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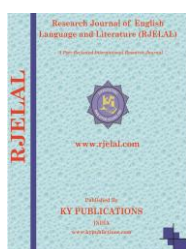


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REFLECTION OF MODERNITY IN GIRISH KARNAD'S "THE WEDDING ALBUM"

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad is a leading contemporary Indian English playwright who has given a new dimension to the literary world by converting simple folk themes and historical evidences into fine existential plays. Multiple influences have framed Karnad's mind as he came across literary scenes where there was a direct clash between Western and Indian Tradition. *Wedding Album* is an exceptional play of Karnad. He neither uses myth nor history as the base of the play. The present paper is an attempt to discuss the cultural transformation and influence of globalization on contemporary India. The play is a combination of conjugal, sexual, caste, class, attitudes of selfishness and sacrifice, obedience and authority, age-related behaviors, chastity and commerce, all integrated into the modern Hindu marriage institution. Karnad has masterfully woven all these threads into the theme of *Wedding Album* in a modern manner.

Keywords: Cultural Transformation, Marriage Institution, Existential, Tradition, Chastity.

The modern age has evidenced a great deal of socio – political changes in all spheres. It is an age brimming with complexities, puzzling and progressive thoughts. The age in which we stay is loaded with pressures and stained issues of life. It provides simply materialistic fulfillment at the expense of spiritual relief. Yearning for money, desire and reputation have made man crazy and he finds himself in solitude on the dull shore of incompleteness without any glimpse of life—providing water, suffocated and caught in his own ambitions battling with the question – "To be or not to be". Globalization and scientific research have damaged our cultural and moral values to a major extent and we are on the edge of 'Gone'. Existentialism, Lust, craving for money, women's emancipation, and liberation have been the topics of priority of modern writers, whereas Karnad exceeds expectations here by having the framework of mythology and history and looks over the problem

of an individual in the modern setting. In this manner he sustains our culture and history in literature and brings awareness in his readers about India's historical and cultural grandeur. Artistically he passes on the feeling of contemporary pressures by returning and diving into the past. His plays generally deal with the issues of skepticism, jealousy, isolation, frustration, despair, search for identity, craving for money and fame, and other modern issues like caste differences and position of women in a patriarchal world. Along these lines, it can be stated that his plays rely on the stores of dead past but discuss of modernity.

Wedding Album, the most recent play written by famous playwright Girish Karnad in 2009, is a comical and moving display that is profoundly revelatory about our India that we live in today. This play has already been staged at various venues and was translated by Karnad himself from Kannada into

English. According to the title's suggestion it deals with Indian arranged marriage. In Indian culture marriage is considered as one of the most sacred Sanskar in Hinduism. It is trusted that marriage isn't just the combination of two individuals or families, but it is a fusing of two souls. The system of marriage in India enlivens and fortifies the most distant or weak relations and relatives who join together to celebrate the wedding. According to Amrit Srinivasan, the play is a congregation of conjugal, sexual, caste, class, attitudes of selfishness and sacrifice, obedience and authority, age-related behaviors, chastity and commerce, all integrated to the modern Hindu marriage institution. Karnad has masterfully woven all these threads into the theme of *Wedding Album* in a modern manner.

Wedding Album displays the mixed feelings of condensed rationale of Karnataka based Saraswat Family. It is not simply about the Nadkarnis who are the representatives of a middle-class Hindu family but the theme is applicable to any caste, ideology and religion in India and this makes the play quite suitable in any context and makes it perfectly contemporary. To think rather diversely it is a mix of Indian Culture and technology driven modern culture. The dissipated personalities disclose the discontentment of human selves in the world of globalization. The agonizing of a few characters takes the play near to the concept of existentialism. The main characters of the play are- a daughter who stays abroad with her working husband, a brother who is serving as a software designer, a younger daughter happy to marry a suitable boy from the US whom she has never met, and then, obviously, there is the indulgent mother and the loyal cook. It is about a family which is well-educated, modern and liberal. Each frame shows its members frozen in a projection of decency, yet each figure has a two-fold image, with the shadow of a shrouded life. Though it is a hilarious spectacle, hopefully, it is both revealing and touching.

