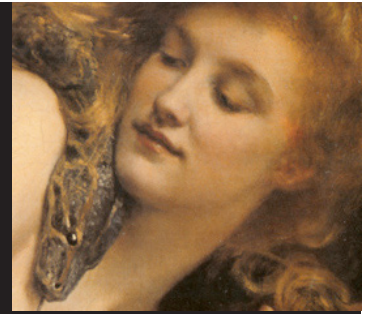


THE *Rogue* THEATRE

Nāga Mandala

(Play with a Cobra)

by Girish Karnad



In Rehearsal at the Rogue

A story filled with magic, mysticism and a cobra's love, woven from two Indian folk tales.

September 9-26, 2010

Production Sponsor: Nancy Reeder

About the Playwright: Girish Karnad

Girish Karnad is an Indian actor, director and playwright whose plays exemplify the Theatre of Roots movement that developed after India gained its independence. The movement sought to develop a theatre not based solely on European models; instead, integrating traditional Indian performance into modern Indian drama. To Karnad, the goal of Theatre of Roots “was not to find and reuse forms that had worked successfully in some other cultural context. The hope, rather, was to discover whether there was a structure of expectations—and conventions—about entertainment underlying these forms from which one could learn.”



Karnad combines the lush staging of traditional Indian folk performance with aspects of Western theatre to present “truly Indian themes in a modernist style.” While some of Karnad’s plays adapt Western stories and ideas to Indian culture, *Nāga Mandala*, his most-produced play, is rooted in an Indian folktale about a woman’s love for a cobra. *Nāga Mandala* is one of the best examples of the blending of myths and history with contemporary relevance in Indian Theatre of Roots. *Nāga Mandala* transcends the “charming folktale” at its core, and according to playwright Mahesh Dattani, “becomes a statement on the condition of women in our society.”

Nāga: The Cobra in Indian Culture

In Sanskrit, *Nāga* refers most specifically to the King Cobra, but is often used to describe any snake. In the Sanskrit epic *The Mahabharata*, *nāgas* are portrayed somewhat ambiguously, “of virulent poison, great prowess and excess of strength”. This poisonous prowess points to the cautious reverence the Indian culture has for *nāgas* as representative of the gods and of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Some of the *nāgas* in both Buddhist and Hindu mythology can transform themselves into humans. In India, *nāgas* are associated with water, protecting springs, wells and rivers. They also are said to bring rain, but along with rain can come flooding and droughts. *Nāgas* traditionally strike when provoked—so often the environmental disasters associated with *nāgas* are attributed to humanity’s mistreatment of nature.

It is also believed that *nāgas* should not be harmed or killed, and that anyone who does so must perform a ritual to cleanse themselves and the community of the act. In some regions of Southern India, a cobra that is killed accidentally receives death rites like a human being.



The Mandala

The concentric design of the mandala carries significant weight in Indian culture. It is a manifestation of the connection between the spiritual and the physical planes. The mandala contains the essence of the universe.

The mandala design uses squares and circles as a “blueprint” not only of time and space, but of the connection between the earthly temple and the celestial home of the gods. The process of creating a mandala is in part an invocation of the gods, connecting the physical plane with the greater spiritual forces of the universe.

Carl Jung popularized the use of mandalas in the Western world in the first half of the twentieth century as a metaphor for the “wholeness of the self,” bringing the conscious and the unconscious mind into focus. For Jung, the mandala represented “the sensing of a center of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which is itself a source of energy.”

Mandalas often sanctify both temples and private dwellings. They are also traditionally used as an offering to a potential teacher when a student requests spiritual instruction. In these instances, the mandala, as a representation of the universe, also symbolizes the value of knowledge.



Want to know more about this production? Come to The Rogue Theatre for the first in a series of Open Talks about our season. Join members of the ensemble for a discussion on “Mythical Structure in Nāga Mandala”, Wednesday, September 1st, at 7:00 pm.



This season, The Rogue Theatre is launching this publication as part of our continuing commitment to foster a dialogue with our audience about the challenging, provocative, and complex ideas behind quality dramatic language and literature.

In Rehearsal At The Rogue
written and edited by:
Carrie J. Cole, Rogue’s resident dramaturg