

# Comparative study of Macbeth by Shakespeare and Nagamandala by Girish Karnad

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### **Introduction**

In a class of fifty students a question was asked, who knows John Keats, around twenty students raised their hands, next was who knows Robert Frost, around thirteen hands were seen in the air, the last was who knows Shakespeare and the whole class raised their hands with enthusiasm. The pride that glows in their face says it all. Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth did create a big impact on people's life

William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet, and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in

London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, at age 49, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, which has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, and religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories, and these are regarded as some of the best work ever produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth, considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, however, John Heminges and Henry Condell, two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published a more definitive text known as the First Folio, a posthumous collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's. It was prefaced with a poem by Ben Jonson, in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time".

In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works have been repeatedly adapted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular, and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

Girish Karnad is an eminent playwright, actor, screenwriter, and movie director in Kannada. During the 1960s, Girish Karnad rose to prominence as the one of the eminent playwrights in Kannada; and he introduced a new wave of plays that were entirely different.

Girish Karnad revolutionized Kannada writing in the same way as Badal Sarkar, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar who made significant contributions to Bengali, Hindi and Marathi plays. He won several awards during the course of his career as a playwright.

Girish Karnad created beautiful compositions by incorporating historical and mythological references, and he translated his plays into English too. His plays were adapted and directed by

eminent playwrights and directors like B.V Karanth, EbrahimAlkazi, Prasanna, AlyquePadamsee, SatyadevDubey, Arvind Gaur, ShyamanandJalan, Vijaya Mehta, and AmalAllana.

The greatness of Girish Karnad lies the success on the stage as well as among the readers. The use of folk elements is one of the reasons behind Karnad's success as a playwright. Iyengar, commenting on the dramatic technique of Karnad, says :  
“In all his three plays – be the theme historical, mythical or legendary, Karnad's approach is 'modern', and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouement.”

#### Summary- Macbeth by Shakespeare.

Macbeth is set in medieval Scotland and partly based on a true historical account, Macbeth charts the bloody rise to power and tragic downfall of the warrior Macbeth. Already a successful soldier in the army of King Duncan, Macbeth is informed by Three Witches that he is to become king. As part of the same prophecy, the Witches predict that future Scottish kings will be descended not from Macbeth but from his fellow army captain, Banquo. Although initially prepared to wait for Fate to take its course, Macbeth is stung by ambition and confusion when King Duncan nominates his son Malcolm as his heir.

Returning to his castle, Macbeth allows himself to be persuaded and directed by his ambitious wife, who realizes that regicide ,the murder of the king is the quickest way to achieve the destiny that her husband has been promised. A perfect opportunity presents itself when King Duncan pays a royal visit to Macbeth's castle. At first Macbeth is loath to commit a crime that he knows will invite judgment, if not on earth then in heaven. Once more, however, his wife prevails upon him. Following an evening of revelry, Lady Macbeth drugs the guards of the king's bedchamber; then, at a given signal, Macbeth, although filled with misgivings, ascends to the king's room and murders him while he sleeps. Haunted by what he has done, Macbeth is once more reprimanded by his wife, whose inner strength seems only to have been increased by the treacherous killing. Suddenly, both are alarmed by a loud knocking at the castle door.

When the drunken porter of Macbeth's castle finally responds to the noise, he opens the door to Macduff, a loyal follower of the king, who has been asked to awake Duncan in preparation for the return journey. Macbeth indicates the location of the king's room, and Macduff discovers the body. When the murder is revealed, Macbeth swiftly kills the prime witnesses, the sleepy guards of the king's bedchamber, and Lady Macbeth faints. The assembled lords of Scotland, including Macbeth, swear to avenge the murder. With suspicion heavy in the air, the king's two sons flee the country, Donalbain to Ireland and Malcolm to raise an army in England.

Macbeth is duly proclaimed the new king of Scotland, but recalling the Witches' second prophecy, he arranges the murder of his fellow soldier Banquo and his son Fleance, both of whom represent a threat to his kingship according to the Witches' prophecy. The hired murderers kill Banquo but mistakenly allow Fleance to escape. At a celebratory banquet that night, Macbeth is thrown into a state of horror when the ghost of the murdered Banquo appears at the dining table. Again, his wife tries to strengthen Macbeth, but the strain is clearly beginning to show.

The following day, Macbeth returns to the same Witches who initially foretold his destiny. This time, the Witches not only confirm that the sons of Banquo will rule in Scotland, but they also add a new prophecy: Macbeth will be invincible in battle until the time when the forest of Birnam moves towards his stronghold at Dunsinane and until he meets an enemy "not born of woman." Dismissing both of these predictions as nonsense, Macbeth prepares for invasion.

