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CULTURAL ETHICS AND MODERNIZATION IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *WEDDING ALBUM*

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Abstract

Girish Karnad is a prominent contemporary Indian English dramatist. He has added a fresh perspective to literature by transforming common folk themes and historical information into excellent plays. Karnad's thinking has been shaped by a variety of influences as a result of reading literary scenarios in which Indian tradition and Western culture directly clashed. Through the perspective of *Wedding Album* Karnad portrays the blend of human virtues which represent the different aspect of the society. Hybridity of not only human culture but even values and society tend to define Karnad's character. Every character portrays two facets of his personality and this duality of every character comes to front when they encounter any such circumstances. Through the mouth piece of Karnad the reader can very well smell the stink of modernity which is born upon the ashes of culture and tradition. With the change in time one can very clearly witness that culture and tradition are becoming a moment of past. People have not only adapted to modernity but it seems as if modernity and modern facets have become their soul. Modernity and modernization have overpowered the tradition and culture. A stark criticism of the modernization can be witnessed throughout the play.

Keywords: Hypocrisy, Criticism, Modernity, Traditional cult, Culture.

India as a nation is known for its rich hybrid culture and the customs, traditions, rituals tend to provide not only life but at the same time contribute towards the liveliness in the human life. One should not forget the fact that the cultural practices should be a choice, not a necessity. It is the sheer hypocrisy of the Indian society, which prioritizes the values and principles above human beings. It is these hypothetical aspects of the society which enforces the society to locate happiness in artificiality and hypocrisy instead of trans reality.

Moving onto the play *The Wedding Album*, the play brings froth the dual aspect of the Indian

society. The play provides the reader a blend of modernity as well as traditionalism, but the play also enforces the hidden reality of the Indian society which gives vent to such hypocrisy. Through the play, Karnad attempts to expose the stark reality of the Indian society as to how the things happen in the society and brings forth the reader some important and unveiled aspects of the society.

The play rightly portrays the modern ethics which have been built upon the cultural platform and how they have been responsible for degrading the society. The play opens with the marriage ceremony about to take place in the Nandakarni

family. The institution of marriage, which is considered to be most pious in the society. A marriage is not only about two persons, two families instead a marriage is believed to be a union of two souls.

In the Indian society, a marriage is believed to be one of the most pious of all the institutions which take place in the society. Marriages usually take place with the consent of the parents, where it is the parents or if they have a joint family, they look for the suitable boy or the girl. They even go for their family, their religion, caste, close parental cities etc. If one looks forth at the arrange marriages which were taking place earlier one finds that in the prior marriages consent of parents was believed to be most important, while if one looks upon the current scenario one finds that the consent of the bride and the bridegroom holds equal importance too. The Nandkarni family which one encounters in the text is busy with the same marriage preparation for their daughter Vidula. The variation which the readers encounter as the play proceeds is that the traditional practices of meeting the boy, or meeting the boy's family has been moved to the modern practice of video recording, sharing the photograph on the internet etc. In the beginning of the play, one finds that the bio-data of the girl is replaced with the video-bio-data of Vidula which she is expected to reproduce for the marriage, "Vidula to the camera: my father was the Doctor in the government service. We are three of us. Eldest sister Hema is married and lives in Australia. Then Rohit who is shooting this film. He is a writer-writes story, and scripts for teleplays. Then there's me" (Karnad 6).

Though the changes have been introduced with time but one aspect which has been existing in the traditional as well as the modern world is the condition of women, the helplessness which the women are forced to face in marriage through domination in marriage. Whether it is the arrange marriage or the western love marriage, in both the scenario it is the women who are the victim. A woman has always been an object in the hands of patriarchy an object of dominance an object of exploitation, an object of subjugation her condition has always been the same and will remain the same. In fact, the society has made the system of marriage

in such a way that it tends to provide security to women and respectability to men, in the words of Eva Figes,

Dominance is ... the keynote in an analysis of the man-woman relationship where the male attributes are one associated with mental thought and positive activity, whilst the woman is regarded as essentially passive; her role is to be the respectable of male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the species. (Figs 173)

The play itself opens with the preparation for the Vidula's marriage. Vidula's is a twenty-two years Geography graduate girl who is not so pretty. After her marriage to an NRI, she is willing to relocate to the USA. She is being prepared for getting a marriage with Ashwin an NRI guy whom she has known only through internet. Vidula's brother Rohit is recording a video in order to send it to Ashwin. Ashwin is an NRI who is living in the USA but when it comes to marriage, he wants to marry an Indian girl because he believes that Indian girls are the epitomes of traditionality when placed upon the pedestal of a girl, a wife, a mother and a daughter. Rohit wants to take a good recording of his sister so that he can send it to Rohit, he wants Vidula to look cheerful and elegant,

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 (off-screen). Why don't you smile a bit? Look cheerful....