The play opens with the event of Vidula and Ashwin's marriage. Vidula is the chief female character of the play. She has known Ashwin just through video – conferencing, e-mails and photo – sharing. Incidentally, Vidula and Ashwin's marriage is an arranged marriage in the contemporary India

which is changing tremendously under the influence of several worldwide forces. In the play, one can observe an incorporation of postmodern technologies by a traditional social institution. Vidula ventures into a new built 'self' in the internet center, and also when she is with Ashwin, her would-be. We see a strain of tact in Vidula when we consider the opening scene of the play. Her brother Rohit is preparing a video of Vidula to be sent to Ashwin, who is in USA. He asks her to appear elegant and cheerful and give good expressions while capturing photos and shooting of video. Vidula opposes to this suggestion. She comments:

VIDULA. I am Vidula, Vidula Nadkarni. I am twenty- two. Twenty- two and a half, actually. I have done my BA in Geography. Passed my exams last year. I am not doing anything at the moment. Worked for travel agency for six months. I got bored. If I come to the US, will I need to work? I am really not very good at it. I am not glamorous, as you can see. I am not exceptional in any way. I don't want you to be disappointed later"

ROHIT (offscreen). Why don't you smile a bit? Look cheerful....

ROHIT (offscreen). But don't go out of your way to make yourself unattractive. (Karnad: 2009, 6).

Vidula's disdain and anxiety appears to be clear in the above dialogue. She needs to be sincere to Ashwin by telling him the fact that she isn't fabulous in any way. She isn't excellent in any capacity and don't need him to be dissatisfied later. Furthermore, she objects to re-shoot later, regardless of request by her dear brother who appears to be totally thinking about his sister, the most regular image of any Indian household. Vidula's brother is so excited while Vidula is infuriated. In her enagement, she continues telling the genuine family realities while Rohit shoots, she giggles in the middle by cracking jokes to comfort herself. But when she reveals to a few realities identified with family truths Rohit differs inquiring as to whether she is endeavoring to inspire him or frighten him away. But Vidula is firm to tell the realities to her life partner. It has been a

great obscenity of the marriage system that realities are never told by either sides or if at all they are told, they are not acknowledged by either sides and this prompts the settlement of marriage dependent on exposed falseness which results into a despondent marital life after marriage. If we keep aside the humor part in Vidula's dialogues it is a genuine attempt to tell the truth about herself to the would-be husband.

Vidula herself is not aware of the potential outcomes within her. She gives off an impression of being unmindful of how exciting she can be on occasion, as later showed in the café episode. Everybody considers Vidula to be shy and submissive, however in the internet center when she is attacked by the so-called guardians of Hindu culture, she responds in an aggressive way, shouting and threatening her attackers. Vidula clearly comprehends how a woman is treated in a conventional patriarchal Indian family before her marriage. All choices related to her are currently taken by her father and, later after marriage the role of the master is given to her husband who would take all decisions about her life. Vidula comments about Ashwin that he can do whatever he wishes with me. Her sister Hema also discusses her experiences in her married life where her husband takes all the decisions pertaining to her. Hema is never allowed to utilize her ability and education and remains a housewife, continuously stressed and worried about her children and home. She is quite neglected by her husband and her married life is so dull that she is delighted when Vivan, a boy even younger to her son flirts and shows an interest in her.

The play starts with the Nadkarni's engaged in arranging the auspicious wedding event of their dear Vidula. The enthusiasm of the Nadkarni mother is similar to any bride's mother in India. The Indian marriage system and the realities and myths concerned with the marriage event are efficiently revealed through the dialogues of Vidula's mother with different characters like her elder daughter Hema, her husband, son Rohit and the younger daughter Vidula. Marriage is seen as the best opportunity for a wide range of shopping's which are very much enjoyed by the Nadkarni family. The

selection of bridal garments, saris, garments of other family members, and relatives coming to the marriage and fun generated through these meetings are very common features of Indian marriages. The mother is stable about taking revenges upon her relatives who ill-treated her in their family marriages. She is prepared to settle the issues with the relatives who have been very easy-going and unfriendly towards her. The following dialogue between Vidula and her mother reveals such eagerness of the mother towards one of their relative:

VIDULA. This one for Indira Aunty, do you think? And that, perhaps for Mitrakka?

