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THE YEARNING FOR LAISSEZ-ALLER: UNSHACKLING THE  
OVERWEENING SUPREMACY BY THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN  
GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAY *THE FIRE AND THE RAIN*

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**Mousoomi Aslam. A<sup>1</sup>, Dr. V.S. Bindhu<sup>2</sup>: The Yearning For Laissez-Aller: Unshackling The  
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**ABSTRACT**

Girish Karnad was an applaudable author, who unveiled the complexities of women's life as well uplifted them from various atrocities through his sublime jottings with his acclaimed works. *The Fire and the Rain* astonishingly picturises the consequences held upon women by the domineering male authority through the characters .Nittilai and Vishaka yearn for laissez-aller, despite the age-old phallogentric powers that rely upon women across cultures. Though they are hegemonised by the overweening powers, they moved in accordance to their rightful path to achieve the life which they yearn for apart from the institution of marriage. Karnad indubitably explored the woman psychological conundrums that trammel up their lives by exquisite portrayal of disparate psyche of female characters. Vishaka and Nittilai, from disparate communities seek for the achievement of same wish to unchain the enslavement so as to live freely with eccentric happiness. These characters ride roughshod over their authoritative male supremacy to unfetter the manacles of subjugation.

## Introduction:

Girish Karnad was an astounding figure acclaimed with excellent works that stuffed with the culture and tradition prevailed in India. He had imbibed suffice knowledge in Indian myths, customs and traditions to accomplish his work of art. *The Fire and the Rain* is an amalgam of social distress and mythical milieu. Karnad had unveiled the complexities of women's life in an unbiased manner, despite being a male writer. His intention was not only for the equality of women but also for the upliftment of women from the society established by unjustified gender and class division.

The paper attempts to focus on Karnad's behaviour of a responsible being empowering women by raising voice against the social domination. The characters Vishakha and Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain* are traditional under the male supremacy but are courageous enough to establish their views in front of the society. Though they are subjugated by the phallogocentric power, they yearn to unfetter the manacles to live in pursuit of their happiness.

"Karnad has explored the awakening of female consciousness often dramatized in literature"(Kosta,1999)

Here Karnad yearns to upgrade the position of women to a level that could attain their freedom of choice. The play picturises two female characters from different social class but facing the same oppression of patriarchal society in disparate manner.

Karnad portrays the psychological agitation faced by women throughout their lives in the hands of male hegemony. The female characters in the play are confronted with the miseries due to the traditional beliefs of male domination. Through the play, Karnad highlights his assumptions on human emotions of sacrifice, love, hope, loss and spirituality. He has revealed the inner psyche of humans, especially the dilemmas and conflicts experienced by Indian women in their desperate social situations, where the readers are driven to interrogate the subliminal minds of the characters.

Karnad has indubitably explored the psychological conundrums of women that trammelled up their lives by exquisite portrayal of disparate psyche of female class. Karnad demolishes the traditional belief that women should be under the control of man. He has thrown away the conventional notion of women to be obedient and the duty to serve for the male powers. The female characters are uncompromising and not willing to be submissive. He remoulds and polishes the myth and transforms into a tale which would be relevant in modern times. Karnad develops the female characters as an epitome of suppression, victimisation and physical and emotional exploitation. He also tried to make them much stronger and stubborn in making their decisions to unfetter themselves from the male bonds after having a wide saga of disgusting experiences from the male counterpart.

## Yearning Laissez-Aller by Traditional Indian Women:

Vishaka, an upper caste women has been married to Parvasu for her father's wish. Her father has arranged her marriage without her consent. This picturises the patriarchal concept that restricted woman's freedom from choosing her life partner. Parvasu makes her happy for one year and after one year he has left her for the sacrificial ceremony. He has the right to take decisions to establish his aim independently whereas Vishaka is bound by the traditional customs of household duties done by the women in society. She has no other options to move forward and no right to act independently according to her wish. Though she belongs to the upper Brahmin caste, she has to give up her desires and passions for it is women's duty to sacrifice her life for the betterment of family. At the same time Vishaka realises the lusty nature of her father-in-law Raibhya as she says;

"On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's curdlest lust. And there's no one else here to take his rage out but me ....Here he comes the crab!" (Karnad, 1988).

Here, Karnad presents the formented life of a woman who has to sacrifice her life after one year of her marriage for the sake of her husband. Her aspirations, motifs and passions are torn away for the decision taken by her husband. She is forced to live a life neglecting to live independently disregarding her sexual desires and her submission to do all the household works without any disregard. The failure in the married life of Vishaka is the result of selfish decision of Parvasu to attend the fire sacrifice. He considers her to be a mere object for his sexual desires as he behaves "like an experimenter, an explorer. As instruments in a search." P.D Nimsarkar observes:

"Marriage in the high cast Brahmin society where virtue is highly honoured, is reduced to mating and sex enjoyment. The lack of understanding and failure of communication ruing the secret concept of marriage and wreck the family."(Nimsarkar, 2009)

But Vishaka has ceaselessly struggled to attain freedom despite being crabbed by her husband and father-in-law. Karnad ultimately emancipates Vishaka from the traditional norms of the society.