When he is told that Macduff has deserted him, Macbeth begins the final stage of his tragic descent. His first move is the destruction of Macduff's wife and children. In England, Macduff receives the news at the very moment that he swears his allegiance to the young Malcolm. Malcolm persuades him that the murder of his family should act as the spur to revenge.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, Lady Macbeth has been taken ill: She walks in her sleep and seems to recall, in fragmentary memories, the details of the murder. Now, in a series of alternating scenes, the action of the play moves rapidly between the advancing army of Malcolm and the defensive preparations of Macbeth. When Malcolm's army disguise themselves with sawn-off branches, Macbeth sees what appears to be a wood moving towards his stronghold at Dunsinane. And

when he finally meets Macduff in single combat, his sworn enemy reveals that he came into the world by cesarean section; he was not, precisely speaking, "born of woman." On hearing this news, Macbeth rejects one final time the Witches' prophecy. With a loud cry, he launches himself at Macduff and is slain. In the final scene, Malcolm is crowned as the new king of Scotland, to the acclaim of all.

### Summary- Nagamandala

Naga-Mandala though based on folktale, it also evinces the influence of western playwright Bertold Brecht and Jean Anouilh who delved into classical stories of other cultures and retold them in western context. Although the folk theatre derives its energy from traditional values, it also has the capacity to question them. It thus simultaneously presents alternative points of view and attitudes to the cultural problems. It is a play within a play, Brechtian theatre technique, that starts with a man cursed by a sage, for his terrible tales that put people to sleep uncomfortably in their chair, that for a night within thirty days time he has to stay awake, the man tried but couldn't, the last night he wanders around as to not fall asleep and run into a ruined temple, he sets up camp and tried to stay awake, he then hears noises and as he looked around he saw lamps coming out of the houses and also a lady in a sari came along, they represent a story and a song and convinced the man to hear the story and tell it to someone else. Thus it began. As a young girl Rani, 'the queen of the long tresses', is married to cruel and indifferent Appanna, who locks her in his house and visits her only at midday for lunch. Kappanna, a young man in twenties informs blind Kurudavva that he has been severely upset ever since he came to know that Appanna has a concubine. Blind Kurudavva, a friend of appanna's mother, feels Rani's superb beauty with her fingers and exclaims: 'Ayyo! How beautiful you are. Ears like hibiscus. Skin like young mango leaves. Lips like rolls of silk. How can that Appanna gallivant around leaving such loveliness wasting away at home'. She gives Rani a magical root to be made into paste and added to a curry. She advises Rani to feed it to her husband and watch the result. This advises Kurudavva' will make Appanna fall in love with her once she smells he won't go sniffing after that bitch. He will make you a wife instantly. But when Rani adds the paste, the curry turns into horrible red color. Scared Rani pours it into an anti-hill. Naga, who partakes the curry, falls in love with Rani and visits her every night assuming Appanna's form. Rani fails to understand how the cruel husband who visits her only midday has been transformed into a

sensuous lover at night.  
 Rani becomes pregnant. Appanna accuses her of adultery and insults her in front of the village elders. To prove her innocence Rani accepts the snake ordeal and puts her hands into the snake pit. When she pulls the snake out it, binds itself around her and does not bite. She is proclaimed to be a goddess. Appanna seeks her pardon and lives happily with her and the baby. The man does not accept such an ending, He wants the story to go on so that he can keep awake until it is dawn. So, he asks about Appanna, Rani and the Naga. The story prolongs the tales. Naga, who seeks Rani happily sleeping in the arms of her husband, strangles himself in her hair. It is here that one of the flames demands a happier ending .At this is the man amends the story .The Naga does not commit suicide. Alive snake falls out of Rani's hair and lies writhing on the floor. Appanna wants to kill it but Rani silently conceals it in her dark and dense tresses saying: The hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, forever.

### Statement of Purpose

A comparative study on similarities between Macbeth and Nagamandala.

There are many similarities between Shakespeare and Girish Karnad, one being that both are not religious in their writings. Most of Shakespeare's plays have no religious attachment to it, same goes with Girish Karnad. However, this paper will focus mainly on three aspects, Supernatural elements, Role of women and the class study.

The supernatural elements include The three witches, the Ghost of Banquo from Macbeth by Shakespeare, and The flames, the song, the snake from Nagamandala by Girish Karnad.

Role of women, giving the limelight to the protagonist of the play Lady Macbeth and the other Rani.

Class study, Shakespeare inability to write about common man and Girish Karnad's image of India through his plays.