MOTHER. Such fine sari for Indira? She has never bothered to invite us home for a meal. Not once in nine years. (Karnad: 2009, 11)

The Nadkarni mother is a typical embodiment of selfless attitude and penance. Woman's struggle in the contemporary Indian society is to explore and safeguard her identity as wife, mother and most imperative of all as a human being. She at times might have expected to be liberated but she could not, because of her family commitments. To read the mother's emotional and mental make up one need to have a profound insight into her psychological authenticity. A very different form of mother-daughter relationship is seen through mother and Hema's retaliate behavior, which is one of the peculiar features of mother-daughter relationship in our Indian context. The biases and egos of the mother-daughter relationship are vividly seen through mother and Hema. This relationship has taken unpredictable shape, the reason being one-sided treatment given to Hema from her childhood days which came to the crest in her marriage according to her.

Ashwin lives in US and he relishes the culture of US but as far as marriage is concerned he wishes to wed an Indian girl. Despite the fact that he is modern and an NRI, he is confident that still Indian girls possess all the good qualities and sanskars of girl, daughter, wife and mother. He believes that American culture is inferior to Indian culture in the event of marriage and family. He

expects Vidula to be a meek and subservient housewife who will perform her duties without violating the set norms of society. He thinks that she will not expect any appreciation or without thinking of her own career, life or economic freedom.

The wedding is meant to unite all the family however sometimes the hostility of the relation also comes forward. Hema, for instance, has always opined that she is not loved by her parents compared to Vidula and Rohit. She recollects that in her childhood when her father got transferred, they did not take Hema along but left her along with the relatives. She also claims that her parents did not spend more money on her wedding. She envies the pompous celebrations being made for Vidula's wedding. The discussion later furthers to the printing of invitation cards, the selection of Wedding Hall and the expenses for that. All family members are utterly anxious about their role to be played at the time of Wedding, but nobody is bothered about the internal pressure of Vidula who is going to be a bride. Her bridal stress is not understood by anybody. Vidu's Father is worried about the huge advance given to the Wedding Hall. Rohit guarantees about not losing that. Vidula counters to that:

VIDU. Is that what we are worried about? For goodness sake. I can't sleep at night. I sit up suddenly in the middle of the night, Shivering. It's like having ice water poured into my entrails (Karnad: 2009, 26).

Vidula's disdain shows that her family members do not possess an attitude of understanding towards her bridal inhibitions. Her father and mother feel that, they could not plan Hema's wedding in a grandeur way as she was in a hurry to get married. Her father even draws out a list of expenses aroused on the wedding, which is prepared accurately by Ramdas. He speaks affectionately about his brother Ramdas whom he feels was very splendid, but mother discloses to him that Ramdas hated him in spite of his affectionate concern for him:

You go on, Ramdas, Ramdas. About your brotherly love. Helping him out. But have you ever wondered what he thought of you? He hated you for it . . . he was an

ungrateful . . . jealous . . . (Karnad: 2009, 74).

Vidula's obsession with technology is clearly seen from her use of Internet. She is like the rest of the youth of the modern world who has become a fiend to Internet. When she is asked about the misuse of internet by her sister Hema she misleads her by saying that she listens the preaching's of Swami Ananga in the internet café. However, Rohit knows she enjoys by playing video games there. When her original self is revealed in the Internet café, she outbursts in a strange manner. Every individual in this universe have a secret self like that of Vidula. There is no uncertainty about it, this self may be a blend of good and bad, but surely everyone possesses it. Vidula's hidden self is disclosed where it seems that she is obsessed by pornography. The girls in this modern world of globalization are occupied in all types of desires, love affairs and even pornography by forgetting the motive of their lives and ignoring to build up a good carrier by pursuing good education. There are ample opportunities for the girls like Vidula, but they are not in a state of mind to utilize these opportunities for their welfare and their family happiness. In contrast, Vidula converts her guilt at being found out into frantic rage screaming sexual harassment, to make her moral instructors flee from that place. She is clever enough to find herself using the name of swami to help continue with the work she does with pointless desire. The oppression she looks for in her secret, obscene world can after all be filled in as well through marriage with respect and higher reason.

