

Cultural Complexities in Girish Karnad's Wedding Album

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Culture defines society. The cultural ethos of every society is unique in its form and essence representing the character of its people, their experiences and beliefs. Myths, legends and folklore are in fact the embodiments of these cultural ethos that represent the underlying values and principles of life, the shared experience of the race, the rules and codes of society. Girish Karnad has time and again returned to eternal roots of his Cultural Tradition, taking inspiration from mythology and folklore.

Diverse influences have formed Karnad's mind as he came across literacy scenes where there was a direct clash between Western and Indian Tradition. *Wedding Album* is an exceptional play of Karnad because neither he uses myth nor history as the base of this play. Karnad generally writes the play based either on mythological characters or historical characters.

In *Wedding Album* he has taken the characters from the contemporary life. The play deals with the wedding of Vidula and Ashwin Panje mainly but at the same time it comments on many characters and many issues. As the play is based on contemporary characters and theme, Karnad shows his characters using cell phones, video-shooting, internet and other modern means of communication. This happens first time in the plays of Karnad.

The play comments on the approaches of the old generation and young generation towards the marriage ceremony. For the elders, the marriage is a ceremony and it is to be celebrated whereas for youngsters it is but all fuss and a tamasha and marriage is like a bond to be signed in the Registrar's Office.

In Karnad's plays women always seek for their identity. Hema, the elder sister of Vidula is married and she stays in Australia with her husband and her son. However now she has come to India for the marriage of Vidula.

One can find her all the time thinking of her husband and her son. She compares her conditions with her Ma. She tells her mother that all are transferable jobs and the white wife refuses to go trailing after her husband. The Indian women on the other hand are obedient Sati Savitris, ever willing to follow their husband's footsteps.

Karnad in this play touched many corners of human life. Vivian, a son of Kai Kini Chandrika, who lives in the neighborhood of Nadkarni, is a complex character. The boy borrows books from the Nad Kami family and returns them. When Hema says that he should not read like *Madame Bovary* he reacts that he has even read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

One cannot understand that a boy of thirteen or of fourteen can have sexual desire for a woman of his mother's age. He has written a letter to Hema with these explicit words; "Darling you don't know how I desire to crush you in my arms."

In the fourth scene we find Vivian visiting once again Hema and gives her one more letter. When Hema threatens him to tell the matter to his mother, he says, "Go ahead I will also tell her I love you. The moment I saw you the other day, I fell desperately in love. I want to die with my hand inside your."

After listening to this Hema slaps him but he tells that he is crazy of her. This type of complex relationship is first time shown by Karnad in the Indian Theatre.

Dr. R.T. Bedre in his article on Tendulkar and Karnad compares their approach to reality and says that Karnad is more sugar coated but in *Wedding Album* he is more realistic like Tendulkar regarding sex.

The sixth scene is most symbolic in the play. When Vidula is busy with the Internet, two Hindu youths who are worried about the Indian culture arrive there and they threaten to the attendant of the Internet cafe', Karnad is more sarcastic in the scene and he criticizes the so called Indian culture lovers. Here Karnad

attacks the Hindu people who call themselves as the guardian of Hindu culture.

Karnad comments on the young generation and their approach to their parents. Here one can understand how the young generation reflects their spiritual crisis and how they are boiling inside like a Volcano. This scene is the climax of the play where we find Karnad suggesting solutions for spiritual crisis which is the crisis of Industrial Revolution. In the last scene Karnad comments on the modern changed approach of youngsters towards marriage, here Rohit tells that they live in the modern world where divorce is not shame.

The play is an expose of middle class, urban, global Indian family. The young daughter Vidula is getting married to a boy from the US through an exchange of personal portraits on video. The video has the power to tell much and also in advertently manipulate, reveal and hide what we honestly want to convey but are told it is best not to tell. Hema the elder sister who lives abroad fulfills her responsibility by checking on her family constantly through her mobile ensuring her control and concern.

Rohit, the brother, is in love with a Christian girl and is questioned, "Why not a girl from our own caste"? The mother, Amma is a bundle of nerves with the arrangements for the wedding and is also peacemaker and the cause of kitchen fights with the maid servant. The father is being ignored for living in the past. Radhabhai the maid servant has her own battles - dark night mares of her past. A delightful youngster has a crush on Hema! Each member of the family has a secret which is unraveled and left to speculation and conjecture.

The play gives a glimpse of all the complexities of modern Indian society, as it adjusts the tech-savvy life style of the young. It did not however answer the many questions that arose in the viewer's mind as one by one the scenes unfolded. Karnad has become successful in raising certain questions in the mind of the audience about the Indian culture which is changing fast.

Can the system of arranged marriages survive in a changed world? Can the Indian family continue to be as close - knit as it used to be if each one has a parallel life that he doesn't share with the rest? How long would it take before the Indian family too gets

fractured as in the west? True to its title, it was a collection of pictures that were not necessarily connected to each other in a straight forward narrative structure. This is Girish Karnad's only plays set in contemporary India-all the others take place in the mythological or historic past.

Thus the new play of Karnad explores the traditional Indian Wedding in a globalized, technologically advanced India. On the surface it's a familiar picture - a joyful event when members of the clan come together to celebrate and reaffirm loyalties, but behind the picture perfect smiles, simmer long suppressed suspicious, jealousies, frustrations and aggression.

The slow peeling of the narrative in Wedding Album is like dicing, in in some one's private cup board, unearthing hidden urges, private affiliations and subterranean desires Danger lurks in each scene and the characters are all on edge, desperate and living in many emotional and sexual zones. It is funny and unnerving.

Girish Karnad is one of the most influential play wrights of our time and his plays have become a byword for imagination, innovation and crafts manship. Only a play Wright of his caliber could have invested this humourous play with such a pungent and stinging core, a world very different from the sanitized versions we are exposed to. Wedding Album is irreverent, subversive and radical and reveals the Indian middle-class family as never seen, felt, or breathed before. Each snapshot of the album shows its members frozen in a contemporary projection of respectability but beneath that is a double image, with a penumbra of a hidden life.

REFERENCES

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