“Someone needs to tell those tales. When the battles are fought and won and lost, when the pirates find their treasures and the dragons eat their foes for breakfast with a nice cup of Lapsangsouchong, someone needs to tell their bits of overlapping narrative. There's magic in that. It's in the listener, and for each and every ear it will be different, and it will affect them in ways they can never predict. From the mundane to the profound. You may tell a tale that takes up residence in someone's soul, becomes their blood and self and purpose. That tale will move them and drive them and who knows what they might do because of it, because of your words. That is your role, your gift. Your sister may be able to see the future, but you yourself can shape it, boy. Do not forget that... there are many kinds of magic, after all.” — Erin Morgenstern, *The Night Circus*

One striking element that both *Macbeth* and *Nagamandala* have is how the existence of the supernatural elements played a crucial role in both these plays. They both symbolize society differently based on the background they both belong into. The Three witches in *Macbeth* which most critics say they symbolizes the past, present and the future, however may stand corrected where some argues that they represent an ‘oracle’ a Greek myth God, who talks about the future and some say they symbolize the church, where one will be judge of the past, the present and how you remain or change your course in the future, like how the story familiar to “James, the king that ruled Scotland during the course of the play, he had inherited the throne of Scotland through his ancestors Banquo and Fleance, and the story of Duncan's murder was well known. The real Macbeth reigned in Scotland from 1040 to 1057. He killed his predecessor Duncan I, and was in turn killed by Duncan's son Malcolm III. Events such as these were not uncommon in the 'barbaric' feudal Scotland of the eleventh century. Of the fourteen kings who reigned between 943 and 1097, ten were murdered..” These three witches sets the tone of the play entirely, their dark entity gives the reader a chilly atmosphere and a cringe image of how the play would follow. One would agree that the play though has its victorious moment has been overshadowed by the scene of the witches.

On the other hand Girish Karnad uses the supernatural elements on a whole different level, readers would read and expect easy interpretations of the elements like that of the flames representing the gossip monger of society but it's deeper than that. Karnad often felt that Folk art has a great impact on the modern theatre. The Myth of Cobra reinstates the fact that modern man

cannot have one identity and every choice gives way to certain experiences and at times at the cost of penalty. **Karnad had once observed “We keep acrobating between the tradition and the modern, perhaps we could not hit upon a form that balances”- true to life, nation and personal idiosyncrasies.** The cobra myth provides the playwright with an opportunity to use mask creating a complex metaphor and demarcating the world of desire, enunciated libidos and by the use of them he brings out the ambivalence between natural and supernatural. . Thus he draws the contours of contemporary reality within the confines of his mythical canvas.

“Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade since it consists principally of dealings with men.”  
— Joseph Conrad

Shakespeare and Karnad lived in an era where women are not given much importance, instead they were highly criticized. In England, a woman should marry a well to do man in order for a life to be stable and supported throughout, if she did something wrong she’s not allowed to speak her mind. Unfortunately, while England evolved, India still has a highly dominant patriarchal system where the women have no say whatsoever.

However strong women personalities are seen in both the plays, Shakespeare beautifully portrayed the authoritarian elements embedded in Lady Macbeth, who critics believe to be The modern Eve. As far as the feminist world is concern, ‘Eve’ has always been accused of being the temptress and Adam the innocent one. However, Shakespeare depicts Lady Macbeth in the same way, but there’s something about Lady Macbeth that makes people fall for her. It may be her bravery of such evil thoughts, that too to expect from a woman in the era of the play, or the personality that embraces her coldly giving the readers a sense of heroism. Lady Macbeth controlled Macbeth from the beginning, she was able to plan King Duncan’s death on such notice and her mask of loyalty towards him went unnoticed. She took care of the deed when Macbeth could go through and played the most convincing act when the chaos of the murder came into light. Macbeth as portrayed by Shakespeare is a coward who relied on his wife capabilities, he couldn’t have a thought of his own and even though he was able to do a few things quite normally and alone, there’s always a need to consult others first, for instance, when Lady Macbeth killed herself, he couldn’t make decisions in the right mind, he had to consult the

witches for support. Lady Macbeth play a very important role in the play, manipulating Macbeth's thought and left him battling on his own. Even though Lady Macbeth becomes mad in the latter of the play, her fiend personality rings throughout the play and she later made the readers sympathize with her condition.

As we all know, Shakespeare has no female actor, it is astonishing as how he presented the character of Lady Macbeth with an image of a man performing the role, yet the strong personality of Lady Macbeth is not tampered with the thought of how the groundlings and the noble men would take it.

