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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to discuss the modernity as projected by Girish Karnad in his one of the latest plays Wedding Album published in 2009. He puts the element of modernity through his characters. At the same time he also deals with the contemporary issues of the modern India. He has employed the video chatting, video recording, computer, cyber café etc. in his present play.

INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is the great Indian playwright, poet, actor, director, critic and translator. He was born on 19th May 1938. He has achieved Jnanapitha Award for Kannada, the highest literary honour conferred in India. Karnad has written a number of plays in Kannada which have also been translated into several major Indian languages and English by the playwright or by others. Myth and history are the backbone of Girish Karnad’s plays to discuss the burning issues. He employs the modern techniques in his plays. The eminent directors like B.V. Karanth, Ebrahim Alkazi, Alyque Padamsee, Satyadev Dubey and Prasanna, Arvind Gaur have directed the plays of Karnad. He is also regarded as an eminent figure in Indian cinema, where he has worked as an actor, director and screenwriter, earning numerous awards. He has been honored with Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

THE MODERNITY IN WEDDING ALBUM

Wedding Album is the most recent play of Girish Karnad published in 2009. As per the title suggests it deals with Indian arranged marriage. In India marriage is a considered as one of the most pious Sanskar in Hinduism. It is believed that marriage is not only the blending of two bodies or families but it is a blending of two souls. The occupation of marriage in India enlivens and strengthens the farthest or weak relations and relatives come together to celebrate the wedding. With the marriage theme Karnad explores several contemporary issues related to relationships and society in a modern way.

The present play opens with the occasion of marriage of Vidula with Ashwin. Vidula is the female protagonist of the play and she has known Ashwin only through e-mails, video – conferencing and photo – sharing. Incidentally, the marriage of Vidula and Ashwin appears as an arranged marriage in the contemporary India which is changing rapidly under the impact of several global forces. One can notice a co-optation of postmodern technologies by a conservative social institution.

Vidula steps into a newly constructed ‘self’ in the internet cafe, and also when she is with Ashwin, her groom-to-be. We notice a strain of hypocrisy in Vidula when we return to the opening scene of the play. Her brother Rohit is making a video of Vidula to be sent to Ashwin. He asks her to appear bright and cheerful and put her best foot forward. Vidula objects to this suggestion and says:

“I just want him to know what I am like”; and she warns Ashwin, "I am not glamorous, as you can see. I am not exceptional in any way. I don’t want you to be disappointed later” (Karnad: 2009, 6).

It appears that Vidula herself is hardly aware of the possibilities within her. She appears to be ignorant of how glamorous she can be at times, as later demonstrated in the cafe episode. Everyone considers Vidula to be timid and subservient, but in the internet cafe when she is attacked by the self-styled guardians of Hindu culture, she reacts in an aggressive manner, using expletives and threatening her assailants. Vidula clearly understands how a woman is treated in a typical patriarchal Indian family before her marriage. All decisions related to her are taken by her father and, later, when she is married the role of the master is passed on to her husband who would decide about her life. Vidula remarks, "He can do whatever with me" (65). Her sister Hema too discusses the patriarchal arrangement in her married life where her husband takes all the decisions of her.

Probably, this is the reason Hema has not been able to utilise her talent and education and remains a housewife, constantly worrying about her children and home. She is probably so neglected by her husband and her marital life is so dull that she is excited when Vivan, a boy even younger to her son, shows an interest in her. She is at first shocked at receiving attentions from a boy so young, but later she feels flattered and looks forward to short meetings with him and his erotically charged letters. But near the end of the play, Vivan dumps her for a younger girl. Karnad, through this episode, hints at the sexual
openness prevalent in society where all limitations of age, relation and propriety disappear.

Ashwin lives in US and he enjoys the culture of US but as far as the matter of marriage is concerned he wants to marry an Indian girl. Though he is modern and NRI, he is firm that still Indian girls have all the sanskars of daughter, girl, wife and mother. He thinks that American culture inferior to Indian culture in the matter of marriage and family. He expects Vidula to be a submissive housewife who should perform her duties within the circle of the household without expecting any gratitude or without thinking of her own life, career or economic independence. Vidula, however, listens to all this hypocrisy in silence and does not object to it. It is difficult to believe that she is the same Vidula who reprimanded the moral guardians in the cafe episode so vehemently.

The wedding is supposed to bring together all the family but sometimes the bitterness of the relation also comes fore. Hema, for example, has always thought that she is less beloved of her parents than Rohit and Vidula. She remembers that in her childhood when her parents got transferred, they did not take her along but left her with the relatives. She also feels that her parents could have spent more on her wedding. She envies the elaborate preparations being made for Vidula’s wedding. Her father and mother feel that it was Hema who was in a hurry to get married, so they could not plan an elaborate wedding. Father even brings out a list of expenses incurred on the wedding, prepared accurately by Ramdas. He speaks lovingly about his brother Ramdas who he feels was very bright, but mother tells him that Ramdas hated him despite 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).

Through Rohit, the play gives us a glimpse of how the lure of money and fame could make a person opportunistic. Rohit loves Isabel, but the Sirur family wants him to marry their daughter Tapasya. They offer him foreign education and even assistance in setting up his own business. Rohit at first refuses but gradually the luster of wealth tempts him and he gives in, dumping Isabel to suffer. Rohit marries Tapasya and yet has his eyes on Isabel, and so invites her to join him when Tapasya is away. But the promise of prosperity and material well-being makes him suppress his emotions for Isabel. It is thus the conflict between wealth and prosperity on the one hand and love and emotion on the other which defines Rohit as a subject.

Radhabai, the cook, too makes a similar move, when it comes to choosing between the love of a daughter and a job. Radhabai’s daughter was a kept woman. She used to send money to her, with which Radha is able to come to the city and find a cook’s job in a household. But she does not tell anyone about her daughter because it might cost her the job if the employer came to know that her daughter is a concubine. Incidentally, her daughter’s master dies and his people turn her out. With no shelter or money and heaps of insults from people, she goes mad and starts running on streets in search of her mother. But her mother refuses to recognize her when she finally finds her house. The incident, however, leaves Radha guilty and repentant, causing her to weigh and ponder her decision time and again, throwing her into fits of temper. The play ends with Radhabai contemplating the decisions she made, reliving the crucial moments and justifying to herself what she did and why she could not do otherwise. It appears that she repeats the incident to herself time and again in order to consider and reconsider her options:

You can't keep a grown up daughter 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 obvious that Karnad moves from myth, folklore and history to cultural stereotypes and modernity in the present drama. No one can find the direct allusion of myth or history in the play but the projection of Indian culture is stand on the pillar of myth. Although it appears to be a comparatively modern play, yet the subjectivity it explores emerges out of ancient mythical and cultural discourses. The play explores the tension between forces of tradition and modernity, both vying with each other for a space in subjectivity, leaving a hole in the subject. It also depicts how the discourses of culture, morality and tradition are associated with a sense of guilt and remorse, as is apparent in the case of Radhabai and Rohit.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Karnad's plays thus are a mirror to the formation of contemporary Indian subjectivity against the backdrop of several ages. Karnad explores the multiple layers of subjectivity in not only the mythical and historical but also the contemporary Indian subjects. His plays can be regarded as representing the contemporary Indian subjectivity across classes, genders and temporalities. In the present drama Karnad has blended the modernity and tradition through the projection of the major characters.

REFERENCES