ROHIT (off-screen). But don't go out of your way to make yourself unattractive. (Karnad 6)

The cultural changes which the readers encounter here is that earlier the boy and his family used to visit the girl personality in order to see her and consider her to be acceptable for marriage or

not. Now in the world of internet, telephones have become a substitute instead of face-to-face meetings. Even Vidula who has been portrayed as an ideal daughter who has always seen within the four walls of the house and would never be expected to cross the threshold of her house by getting indulged in any shameless act. Vidula is also portrayed as having a dual personality, where on one hand she is presented as decent and a traditional daughter belonging to a respectable family. While her brother Rohit is capturing her video, she decides her best to show her real nature, she does not pretend to be beautiful and attractive or as Ashwin might consider her to be. The other facet of Vidula's personality with which the readers' encounter is that Vidula is internet savvy. Vidula belongs to a typical Indian family where culture and values serves as the integrity of the family. No member of the family can sustain the fact that the girls or the boys are getting involved in any kind of illicit relationship before their marriage. Vidula too becomes a victim of a dating site, where she has a virtual lover. She used to chat with him daily on internet.

Voice: Tell me your name and address and I will come and buy you.

Vidula: Thanks mate. I knew you would say that. You are nice.

Voice: These things still happen in India? What a country! (Karnad 65)

While she was having conversation on internet, she was behaving like some other woman. Vidula is a victim of inner desires, those sexual desires which repressed by the society until and unless a girl marries. One day while Vidula watching pornography on the internet, she is caught red-handed by the two youths,

Youth 1: You have cubicles in the outside foyer for video games.

Youth 2: Why does she need a special game for video games?

Youth 1: The moment I saw her sleazy in alone with him, I smelt a rat. I smelt a rotten bandicoot.

To (Vidula): You are watching porn films, aren't You? (Karnad 69).

In order to defend herself, she accuses the youths who catch her while watching the pornography, "You have come here to rape me"(Karnad 70). She angrily shouts at her assailants, "What gives you the right to come in here? I'll do what I like here. Who the hell are you to question me?" (Karnad 70). It is later on; Vidula gets to know from the owner of the cybercafé that those people were there only for collecting their money. Vidula is representative of the modern society where the youth is dominated by the world of internet and how the over indulgence in the world of social – media leads to their diverging from their main paths or ley's say from the real motives of their lives. Though there are numerous opportunities for youth like Vidula, but it is the rigid patriarchal structure which prevents these young girls from seeking higher purpose in their lives.

Another aspect of Vidula's character which the reader come across is crossing the cultural threshold when she questions about her relationship to Ashwin which she believes is equivalent to the master slave relationship when she says that her old master is about to die and, "His family is bound to throw me out. So, I had to find a new master. A younger man. He lives in the US. He has paid a good price to my family" (Karnad 64). Till now, it was her father who was responsible for deciding for her life but now all the decisions relating to her life will be taken by her husband Vidula remarks, "he can do whatever with me." (Karnad 65).

In fact, similar is the case with her sister as well. She, too, was wedded according to her parents and once married all the decisions of her life were taken by her husband,

Because they are all transferable jobs and the white wife refuses to go trailing after her husband. We Indian women, on the other hand, are obedient Sati Savitri, ever willing to follow in our husband's footsteps. Look at me. . . Our men may get all the top jobs. But I am in no better position than Ma (Karnad 17).

The above-mentioned instances of being caught red-handed in the cybercafé watching porn, while the second incidence of questioning the cultural values of the society, brings forth the changing ideology of the present generation and a vent towards modernity.

