



# Religious but Adulterous Queen in *Bali: The Sacrifice*

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## Abstract:

Girish Karnad, the great Kannada playwright, lived in Sirsi, a small town in Dharwar. At that time myths were very much in the air. *Bali : The Sacrifice* is based on the myth of cock of dough. Karnad took the inspiration to write the play from *Yashodhara charite*, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Kannada epic, which can further be traced back to two Sanskrit epics of 11<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. The play first appeared in 1980 in Kannada with the title *Hittina Hunja*. B.V. Karanth and Satyadev Dubey contributed for its successful production in Kannada and Hindi and later on Prema Karanth and Lankesh tried their hand in its production. Karnad reworked on it and the English version of the play appeared in 2002 for a production at the Leicester Haymarket Theatre in England and it gets published in 2004. Renowned actor Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah played the lead roles of the King and the Queen. Karnad admits that the myth of Cock of Dough comes in his mind during his teenage. A class conflict is also highlighted in the play. The play centres round four major characters in the play—The King, The Queen, The Queen Mother and The Mahout. The Queen, despite being a staunch follower of Jainism, commits adultery with a low caste mahout. She is bold enough to persuade the King to change the religion. She keeps both the male characters—the king and the mahout in dark till the end of the play.

Keywords: Myth, epic, cock, dough.

In *Bali: The Sacrifice*, a Hindu king is married to a Jain girl named Amritamati. After marriage the Jain queen persuades the Hindu king to change his religion to become a Jain by caste. King's mother is quite unhappy with this conversion. Then, there arises ideological differences between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. The Queen Mother is pole apart from the Queen. She is a typical orthodox lady who supports animal sacrifice to please the God to fulfil her wish. But the Queen is totally against violence. The king gets caught up in the conflict between the two of them. The royal couple- the king and the queen- remains childless for fifteen years. The Queen mother forces her son for animal sacrifice before the God to fulfil the wish of a child. But the Queen, who is a Jain by caste, opposes animal sacrifice because it is not agreeable in the Jain religion to do violence. In the play a culture difference is also seen between the Hindu and the Jain religion. The king gets sandwiched between the two religions. The Queen is quite dominant and she prevents the king to do the animal sacrifice for getting a child. On the other hand the Queen Mother insists him to do animal sacrifice.

One night the royal couple were sleeping and suddenly the Queen hears a melodious song. She immediately gets attracted towards the voice and goes out in search of the singer. She falls in love with that beautiful voice. She finds the man in the inner sanctum and thanks him for the beautiful and soothing voice. The king also wakes up and senses something wrong. He comes out and moves around in his garden in worry. Suddenly the Queen Mother comes there with a silver tray in her hand. She enquires him of his worry. The king doesn't want to tell her the truth. So he lies to her that he has seen a bad dream. But finally he reveals the truth to her. He does not know what to do. He tells the Queen Mother that "the king sits alone outside on the steps racked by sighs while the Queen is trapped in her lover's thighs."<sup>190</sup> She gets furious to hear all this. She insists the king to do the sacrifice of hundred sheep but the king denies doing so because he has adopted Jainism that does not allow violence. She persuades him to do so. She says if you don't do the sacrifice I'll kill myself.

The Queen Mother suggests him another kind of sacrifice. She asks him to do the sacrifice with a cock made of dough. This is the unique way to avoid violence. Both of them agrees and compromise with each other. "The Queen Mother, with a nod of her head, signals to him to go ahead. He takes the sword from the tray, ties it round his belt, picks up the torch and walks up the steps."<sup>201</sup> The Queen who is unable to bear the social pressure to give the heir to the royal family commits adultery with an

ugly looking man, a Mahout or an elephant keeper. She says to him: “Your looks don’t matter to me. I came here because I heard you sing. You have a heavenly voice.”<sup>194</sup> She very well knows the consequences of meeting with the mahout secretly inside the sanctum. As she says: “if we get caught together here, it won’t be pleasant for either of us.”<sup>196</sup>

The Queen does not even reveal her identity to the mahout. When the mahout enquires her name she replies: “Why do you want my name?”<sup>191</sup> She says to mahout: “It’s been lovely meeting you. Every minute of it. And you’re ruining it.”<sup>192</sup> Even though she hits him badly with her long nails but she madly loves him for his melodious voice. The Mahout says: “I like everything about bed. Everything. That’s why I am good. I am good. Aren’t I?...Better than your husband?”<sup>194</sup> The Queen tries to escape from there but the Mahout does not allow her to go. “There is a scuffle. He drags her back and literally throws her into a corner. She moans in pain.”<sup>192</sup>

In the modern era when everyone talks of gender equality Karnad deals with the theme of gender inequality in the contemporary society. Feminine adultery is seen throughout the play that is bound by the societal norms. Karnad also talks about the theme of alienation in the play. The Mahout says in a defensive tone: “I live alone, if that’s what you mean. That’s all right by me.”<sup>197</sup> At this the Queen replied: “That’s why you are holding me prisoner. You don’t want to know my name. You want someone to talk to.”<sup>197</sup> When the Queen and the Mahout are indulging in love making the king knocks at the door of the sanctum. The king speaks in a furious tone: “You bastard, get the hell out of here. Or else...I’ll bash your brains out....Stamp you into mud...”<sup>202</sup> Then the Mahout opens the door to hit the King. He says: “I’ll kill the rascals a taste of my stick...”<sup>202</sup> But instead of hitting the king he freezes in fear. Then the King enters the inner sanctum and calls his Queen by her name. At that time the Mahout comes to know that this lady is a Queen. He apologizes to the king and says: “We didn’t do anything, sir. I swear to you. I sang...she listened... Her Majesty was about to go back soon...”<sup>203</sup> He further says to him: “I swear to you I won’t breathe a word of this to anyone. Who’ll believe me anyway? They’ll laugh at me...”<sup>204</sup> In the end the king agrees to do the sacrifice. When the king lifts the sword to slash the Mahout then suddenly he reminds that he is Jain now who does not indulge in violence. He immediately slides back his sword and at this the Mahout takes a sigh of relief. Now the Queen Mother

asks him to do the sacrifice of the cock of dough. The Queen stops him from doing so. It's terrified scene. The cock suddenly becomes alive and the play ends.

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