

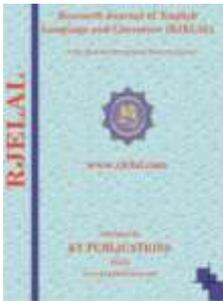


EXAMINING THE METROPOLIS AND THE FAMILY IN GIRISH KARNAD'S WEDDING ALBUM AND BOILED BEANS ON TOAST

Dr.M.K.SHEEBA

Lecturer in English, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan
Deemed University, Guruvayoor Campus
Puranattukara, Thrissur

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ABSTRACT

Indian drama written in English and translated in English by Indian playwrights has registered a remarkable growth recent decades. Contemporary Indian drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosity. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with splendid results. Girish Karnad has been one of the vanguards who aided the audiences by using Indian English, mythical references in theatres that is at once internalized and voiced without any traces of premeditation. He returned the gaze, as a vehicle of resistance and gave Indian dramas, a form, and an identity that is truly Indian. Karnad has great insight into human nature. His knowledge of human nature has made him a great actor and playwright. He is well aware of the paradoxes in human nature and has thorough comprehension of life's little ironies. He has been a humanistic writer. His profound humanism is carved in all his works. His various roles as actor and the protagonists in his plays illustrate the clear absurdity in human nature and life. This paper focuses on Karnad's plays Wedding Album and Boiled Beans on Toast.

Keywords: caste, Feminine psyche, Humanism, , ideology, modernity, traction,

INTRODUCTION

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright is concretized when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage. Karnad's dramatic world is most strange. Peeling the multiple layers of fantasy his protagonists seek to confront the mystery of life beyond the horizon. His plays represent a unique depiction of the dual between the internal and the external, the intuitive and rationalistic tradition and modernity. They are insightful and thought provoking. He catches the bewilderment of the individual psyches, confronted with the overbearing

sociocultural atmosphere and the ever-present modern promise of self-fulfillment. Karnad is India's best playwright whose journey from Yayati to Boiled Beans on Toast holds a mirror to the very evolution of a truly 'Indian Theatre' which can be true to its traditions and at the same time responsive to contemporary concerns. Karnad tries to establish a 'dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity which is a central theme in contemporary Indian society.

The relationship is a main thread which makes the strong bound between Man and Women. Series from the husband-wife relationship to

stepmother-son saga, Karnad has also been able to project general perceptions of people in their times about the man-woman relations. Although women are the underdog in most of the relationship portrayals but he has also touched the sensibility of man in contrasting shades. Karnad has also depicted the levels in relationship response of his characters which are separate- age, caste and social acceptability wise.

His Wedding Album deals with an urban middle-class Saraswat Brahmin family of Nadkarni: a daughter who lives in Australia (Hema) with her professional husband, a son (Rohit) who is a software designer, a younger daughter (Vidula) willing to marry a suitable boy from America she has never met, a doting mother (Mother) and a cook (Radhabai). The family is educated, liberal and modern. The Wedding Album which is structured into nine scenes deals primarily with women and their two different worlds i.e. traditional and modern cyber world. But both of them merge into each other. Even the traditional elder women are fused with energy, hope and modern sensibility. Younger sorts enjoy liberty in education, love, courtship via 'distance' technology; and marriage. The play marks the highest evolution of feminine psyche.

The play revolves around Vidula, the younger daughter of the Nadkarni family. The family members are anxious about Vidula's marriage. We see a stress of sensitivity 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 dislike and fear appears to be clear in the above dialogue.

When Ashwin has postponed his coming to India for few days, whole family worried about the shopping, wedding cards, booking of marriage hall etc. but nobody could not understand the inner felling of Vidula. Every family member is utterly anxious about his or her role to be played during the Wedding, but nobody is concerned to the mind-game of Vidula who is going to be a bride. Her bridal tensions are not understood by anybody. Father is concerned about the hefty advance given to the Wedding Hall. This shows the lack of maturity, love, responsibility in relationships. The imbalanced empathy in the relationship converse of inequality in human relationships.

The scattered personalities reveal the discontentment of human selves in the world of globalization. The mother, Hema, Vidula, Pratibha and even Radhabai are new women in the true sense of the term. Their lives are full of anxieties and resentments while facing the mental, psychological and emotional hardships of life. 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.

