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POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Editors

**Jeevan S. Masure
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RAMNIRANJAN JHUNJHUNWALA COLLEGE
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Editors: Jeevan S. Masure and Sanjay G. Kulkarni

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The Notion of Justice for Women –Sociocultural Inlusiveness in Nagamandala?

Dr. Neeta Chakravarty

Girish Karnad's Nagamandala is a comment on the predicament of the hapless women in Indian Society. According to Eliot, culture is more important than the individual and the culture of the individual derives from that of the society. But, what is striking about this observation is the pointer towards the synergy between the individual and the society. There certainly exists a win-win situation where the cultures of the individual and the society influence each other and each is further enriched. It is true that all cultures have a set of beliefs that defines the code of conduct and values for that particular culture and that people living together in a society share the same culture. However, culture is based on the uniqueness of men being able to draw lessons from his experiences and transmitting these as generalizations to future generations. There is also a particular amount of coercion adopted by the older generation to compel the younger generation to accept that it is the most correct way of living based as it is, on experience. In such a scenario, it is the process of communication that distinguishes societies from one another and is often the precursor of cultural differences. In Nagamandala, Karnad turns around the position of the main protagonist Rani by catapulting her from a position of subservience to that of dominance. Also, the elders of society who are the main practitioners of subverting women are instrumental in effecting the change. What is studied in this paper is the life of the change.

According to Raymond William, "..... the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change." Thus, though culture consists of language, codes, institutions and symbols and is the sharing of meanings, the processes of meaning- production

are connected to the structures of power in society. Certain meanings acquire greater power because of their sources, other meanings become less important. So, language and meaning are connected to issues of class, power, ideology and the material conditions in which the communication occurs. In Nagamandala, Karnad relies on sociocultural practices to inscribe new meaning to Rani's existence and life. She becomes confident and asserts her new found position with total congruence with the will of elders in society.

In the postmodern world, Indian society is increasingly becoming culturally diverse due to large scale movement within the different states, as also movement of the diaspora to and from India. So, steps have to be taken to help them to live together. Both these groups of people need strategies that will help them. They should, no doubt, see all that is going on around them, but they should learn to decide what to observe around them. They should be able to perceive differences, both from within the group and from without. However, one wonders if Rani's husband has an eye for any of these changes. He seems to be helpless as the major part of societal viewpoint polarizes with that of Rani.

It has been seen that a kind of globalization occurs when the settler both adapts and appropriates local culture. At times, it is the inside view that provides the clue as to how to conduct oneself and how to make sense of the new world he finds himself in. At the same time, by projecting themselves as strangers, they can objectively attempt to understand how two cultures compare or contrast with each other. At this point, it is pertinent to note that there are subtle ways in which cultures differ. Cultures may vary with respect to the context. For instance, the communicator has a choice of either being explicit so that more responsibility is placed on the listener to keep up their knowledge base and remain plugged into informal networks or being implicit and communicating in indirect ways. Similarly cultures vary on the basis of their concern with traditional values and ways of doing things, or their focus on the present where they see the past as

passed and the future as uncertain or their optimism about the future wherein they believe that they can shape it through their actions. Similarly, Naga according to one ending is dead and gone, perceived as Rani's past. However, the flame who narrated the story successfully changes the ending by providing Rani with the capacity to find a balance between Naga and her husband.

The extent to which people accept differences in power and allow this to shape many aspects of life is an important factor in their ability to adjust. In individualist cultures, individual uniqueness, self-determination is valued. A person is all the more admirable if they are a "self-made man" or "makes up their own mind" or show initiative or work well independently. Collectivist cultures expect people to identify with and work well in groups which protect them in exchange for loyalty and compliance. Paradoxically, individualist cultures tend to believe that there are universal values that should be shared by all, while collectivist cultures tend to accept that different groups have different values. Thus, we find virtues of chastity being lauded as an Universal value in Nagamandala with the expected norms of behavior being partial to men. However, her changed status enables Rani to assert compliance with the contradictory orders passed by societal elders.

Another important contributor to the cultural difference is the history of a particular region or country. The events of the past certainly shape the moods and opinions of people living in that locale. When a large group of people observe a set of traditions, social norms and values, it gives rise to culture. Besides, mythology also gives rise to myths which ring in cultural differences.