Rani as portrayed by Girish Karnad on the other hand is a pure symbol of purity and love. Her state of life makes the reader fall for her goodness and loyalty towards Appana. If the play was set on the 21<sup>st</sup> century, surely Rani would have been given the chance to challenge her husband or even speak up of his double role in the night and day. But she never said a word, why her husband is nice to her only in the night and during the day he hardly said a word. All hell broke loose when Rani announced she's pregnant which got Appana to think how the impossible happened when he had never touched her. The elders were gathered and Rani was given a task where she chose to take a cobra out of the ant hill and speak the truth and if indeed it is true the snake would leave her alone. And so she announced that there were only two body she did touch her whole life, Appana's and the snake she's holding, which led to another turn of event, the snake coiled up her neck and never did hurt her, the elders were astonished and bowed down and regarded Rani, Worthy of Worship. Appana was suggested to turn his ways and take care of his wife which he did so indeed. Rani turned from being a nobody to a Goddess, praised by her husband and the village. Girish gave Rani a very sad beginning, pertaining to the evil of child marriage but later turned the table around giving Rani the spotlight in the village.

“When I look at a person, I see a person - not a rank, not a class, not a title.” — Criss Jami, Killosophy

One other element that through personal re-reading has brought about is the reflection of society's consciousness. Shakespeare wrote extensively on Aristocrats and his characters always bear a noble resemblance, is he trying to fit into society as a noble man or is he hiding England's true nature through his plays. As of today, we know England is one of the countries that have

been known of its racist dominance, to name a few works that the British has been targeted upon, Australia by A. D. Hope, The heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, The trilogy, Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease and Arrow of the God. Shakespeare is what we call in colloquial terms a people pleaser, however he writes about the noble men and their catharsis and hamartia.

One who reads a few of Shakespeare's great plays and then the meager story of his life is generally filled with a vague wonder. How an unknown country boy, poor and poorly educated according to the standards of his age, who arrives at the great city of London and goes to work at odd jobs in a theatre. With this menial work he rose to become one of the most notable dramatist and has been given an undying glory to the age, 'The Age of Elizabeth'. He wrote plays of Kings and clowns, of gentlemen, of heroes and of noble women. One would expect him a man of a past like his would portray life and its claws of venture, yet he wrote about the noble men and women, catering to the Higher standard of Class.

On the other hand Girish Karnad wrote plays with liberal humanist ideas. He sees the topic of his dramas and developing them, casting them in the crucible of his imaginative self and experienced vision. He goes to that generation which came out at the threshold of post-colonial India. It was that generation which was trapped by the perils of the cultural past of the country equally well as the colonial past. **In a typically reactionary post-colonial situation, to write in the terminology of the colonial ruler-'English' in newly Independent India was seen as politically incorrect. And there lies the question of mimicry, adopting and adapting the speech, language of the colonizers to create an Indian drama. India that time was on her way towards the discovery of her 'self', her identity.**

He returned the gaze, as a vehicle of resistance and gave Indian dramas, a form, and an identity that is truly Indian. Karnad was profoundly influenced by Shakespeare, G.B. Shaw and Ibsen. And the influence of Kannada drama stayed with him. But primarily it was his childhood as he observes “, **in a small town in Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by troupes of professional actors called natal companies which toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semi-permanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and illuminated by petromax lamps. Once the harvest was over, I went with the servants to sit up nights watching the more traditional**

**Yakshagana performances. The stage, a platform with a black curtain, was erected in the open air and lit by torches. By the time I was in my early teens, the natak companies had ceased to function and Yakshagana had begun to seem quaint, even silly, to me. Soon we moved to a big city. This city had a college and electricity, but no professional theatre. –** (Please note, his introduction on the three plays.) Inspiration arrives to him from numerous social movements and personal chambers of private pain. For Karnad, it was the striking throbbing of identity crisis, not merely of the Neo-Indian search for individualism, but a personal search of distinctiveness amidst the angst ridden life he led. And afterwards, the story seemed like a deadbolt from the blue to him.

### **Conclusion**

Once, someone told me that the book in one's hand is not constructed yet, its textual meaning is produced by a reader. Shakespeare to most of us is a great playwright, poet, to some he's a demoralizing noble man who's sexist in nature and a little racist. But he contributed a large amount of his life to the world of literature. He was able to connect with the modern world as much as he was acclaim in his years. Romeo and Juliet stands to be his great love story, but do we ever wonder that how young they were when they fell in love and their strategies to be together and fight for each other is beyond their age. We are so blinded by all this only because his play brings about social, emotional and physical connection with the reader.

Girish Karnad, the famous playwright from the southern parts of India had done the world a great deal in his attempt to popularize the long gone idea of oral story telling. The usage of mythological elements in his plays allowed vivid imaginations of the present generation to connect with the era of the play.

The empowerment of women in both these play is astonishing considering the age it was written, the present generation was able to appreciate the rise of women in society due to their prior knowledge of women and their status in society.

The supernatural elements plays with human mind, adding to the imaginative world that creates a pathway for viewers to travel through time and also it give an effect that affects the audience.

Shakespeare and Girish karnad plays their music differently, one attempts to soothe the higher class in society while the other offers play facts about a struggling country that is brain washed by superstitions, poverty, modernism and dominant patriarchal system.

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