "psycho-traumatic" is the amalgamation of the two words "psycho" and "trauma." "Psycho" is related to our minds, and "traumatic" is connected to trauma, which is a very deeply depressing and distressing situation. Therefore, psycho-traumatic discusses the relationship between psychology and trauma, and the merger of both concepts helps people to conduct an in-depth study of the psychology of the traumatised people.

In the play *Naga-mandala*, the narrator explicitly portrays the female protagonist, Rani. Unfortunately, she becomes the victim of the patriarchal, dominating society. She has to get married to a man of her parents' choice at an early age. Where she plays the role of a subaltern, where she has no voice of her own. The attachment between children and parents is irreplaceable, as initially seen in Rani's case, when she left her parents. Moreover, moulding herself in a new role as a wife and adapting to a new environment becomes difficult. Sadly, her husband's cruel treatment makes her character more tragic and traumatic. *Kappanna* used to lock her in the room, making her life like a caged bird, where she had to follow his orders passively. Moreover, she is also unaware of the extramarital affairs of her husband.

Dori Laub's notion of trauma analogy in the character of Rani

Rani. Listen— (Fumbling for words) Listen—I feel—Frightened—alone at night—

Appanna. What is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you. (Karnad 7)

Rani's fear and fumbling in her choice of words remind us of the famous trauma theorist Dori Laub's notion of trauma. As stated by Laub, when someone experiences trauma, they find it difficult to communicate due to their inability to find the proper words to convey it. Being a traumatic character and experiencing fear, Rani struggled to demonstrate that she feels scared and alone at night. Additionally, in this traumatic situation, getting someone's company is necessary, but in her case, her husband's negative response exacerbates her trauma. The pivotal conversation between Rani and Kurudavva marks a significant turning point in the play. In the matter of Rani, Kurudavva becomes a mediator where she can freely express herself. Rani's declaration to end her life is a clear indication of how pathetic the conditions of her life are, where she has no willingness to live. Rani and Kurudavva's discussion about Rani's marital life leads to a conversation where Kurudavva has to tell her own life story, including her struggles, and how, through the use of magical roots, she gets married and builds her family. Moreover, the same roots, Kurudavva, are offered to Rani.

Following Kurudavva's advice, Rani first mixed the magical roots with milk and served it to him; after that, Appanna's health deteriorated. Again, she mixed the roots with the curry, and when it turned red, feeling afraid, she poured the curry into the anthill where a king cobra resided. The cobra consumed it and immediately developed feelings for Rani. Disguised as Appanna, Naga (the cobra) started visiting Rani every night. Rani found solace in the love of the Naga (Appanna) and forgot her pain. Although the treatment at day and night differs, she has undoubtedly been living her life. The peaceful life of Rani turns into a nightmare when she gets pregnant with the child of the Naga.

Pete Walker's Trauma Responses

After finding out about her pregnancy, Rani informed Naga (Appanna), and his response suggested that he was exhibiting a trauma reaction. In *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*, Pete Walker explores the four trauma responses: fight, flight, freeze, and fawn. According to Walker's book, the freeze response may be our initial reaction to a threat, causing us to become motionless, silent, and hidden, in order to assess the danger and determine whether fighting, fleeing, staying frozen, or fawning is the best course of action (Walker 83). Pete Walker's description of the freeze response appears to reflect Naga's behaviour in this particular situation accurately. Everyone betrays Rani, and the Naga's affirmation to keep it silent leads her into a dilemma, making her character more traumatic.

Healing Mechanism and Rani

At the beginning of the play, Rani is presented as an introverted, passive young girl who harbours fears of various kinds. Her aversion to solitude and lack of emotional

support render her a troubled character. The profound influence of Kurudavva's enchantment radically alters her life, granting her not only companionship and affection but also empowering her to emerge as a formidable woman. Viewed through a feminist lens, Rani's transition from passivity and timidity to assertiveness and strength serves as a powerful symbol of her pursuit of equality and empowerment. Moreover, it also reminds us of how socialisation and getting support from someone become coping mechanisms and their relevance to healing from trauma.