When different people of different cultures get together for a common cause of education or job, then many problems arise due to cultural differences for what is perceived as good in one culture is abhorred in another. So, making an effort to understand different cultures assumes significance. Of course, tolerance is considered a virtue, but imbibing of respect for other cultures is a must and cannot be compromised. Thus, there exist three basic

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kinds of problems: ascribing meaning to others annotations and operating mechanism, foreseeing actions, and failure to comprehend inconsistent behavior. Inculcating inclusiveness may be seen as a means to curb these problems. Karnad probably takes these into account as he borrows heavily from three different folktales to open new doors for women, in general and mothers, in particular within Indian society.

Inclusion means including 'all'. It is seen as a universal human right. The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, caste, class or mother tongue. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance (removal of barriers). It affects all aspects of public life. Inclusion is the process of acknowledging the fact that all members of humanity are one despite their differences and that they have the right to access all the resources and privileges available. Inclusion encompasses the fight against social evils that have propagated exclusion in the past. This means that there is no room for racism, castism or even distinction on the basis of linguistic handicap. Consequently, there is a need to acknowledge the fact that everyone is born equal and no one has the right to deny them opportunities just because they think that they are different from them. Yet, Rani's husband who belongs to the modern times seems to turn a blind eye towards his duties towards his wife. At the same time, he displays indifference towards her needs. It is Karnad, who points out the injustice being meted out to her and brings in the character of Naga to expose her husband's treachery while protecting her innocent behaviour by manipulating truth through the usage of language.

One important podium where inclusion can be inculcated is the classroom. Here, children can learn to accept children from other cultures as a part of society. It thus becomes a stepping stone to change management and children are better equipped to handle differences in the future. Part of the reason why problems like racism exist is because adults did not get the opportunity to interact with people who were different from them at a young

age. Inclusion may therefore prevent future cases of hate crimes and other societal wrongs. The teacher therefore finds herself empowered as a role model in society, entrusted with the task of inculcating such positive virtues in the children they are working with. Naturally then the teacher must guard against misconceptions, for misconceptions in the teacher, if any, would percolate down to the children they are working with. In multicultural classrooms, teachers have the opportunity to embrace and accept the individual differences among members of society. After all, inclusive education is also founded on the principle that real education occurs when relationships are created. But, Indian Society seems to be still unable to embrace this. Even Society still remains addicted to practices that are chauvinistic. Rani's parents doted on her but did not seem to consider it important to check the virtues of the groom before marrying her off. Where culture is strong, people perceive the rightness of things before doing anything. But, one must be wary of the phenomenon of 'groupthink'. 'Groupthink' was described by Irving L. Janis as "...a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage when they are deeply involved in a cohesive ingroup, when members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternatives of action."⁷ Thus, groupthink may induce a culture of unwillingness to challenge the trends of thought of the elite culture. In fact, group think is a common phenomenon. We see it manifested many a times in different types of groups. Members that go against the norm are not looked upon kindly and are considered as trouble makers. This could possibly be at the heart of Rani's parents' behaviour.

So, they have to be encouraged to rise above an expectation that some individuals wield larger amounts of power than others and reflect the view that all people should have equal rights. They have to balance individualism with collectivism and also traditionally upheld male and female values with present times and needs. With a long-term orientation, they must learn to stop blaming other cultures to camouflage their personal

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inadequacies. Both, ghetto formation and complacency must not only be avoided, but also replaced by a culture of accepting the society as an extension of their individual selves. Thus, it assumes relevance to adopt the three general types of cultures reflected in Robert A. Cooke's Organizational Culture Inventory: Constructive Cultures, in which members are encouraged to interact with people and approach tasks in ways that help them meet their higher-order satisfaction needs, Passive/Defensive Cultures, in which members believe they must interact with people in ways that will not threaten their own security and Aggressive/Defensive Cultures, in which members are expected to approach tasks in forceful ways to protect their status and security. While in the initial phase of married life, Rani shows characteristic Passive culture, Naga's attempts at reinforcing her confidence is reminiscent of Aggressive culture. Thus, Constructive Cultures would then perhaps be the balance between the other two cultures for they nurture positive individual qualities like optimism, high levels of motivation and satisfaction which in turn are consistent with the societal objectives of empowerment and progress.

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