Another character which the reader encounters is also a victim of modernity, or let's say who too has been spoiled in the vent of modernity, is Vivan. Vivan is a teenager who is presented as a young lad who possesses deep secret desires for Hema a woman of her mother's age. If one talks about the persona of Vivan one finds that "Vivan is an outstanding student in his academics, a talented boy, a techno savvy but strangely a prematurely-adult grown child" (Suresh 19). He is fond of reading novels like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and some other books which comprise obscene content considered unfit to be studied by children of his age. The more he reads these contents, the more he gets fascinated towards Hema. He starts developing sensual feelings for Hema and intends to express the same through letters to Hema. He writes those letters for Hema places them in that book deliberately when he returns those books to her. One day his letter is caught by Vidula who considers the letters to be given by her brother-in-law. She reads it, "Darling, you don't know how I desire to crush you in my arms..." (Challa 318). She becomes extremely happy with the fact that Hema's husband still sends her love letters. When Hema doesn't respond to Vivan's letters, Vivan threatens her to disclose his letters to her, "VIVAN. Go ahead! I'll tell her I love you. The moment I saw you the other day. I fell desperately in love..." (Karnad 45). Vivan is just a teenager, but has become a spoilt lad under the influence of modernity. This also emphasizes over the fact that it is the parent's carelessness which results in spoiling these the younger generation. The facilities which are being provided by the parents without their strict vigilance it is being misused by the children. Technology stands as a boon, if it is utilized in the right manner, otherwise it doesn't take long for the younger generation to become a victim of the same technology.

It is not only the technological advancement which stands out as a point of concern in the modern

age, but the significance of wealth, which is more than cultural value. Rohit is portrayed as someone who is tactful. In the materialistic world it is the money which is prioritized over culture, feelings, love and emotions. Though he admires Isabel but when the Sirur family wants him to marry their daughter Tapasya he very easily gets with the flow of the profit he would be getting in the form of support in his career and establishment of his own firm as well. The point to be considered here is that he is ready to marry Tapasya but on the other hand he is even ready to maintain a relationship with Isabel whenever Tapasya is not there with him.

The next character which the readers encounter is Vidula's mother. Vidula's mother is presented as an embodiment of selfless attitude and penance. Like every other person who is a victim of duality, Vidula's mother too is a victim of duality. Where on one hand she is portrayed as an embodiment of selflessness and penance while on the other hand when she is embodied as a typical Indian woman whose reality is revealed from her dialogues with other members of the family while they are shopping for Vidula's marriage. Through the exchange of gifts as it usually happens in the marriage ceremony, Vidula's mother gets an opportunity of taking revenge from other relatives who have not treated her as to her mark. The dialogue which takes place between Vidula's mother and Vidula very clearly hints towards this attitude which is typical of Indian family,

It appears as if Karnad demands the niche for a woman which is equal to man in a society. Vidula finds fault in her brother, who thought that she must impress her fiancé in every possible way. For this, she has to pretend what she is not. Her views about marriage have grown strangely due to the forceful behavior of Rohit who wants all the time that his sister must present herself beyond her original strengths. Vidula is fed up with all these anxieties and wants to relax herself by joking even in the serious situation. For her, marriage doesn't mean something spiritual. She is ready to accept marriage as a gamble by keeping away her engagement.

As the play begins, the Nandkarni's are all busy in arranging the auspicious marriage ceremony

of their dear Vidula. The excitements of the Nandkarni mother are pertinent when the family prepares for wedding. The Indian marriage institution and the myths and realities concerned with the marriage ceremony are effectively revealed through the dialogues of the mother with different characters like father, her elder daughter Hema, the younger daughter Vidula and son Rohit. Marriage is the finest opportunity for all kinds of shopping and is enjoyed by the Nadkarni family. The selection of saris, bridal garments, garments of family members, and relatives coming to the marriage and humor generated through these incidences are very typical features of Indian marriages. The mother is persistent about taking revenges upon her relatives who haven't treated her up to the mark in their household marriages. She is ready to settle the scores with the relatives who have been very easy going and hostile towards her. The following dialogue between Vidula and the mother reveals such vehemence of the mother towards one such relative: (Vidula picks up a sari)

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 10-11).

The following conversation very clearly hints towards the typical Indian society where every person is disguised as the other where there is duality in both action and speech, and it is this duality which acts as a benchmark of the Indian society. If one looks forth at the Indian society one finds that Indian society is recognized for its extravagant culture, but with the rise of modernity those precious values which were believed to be the base of the Indian society can be seen as perishing with time.

Hence, in a nutshell, one can conclude that for maintaining the equilibrium in the society it is very important that there should be a blend of cultural tradition and modernity. A rigidity of any one of these would not only create a discrepancy in the society but would also widen the generation gaps which have existing in the society from time immemorial. Technological advancement is beyond

one's control, but too much dependency upon technology or even too much rigidity in one's cultural roots will once again leads to imbalance in the society. Through the play Karnad looks forth at the side effects of modernity and technology, is bringing upon the generation, but he fails to understand the unveiled causes which push a youth towards technology and modernization. These causes are none other than extensive attachment to one's culture, existing stereotypes and prejudices which have been born out of these cultural roots.

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