Karnad's latest play, Benda Kaalu on Toast, focuses on the city of Bangalore or Bangaluru, and recalls the myth regarding its foundation. According to the myth, an eleventh century King was offered boiled beans by a woman when he was in need of food. To express his gratitude the King named the spot Bendakalooru, which later on came to be

known as Bangalore. The Kannada term 'Benda Kaalu' means 'boiled beans' in English. This mythical story is the source behind Boiled Beans on Toast. According to Devina Dutt:

This is a masterfully structured play that makes the city of Bangalore and its explosive growth in the last two decades its subject. . . . It avoids the prevalent clichés of its image as an IT city or a city of numerous call centers. Instead, it presents the stories of a cross section of those who live in Bangalore, and whose expectations, survival techniques and disappointments are all coloured by it.

The play holds a mirror to the fractured lives of its floating popularity which occupies a broad social spectrum from the struggler to the street-smart survivor, from the small-town aspirant to the elite. This is a city of wild hopes and hurried dreams, of disappointment and despair, of environmental destruction and rapid development. Bengaluru is said to have acquired its name through a king's gratitude for a dish of boiled beans. Bengaluru on toast- a place that has been cooked rapidly from traditional to modern, from a small town into a large metropolis is the theme of this play. It is the portrait of a city.

Boiled Beans on Toast traces the intertwined lives of people who have chose to live in Bangalore. They are very different from each other, belonging widely different social levels, and come from different geographical areas. By living under a single roof named Bangalore, their lives branch out in various directions. In the play, everyone's physiological needs are fulfilled which motivate them to seek for a higher requirements.

The plot of Boiled Beans on Toast revolves round the character of 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. Anjana weeps over the cut down of the magnificent rain tree across the road-a tree

because of which she built her house there. She also enjoys the social visits of her friend, Dolly who teaches in a public school. Dolly, a high society tattered wife with little to occupy her, feel sorry about the cement concrete that is replacing tree everywhere. However, what she regret, Prabhakar Telang finds exciting. He has never seen tall, glass fronted buildings except on television, in the small town in the Western Ghats from where he comes. For him, they spell promise. For Vimala, the family servant on the make, the obscurity that the city offers, provides convenient cover. Karnad, being a proficient playwright, neither condemns the urbanization nor hates the urban life. However, 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. Accordingly, the bonds of human relationships have been loosened. The simple relationship of husband and wife and parents-children is no longer rational in this modern era. The outcome is totally malign. Each and every one are merely suffering from loneliness. Urbanization has produced alienation among human beings. Boiled Beans on Toast has successfully and quite objectively recorded this contemporary grim reality of city life.

The play urges readers and spectators to think and keep an open mind towards the realities of life. The play explicates several layers of the modern life in a metropolitan city using relationships as its nucleus. A general strife for happiness and contentment is present in the characters; while few people exhibit injudicious use of power ignoring ethics, few others become willing victims of the system. The play strikingly portrays the unquenchable hunger for material and social success which steers people away from their familial happiness.

CONCLUSION

Karnad is an innovative, multifaceted playwright who imbibes several personalities in one. He has contributed a lot to enrich Indian English Drama through performance, acting, and direction. As a modern playwright, Karnad is always engaged in the act of "deconstructing myths. He takes up

mythical and legendary tales from his own culture and unfolds them in the light of modern sensibility. This deconstructing myth becomes an act of self-searching for the playwright...he combines the past and the present into a unity that signifies of tradition and modernity in his art of playwriting" (Gill 8). The changing trends in people's belief and values are elegantly presented. Characters belong to different age and sex and they belong to various economic and social levels of the society. He brings characters of varied backgrounds together artfully. Their actions and reactions are realistic in nature and fascinating to watch.

Karnad does not implicate to steer his readers towards delusionary feeling of excellence, but attempts to arouse them from inertness by appealing them to think about social, political, economic and cultural challenges. He has succeeded in portraying his characters at the critical times of their lives, their inner crises that infused their pretense by giving us an awareness into their desires, goals and preventions. He has accurately presented his observation through intimation, suggestion and implication instead of straightforward exposure. His purpose seems to be to produce assessment from his readers rather than imposing his beliefs or ideas.

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