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URBANIZATION AND ALIENATION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF GIRISH KARNAD'S BOILED BEANS ON TOAST

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad's new play *Boiled Beans on Toast* has vividly painted the corrosive effects of urbanization on human relationships. In this drama, we discern that almost all the main characters suffer from loneliness and alienation. Human relationships have been throttled by the emergence of urban life. While husbands go on making money, the wives indulge in social services. Parents hardly take care of children and siblings rarely evince veneration to the parents. High ambition and career mindedness have alienated human beings from each other. In this play, we see Mr Padabidri to take the medium of Anjana, his wife, to communicate with his son Kunaal. Urbanization has spawned a chaotic world denuded of simple and smooth human relationships.

KEYWORDS: Alienation, Ambition, Relationship, Urbanization.

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Girish Karnad is well-known for his reworking of mythical structures in his plays. An USA based notable Indian critic Moutushi Chakravartee has drawn a parallel between Shakespeare and Girish Karnad for their dexterous execution of derivative materials in their plays:

Indeed, all his plays derive from pre-existing material, yet, like Shakespeare, he transforms the raw material into a unique drama of human emotions and feelings. (183)

Karnad has persistently focussed on the crisis of man and woman relationship. Being a staunch supporter of individualism, Karnad contends: "a person's need to be seen as an individual, as an entity valuable in itself, independent of family and social circumstance" (*Three Plays* 9). However, Karnad's creative spirit has deep roots in Indian culture.

Rightly does Professor P. Dhanavel comment: ". . . Karnad's creative imagination is thoroughly and originally Indian in every one of its blood cells . . ." (96).

Partly based on the creation myth of Bangalore, *Boiled Beans on Toast* is, to some extent, a new addition to the dramatic oeuvre of Karnad. Published in 2014, *Boiled Beans on Toast*, the English rendering of Kannada play *Bendu Kaalu on Toast*, seeks to portray the face of modern Indian people. The play repeatedly reminds us of the devastating effects of urbanization on our daily lives. India is traditionally known for her familial bonds and mutual exchange of love. But Karnad quite deftly points out the invidious corollary effects of modern urban life which seek to jeopardize our familial bonds. In *Boiled Beans on Toast* Karnad is interested to present the life as it is lived by the

people of Bangalore. He has made use of diverse characters belonging to multifarious sections of the society to project the entire gamut of human experiences of city life. Karnad is least bothered about the plot construction and ending of the play. He merely records the chores of day to day life of his characters. In recording it from a typical artistic distance, Karnad has manifestly delineated the loneliness of his characters. The charms and lures of city life enmesh us and illusions fall apart in no time to delude us and decimate our relationships. Almost all the characters of *Boiled Beans on Toast* suffer from alienation and loneliness. They seek to lead life by clinging to certain shimmering offshoots of city life like horse racing, band music, social visits, money making, and so on.

The plot of *Boiled Beans on Toast* revolves round the character of Anjana. In fact, this drama cannot boast of a single protagonist. However, all the characters of the drama are related to Anjana. Her family members, friends, and maid servants have been presented in this drama. Quite interestingly, almost all the characters suffer from loneliness. Anjana is a housewife who has devoted herself in social services because her husband, merely a money-making-machine, frequently visits foreign countries for business deals. She also enjoys the social visits of her friend, Dolly who teaches in a public school. Dolly thrives on pretending to be a well-known woman having connections with powerful and influential persons. We find that her husband Brigadier Lyre slaps her for her pretensions. This slapping is an indication of their loveless conjugal life. Dolly concocts cock and bull stories of her connections only to grapple with her loneliness. Anusuya, the mother-in-law of Anjana, regularly visits race-course and bets money to while away her time. She can hardly exert her power over the family matters. When her grandson Kunaal informs his mother that he would spend night at his female friend's house, she cannot protest despite being shocked:

KUNAAL. . . . Mummy, if it gets late, I may not come home for dinner. I'll sleep over at Nandita's.

ANUSUYA. Who's Nandita?

KUNAAL. The singer in our band. She's absolutely amazing. (*Startled, Anusuya looks at Anjana, who doesn't show any reaction although she has registered Anusuya's sense of shock.*)

ANJANA. If I'm not going to see you before tomorrow morning, I want to have a word with you. Papa called. (*Kunaal groans. Anusuya senses the tension in the air.*)

ANUSUYA. I'll be off then. (18-19)

This conversation points to another very serious issue. Mr Padabidri, Anjana's husband, needs the medium of his wife to talk to his son. Kunaal cherishes his own ambition of playing guitar in bands. As he goes against the will of his parents who want him to play veena, he gradually becomes alienated from his parents:

PRABHAKAR. And her son? He is a guitar player?

DOLLY (*not interested*). I gather he's very good at veena. But he plays the guitar. As a rebellion.

PRABHAKAR. Rebellion? Against whom?

DOLLY. His parents. (26-27)

The young man Prabhakar is so engrossed in his ambition and career that he falls an easy prey to Dolly's claim to assist to get a job with Wipro though he lacks the necessary training and qualification for the job. To pursue his dream, Prabhakar is ready to leave the country keeping his family at his native village:

PRABHAKAR. Where's the fourth box? Ah! Yes. What's this, Sumitra? Why are you being so silly? It's a question of only a month. Then we'll all be together in Singapore.

SUMITRA. I don't want to go to Singapore. I was so happy when you got a job here. Our own house. Our own life. No parents or parents-in-law to breath down our necks. No interfering relatives. We were so happy. What more do you want?

PRABHAKAR. No, Sumitra. I'm rotting in this place. I must thank Dolly for making me realize I'm wasted here. I deserve a better job. I can't go on forever with this grind . . . (34)

The maid servants in Anjana's house also suffer alienation from each other. They are persistently shattered by jealousy and a meaningless inclination towards combative aggression. When Vimala, the cook, does not turn up for a few days, Muttu, the maid, grabs her job. The working class people, bereft of communal feeling, are shown to be engaged in back-stabbing:

VIMALA. Muttu—Muttu—

MUTTU. Oh, Vimala! How nice. Come in. Come in.

VIMALA. No time to come in. Let's talk here. How're you?

MUTTU. Okay. As usual.

VIMALA (*smilingly*). Oh, better than usual, surely. You've got a promotion.

MUTTU (*confused*). What was I to do? Amma said you hadn't come or you weren't coming or something like that. Asked me to take charge till you came back. That's all.

VIMALA. And you got stuck for good. Very nice. I worked there for eight years. You've set yourself up for the next eight now. (66)

Through all the characters Karnad shows the crumbling of human relationship under the remorseless annihilating effects of urbanization. Karnad, being an adept playwright, neither condemns the urbanization nor abhors the urban life. Nevertheless, his presentation provokes a reader to think what we have lost due to the emergence of modern city life. The city of Bangalore wants to shake off all the baggage of the past life. Consequently, the ties of human relationships have been loosened. The simple relationship of husband-wife and parents-children is no longer tenable in this modern era. The outcome is totally pernicious. Each and everyone are merely suffering from loneliness. Urbanization has spawned alienation among human beings. *Boiled Beans on Toast* has successfully and quite objectively recorded this contemporary grim reality of city life. Manoj K. Pandey's remark regarding the dramatic craftsmanship of Girish Karnad is quite apposite for this analysis, too: Social problems have been projected and institutions scrutinised but Karnad's aim appears to be far

greater that is to explore the mesmeric nature of human relationship. (7)

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