Karnad has uplifted the female characters to question the suppression faced by them as Vishaka asked to Parvasu:

"I suppose that would be too human. But what's wrong with being human? What is wrong being happy, as we were before you got Indra into you?" (Karnad,1998)

Parvasu makes Vishaka with interminable pain of isolation and subjugated her with overwhelming power upon her. Finally, Vishaka has unshackled her chains and behaves in a way to escape from the harsh reality of commands made by the hegemonic power. She has avenged her husband by engaging in an illicit affair with her ex-lover Yavakri.

Besides her revenge, she fulfills her sexual desires and yearns for a companionship to get rid of her isolated life. Karnad structures his female characters to understand their position and power of a human being to act upon their will in society apart from being a female.

Gokhale states, "He ( Karnad) transformed Vishakha from mere victim of molestation to an active agent who consciously yields to Yavakri" ( Gokhale,1999)

Nittilai is a striking and adorable character presented by Karnad as a stubborn girl from the lower caste. From the beginning itself, Nittilai is presented as an epitome for questioning the caste and gender discrimination and she even questions Yavakri for discarding his lover for attaining Universal knowledge. Through the character Nittilai, Karnad presents not only the power of woman but also the theme of cast system in India. Nittilai critiques the high class Brahmins and thereby Karnad explodes the magnificence of the upper caste. Nittilai is symbolised as humane, virtuous, gentle and simple.

However, Karnad has moulded his female characters in a way that modernize them suffice to raise voice against the biased system and injustice towards women.

"Karnad does not neglect the women characters totally. He projects their sufferings and dilemmas and also made them raise fundamental questions concerning the use of knowledge and goal of human life."(Ranganathan,2008)

Nittilai has sacrificed her life by obeying her father to marry a man whom he had chosen from their tribal class instead of marrying the high class Brahmin Arvasu. At the end, she pulls herself out from the house to serve her lover who is injured by Parvasu. She has stubbornly supported Arvasu when he is in trouble, despite her life is in danger as she would be killed by her husband and brother for being with Arvasu. Her character is portrayed with strength and power of a woman to act according to her will. Though she is killed by her husband, she has tried hard to unchain her life to attain her destiny with Arvasu.

Nittilai obeys her father, but she has yearned to live a life with Arvasu. She had broken the ties of marriage to comfort her lover. She is illuminated with the power of resistance to overcome the complexities of life. Karnad, throughout these characters has encouraged the patriarchal society to realise the value of women and to consider them as human beings with emotions and passions

### **Conclusion**

Karnad projects the new mute troubles and miseries of married women. The play explores the psychological deterioration of women, their selfhood and identity. Karnad creates a world of reality by painting the human psyche that yearns for happiness. The heroines Vishaka and Nittilai seek for a peaceful life with their own identity and rights of choice that owes for a meaningful existence. The worsening familial bonds and detached relationship among

partners for selfish deeds form one of the main aspects of the play. Karnad envisages the changing traditional practices and psychological progression of women that produced in depth female characters in his plays.

The men in this play failed to live a peaceful and lovable life as they are over powered by jealous, greed, anger, lust and revenge. Charlene Spretnak points out that

“...The problem is androcentrism (male -centeredness) rather than anthropocentrism (human-centeredness). Patriarchal society, in which the male definition of reality is normative and in which fear of women and nature set the stage for biocide, must be named as the problem.”(Spretnak,1981).

The female characters Vishakha and Nittilai represents the women in society who urges to stretch out from the clutches of male domination. Karnad exemplifies the point where a woman subconsciously endeavours to set free themselves from the hardships of male dominating authority. Vishaka and Nittilai put forward their lives to show the female society to free themselves from the cultural norms and to live a life of their own. They have yearned for laissez-aller, despite the age old phallocentric power that rely upon women across cultures. Though they are hegemonised by the overwhelming power, they are moved in accordance to their rightful path to achieve the life which they yearn for.

Karnad has moulded his female characters to unfetter the conflicts and to liberate themselves out of the unstifling social institution of marriage. Vishakha and Nittilai ride rough-shed over their male authority to unchain the manacles of subjugation. Karnad has ostensibly created female characters in a different way that upsurged the women in the society to experience a life free from restraints of male hegemony. Despite the suppression, both characters have endeavoured so hard to liberate from the male egoism. They are illuminated with the power of resistance to overcome the complexities of life. Karnad has built the characters in a way that create turmoil in the minds of audience by visualizing the mistakes, infidelity, lack of communication, which are weaved around the institution of marriage as a cobweb. The play is concerned with unshackling the conflicts experienced by women and their efforts to liberate themselves out of the unstifling social situations. Karnad's plays are concerned with psychological problems, dilemmas and conflicts experienced by Indian women in their different social situations, where the readers are driven to interrogate the subconscious minds of the characters.

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