Vivan character is out of many of the children's issues that the parents and the society are confronting today. Vivan is almost two years younger to Ketan, Hema's son and he is such an eccentric youngster who appears prematurely adult, and keeps busy reading all the sexual, sensual literature which have been restricted for being erotic. He used to borrow books from the Nadkarni family. Vivan is an outstanding student in his academics, a talented boy, a techno savvy but strangely a prematurely-adult grown child. After reading books like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and few similar books he starts loving Hema sensually and expresses the same to her through letters. He writes

those letters very secretly and places them deliberately into the books which he gives back to Hema after reading. One day, Vidula reads his letter given to Hema by mistake. She reads it, "Darling, you don't know how I desire to crush you in my arms..." She understands that the letter is sent by her brother-in-law, Hema's husband and becomes extremely happy that her sister still gets letters of this sort after fifteen years of her married life. Vivan has gone crazy after Hema whereas, Hema is not ready to have a look at the letters of Vivan. He threatens to disclose those letters before others.

VIVAN. Go ahead! I'll tell her I love you.
The moment I saw you the other day. I fell desperately in love,... (Karnad: 2009, 45)

Vivan, a teenager is completely beyond our forbearance, a nasty boy who intends to have sexy relation with Hema, a woman of his mother's age. This reveals the degradation of morals in the current generation. Excessive liberty and freedom to children often leads to an opinion that it's their life. At times, this might be an effect of inattention of parents towards their children. They went beyond the reach, from where it is quite difficult to bring them back. The parents are providing ultimate facilities to their kids completely not bothering of the fact how they are utilizing them. This is an expletive in today's advanced and globalized world. Technology would yield fruitful results if it is handled in a right way; otherwise the world is bound to be destroyed.

Rohits' character in the play gives us a glance at how the significance of money and position could make an individual tactful. He admires Isabel, but when the Sirur family wants him to wed their daughter Tapasya, he starts ignoring Isabel. They support him in his career and even help him for setting up his own firm. Rohit at first seems balanced, but however step by step gets attracted towards their riches and he yields in, discarding Isabel to persevere. Though, Rohit weds Tapasya but still he flirts Isabel, welcoming her to join with him when Tapasya is away. Finally, the assurance of developing and material prosperity impacts him to smother his affection for Isabel. Along these lines the conflict among wealth and prosperity from one

angle, and love and feeling on the other angle describes Rohit as a selfish being.

Radhabai, the cook, makes a relative move, with respect to picking between the affection for a girl and an employment. Radhabai's daughter was in an illegal relationship. She used to send money to her, with which Radha moved to the city and found out a cook's job in a family. She doesn't share about her daughter to anyone since it may cost her the job if it gets revealed that her girl is a mistress. Suddenly, daughter's lord passes away and his relatives threw her out. With no home or money and lot of insult from individuals, she goes frantic and starts searching for her mother. However, her mother denies identifying her when she comes to the place where Radhbai is working. The episode, however leaves Radha blameworthy and repentant, making her think and consider her decision over and again, having her in outburst of temper. The play comes to end with Radhabai pondering over the choices she made, remembering the crucial moments in her life and justifying to herself what she did and why she couldn't do something else. It gives the idea that she reiterates the event to herself again and again so as to consider and re-evaluate her actions:

You can't keep a grown-updaughter at home, can you? . . I was paralyzed. Why is she here? What if my mistress sees her? What'll happen to me? (Karnad: 2009, 92-93).

It is very clear that Karnad moves from history, folklore and myth to cultural standards and modernity in the present drama. Although it resembles to be a comparatively modern play, however the internal element it explores arouses out of ancient cultural and mythical discourses. The play analyzes the strain between forces of tradition and modernity, both competing for a space in distinction, leaving a gap in the subject. It also portrays how the rhetoric of culture, tradition and morality are combined with a sense of remorse and guilt as is evidenced in the case of Rohit and Radhabai.

Thus, the present play of Karnad describes the conventional Indian Wedding in a globalized,

technologically advanced India. Furthermore, it's a well-known picture - a happy event when members of the family come together to glorify and re-affirm loyalties, but behind the perfect smiles, jealousies, suspicions, long suppressed emotions, aggression and frustrations. Each photo of the album shows its members frigid in a contemporary showcasing of respectable image but beneath that is a two-fold image, with a shadow of a hidden life.

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