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CONTENTS

1. Foregrounding the Feminine Psyche: Subaltern Aesthetics in Girish Karnad's
Hayavadana and *Nāga-Mandala*
B. N. Vanishree and A. S. Dasan
2. Nadine Gordimer: The Voice against the Apartheid
Fr. V. Gilbert Camillus, S. J.
3. Social Media for Higher Education
Fr. Alphonse Manickam, S.J.
4. Teaching English in India
Deepti Gupta
5. The Dynamics of Organisational Culture and Employee Performance
P. Lourdes Poobala Rayen and M. Arumugam
6. The Emergence of Third Space: A Reading of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's
The Mistress of Spices from Diasporic Perspective
R. Princee
7. Neil Simon's *Lost in Yonkers*: A Synthesis of Expressionistic and Realistic Modes
B. Soundary
8. Seeds of Consciousness: An Eco-critical Reading of the Nature Parables of Jesus
P. Mary Vidya Porselvi
9. பலதேவன் வழிபாடு
முனைவர். சு. வேங்கடராமன்
10. அநாகரீக மக்கள் திரள்
முனைவர். சூ. ஜா. இதயராஜா
11. "Rent Seeking" practices in Academic Administration: A case analysis
S. Pushparaj

**Foregrounding the Feminine Psyche:
Subaltern Aesthetics in Girish Karnad's
Hayavadana and *Nāga-Mandala***

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Girish Karnad, one of the prominent contemporary Indian dramatists, along with Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar, is a socially conscious and sensitive writer whose humanistic worldview hovers around redefining the human quest for identity. Foregrounding the female subjectivity as agency of questing for identity against the odds of hegemonic patriarchy is part of his artistic representation of life. His representation of the feminine psyche in his plays, *Hayavadana* (1971) and *Nāga-Mandala* (1990), contrapuntally incorporates reality and desire-images vis-à-vis the psychic aspects of his female characters juxtaposing their sense of alienation, humiliation, and muffled voice with their desire and dream-image of self-expression, gender equity and justice. Their desired dream-imaging questions and dismantles the assumed universality of male values and foregrounds gender equity and justice as paramount values.

This paper is an attempt to capture the subaltern feminine subtleties ingrained in the two plays, *Hayavadana* and *Nāga-Mandala*, vis-à-vis the characterization of Padmini of *Hayavadana* and Rani of *Nāga-Mandala*. It explores and examines how Karnad posits the feminine creative principle as 'a cultural idea' and how the central female characters in the two plays are comfortable with their femininity gradually unveiling their personality as agencies of promoting gender justice and equality of human beings. The main plots of these two plays have their exterior levels such as the story of *Hayavadana*, the man with a horse' symbolizing a fragmented identity in the first play with reference to the Ganesha myth, and the folktales of varied hues ingrained within the central story of the second play. This paper refers to the exterior levels only to the extent necessary. The focus is on what the central plots connote within their interior entirety vis-à-vis the female quest for identity in the contemporaneous context. The authors of this paper assume that readers of this paper have