Disability Studies

The field of disability studies is a growing interdisciplinary area focused on exploring the definitions, characteristics, and impacts of human disability. Initially, the discipline focused on examining individuals with deteriorations from medical and psychological perspectives. As Disability Studies progressed, scholars sought to comprehend the distinction between impairment and disability, viewing inability as a limitation of an individual's body or mind and disability as a construct shaped by society. Later on, the field expanded to encompass the humanities and social sciences, examining deficiencies within the framework of cultural politics and society. The emerging popularity of disability studies flourished through literary writings.

Disability Studies and Trauma

By examining how pain, memory, and social perception affect both the body and mind, disability studies and trauma studies, though their methods vary, exhibit numerous important connections. Disability studies mainly focus on disability. Moreover, trauma studies emphasise the physical and mental impacts of trauma. However, there is an inherent link between disability and trauma, as both fields examine silence, stigma, and the difficulties of representation, whether it is the unseen nature of trauma or the incorrect portrayal of disability. Through literary writings, writers attempt to explore the interconnectedness of trauma and disability.

Kurudavva's Physical Disabilities as a Cause of Suffering and Trauma

In the play *Naga-mandala*, along with the character of Rani, the other female character, Kurudavva, is one of the leading female characters whose presence contributes to the growth of Rani's character. Kurudavva, as a blind woman, can be situated within the broader context of disability studies. Metaphorically and paradoxically, she symbolises the stereotypical conditions of disabled people and how they have to feel an inferiority complex in all aspects of their lives. The most pathetic parts of them are being entirely or partially dependent upon someone else. In the play, Kurudavva's son takes on all her responsibilities and never lets her feel disabled or disappointed. Despite this, her lamentation signifies her suffering and pain, which ignites her trauma.

Vicarious Trauma

One of the most common forms of trauma is secondary trauma, also known as vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma is contagious and indirect by nature. We encounter people in our daily lives, and with trustworthy individuals, we share our feelings with

them. Moreover, it is not always the case; we are not going to hear a happier story every time. Moreover, sometimes, while listening to someone's traumatic story, we may also feel traumatised. Everything has both advantages and disadvantages, but once again, when recovering from trauma, someone's motivational story becomes a way to overcome it.

Vicarious Trauma in the Character of Kurudavva

In the play, Kurudavva, being the best friend of Appanna's mother, is portrayed as a mother figure to Appanna. When her son, Kappanna, informs her about Appanna's infidelity, she becomes enraged and shattered inside and develops the traumatic symptoms. To explain her condition, her son uses the term "insomnia," or her difficulty in sleeping, which clearly indicates her vicarious trauma. Here, her trauma is multiplied, as she inherited both disability trauma and vicarious trauma.

Kurudavva's loss of coping mechanisms and trauma

Rani's life has been irrevocably impacted by Kurudavva, as her suggestion to get her husband mystical roots has a profound effect. Rani finds solace from her painful memories and gets everything to which she is entitled. Tension mounts when Rani becomes pregnant with Naga, and Appanna summons the community to determine the true father of the child. During Rani's oath-taking to prove her innocence, Kurudavva suddenly appears. However, this time she is experiencing a double dose of misery. Despite being visually impaired and having endured trauma, she has managed to lead a tranquil life. Kappanna, her son, has been her unwavering companion, providing support and standing by her side in every circumstance like a shadow. Kappanna's unwavering commitment to his blind mother is reminiscent of the revered mythological figure Shravana Kumar. Regrettably, Kappanna has gone missing from home, causing great distress to her.

Conclusion

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that Girish Karnad's *Naga-mandala* conveys a social commentary. Rani symbolises women who lack autonomy in their choice of marriage. Rani's character highlights the importance of having someone to confide in, demonstrating that social interaction can help overcome innate emotions. In the play, aside from Rani, Kurudavva, another female character, holds great importance. She symbolises the inherent hardships faced by individuals with disabilities. Kurudavva's blindness intensifies her suffering, as she frequently reveals her sadness throughout the play. Rescued by her devoted son, as a blind woman, she relies on him entirely. The peak of tragedy and trauma is reached when her son Kappanna goes missing, causing her to become frantic and search for him everywhere. Therefore, Kurudavva's psychological and emotional state varies significantly throughout the play. Moreover, both female characters experience equal amounts of suffering for different reasons.

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