From Silence to Selfhood: Female Identity and Cultural Expression in Karnad's *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*

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Abstract:

Girish Karnad's plays offer a significant exploration of human identity, social structures, gender relations and the conflicts between individual desires and societal norms. His fascination with mythology, folklore, history and traditional storytelling allows him to tackle themes of power, patriarchy and individual freedom from a contemporary point of view. The paper titled "From Silence to Agency: Reclaiming Female Identity in Girish Karnad's Plays" deals with the representation of women and their struggle to attain independent sense of identity in patriarchal social structures. The study focuses mainly on selected plays like Nagamandala, Hayavadana and Yayati in which the female characters undergo conflicts between their personal desires and their socially prescribed roles.

The paper discusses how the women in Karnad, negotiate issues of autonomy, sexuality, desire, selfhood and social expectations by moving out of the position of passive subjects. Characters like Rani in Nagamandala and Padmini in Hayavadana exemplify the complex nature of female agency, highlighting the constraints imposed by society and the potential for resistance within those constraints. Karnad's use of myth and folklore is a powerful literary device that highlights and questions contemporary gender issues.

The paper argues that Karnad does not present female identity as fixed or predetermined, but as a constantly changing process influenced by personal choices, relationships, social norms and the struggle for autonomy. Karnad brings the marginalized female voices to the center of his dramatic narratives to challenge the conventional notions of womanhood and to encourage the rethinking of the gender roles. His plays, the paper ultimately argues, still have relevance to contemporary discussions on women's identity and social change, particularly in relation to patriarchy, individual freedom and the constant struggle for equality and selfhood.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the discourse on feminist intervention in Indian theatre. By highlighting how Karnad's plays create alternate spaces for female subjectivity, the study underscores their relevance to contemporary debates on gender, culture, and identity. It offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand the intersections of literature, performance, and feminist thought in reclaiming female voices.

Keywords:

Girish Karnad, Female Identity, Female Agency, Patriarchy, Gender, Social Change, Myth, Folklore, Women's Representation.