



MARITAL DISCOURSE IN GIRISH KARNAD'S WEDDING ALBUM

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Abstract:

Girish Raghunath Karnad is a leading playwright in Indian Writing in English. He is one of the most influential playwrights of contemporary time who wrote his plays originally in Canada. Later on, it is translated in to English. His plays are well-known for his imagination, innovation and craftsmanship. He is the dramatist of 1960s who marked the future age of the modern Indian playwriting in Kannada like Badal Sarkar did in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. He is recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India. Karnad has composed plays by using the history and mythology to tackle the contemporary issues. Wedding Album is based on the wedding ceremony of Brahmin Saraswat family situated in Karnataka. It depicts the middle class life of people in Indian society who expresses their anxiety and resentment at the time of marriage. The play deals with arranged marriage of girl to the suitable boy based on the Indian culture. The bride and groom have not seen to each other but communicate using technology through email. The parents are selecting the groom for their daughters without considering their choice. She surrenders herself before wish and happiness of their parents. Wedding Album represents sexual, conjugal, caste, class and age-related behaviours, attitudes of selfishness and sacrifice, chastity and commerce, anxiety and resentment, obedience and authority are all integral part of modern Hindu marriage system. The main objective of the paper is to explore the marital discourse which is common in Indian society with reference to Girish Karnad's Wedding Album.

Keywords: *Marital, Discourse, Imagination, Innovation, Craftsmanship, Anxiety Resentment, Sexual, Conjugal, Caste, Obedience, Chastity, Commerce, Class, etc.*

Wedding Album is the latest play of Girish Karnad that deals with common marriage event in the life of the urban middle class of people who feared with anxiety at the time of marriage. It has provided staple for innumerable tele-serials and commercial films: the impending 'arranged' marriage of a girl to suitable, expat boy. The theme of *Wedding Album* is Karnataka based South Indian Brahmin marriage and family. The Indian wedding is expected to bring the clan together in a display of solidarity and mutual concern. Yet it is known to light the fuse of anxieties and resentments long buried within the bosom of the family. Forces raging in the world around also bring their own tensions to the event: the older generation feels defunct in the new technological turmoil; the young are buffeted by aspirations to easy prosperity and notions of sexual freedom; and dreams and phantasms, ardently desired but only vaguely grasped, turn into nightmares as they wait in from the other side of the globe. Girish Karnad's play *Wedding Album* is combination of anxieties and resentments of deep rooted in Indian marriage institution. Karnad's play, *Wedding Album* represents the constellation of sexual, conjugal, caste, class and age-related behaviours and attitudes of selfishness and sacrifice, chastity and commerce, obedience and authority are all integral to modern Hindu marriage forms central narrative in *Wedding Album*.

Wedding Album is an account of a pending marriage Karnataka based Saraswat, Nadkarni family in the middle class. *Wedding Album* is a modern myth which wonders in the real and the technological world that help us to confront the anxieties and anguish in Indian marriage system. Karnad has depicted the contemporary Indian social reality of the marriage which becomes a cause of anxieties, angularities and anguish among the Indian families. Indian marriage system follows typical tradition; the parent has to select the groom for their daughters without considering the choice of the daughter. *Wedding Album* encourages us to observe the growing fundamentalism of the marriage of the Hindu middle class family which is missing from the present social scenario. The play, *Wedding Album* demystifies the middle class South Indian Brahmin marriage which is considered as normal and not destructive to its very being. Karnad has artistically woven all these Indian wedding threads in the play. Along these wedding threads, Karnad has expressed day today account of the middle class Nadkarni family which deserves all praise. The Nadkarni belongs to the Saraswat Brahmin family but the theme of the play appeals to any caste, creed and religion in India. Karnad makes play relevant in any context and a perfect contemporary one. The scattered characterization of the play reveals discontentment as a human beings in the world of globalization. It is important to quote Amrit Srinivasan who writes in the forward to the play, ‘Wedding Album encourages us to examine the growing fundamentalism of the Hindu middle class family, which is largely ‘missing’ from social science scholarship on India today’ (Srinivasan xi). The aim of this research chapter is to explore marital discourse in the play, *Wedding Album* by presenting anxieties and resentments in Indian marriage system. Karnad’s play presents independent and new woman like the woman of Manju Kapur’s Astha in her novel, *A Married Woman*. The mother, Vidula, Hema and Radhabai are representative of new woman.

Wedding Album revolves around the theme of marriage. Indian people has typical psychology in concern of the marriage, Indian families consider the marriage as a gamble. Karnad sketches the character of contemporary new woman who are in search of quest of identity. The present play throws light on these contemporary women like Vidula, Hema, Mother and Radhabai. The lives of these characters are representing anxieties and resentments while facing the psychological, mental and emotional hardships in their lives. The first scene of the play reveals the tension of the brother concerning the marriage of his sister. Vidula is presenting typical trait of Indian woman who is going to marry with man who is not seen by her. The play begins with video shooting of Vidula by Rohit but she was not giving happy and gay take before camera that will give the best face to Ashwin Panje. It is worthwhile to quote from the text,

VIDULA: I am Vidula, Vidula Nadkarni. I am twenty- two and a half, actually.
 I have done my BA in Geography and passed my exams last year. I am not doing anything at the moment. Worked for travel agency for six months.
 (Stops. Looks at Rohit) I got bored. If I come to the US, will I need to work? I am really not very good at it.
 ROHIT: (off screen). Why don’t you smile a bit? Look cheerful.
 VIDULA: Am I looking depressed?
 ROHIT: (off-screen). But don’t go out of your way to make yourself unattractive”
 (Karnad 5).

Vidula is the central female protagonist of the play who is twenty two years old. She completed her bachelor degree in Geography. In the above dialogue, the resentments and depression of Vidula can be easily seen. She wants to be honest with her fiancé who she never met and tell him that she is not glamorous and beautiful at all. She does not want to disappoint him after their marriage. Later on, Vidula declines reshooting and tells Rohit transparent reality of her family before the camera. The father of Vidula Nadkarni was a doctor in the Government service and her mother was a complete housewife. They were three children to their parents. Hema was the eldest daughter of their parents. The central character of the play presents the typical modern middle class Indian family. The elder daughter lives in Australia with her husband and children. Rohit is the brother of Vidula who is the smartest among them. He is writer and writes stories and scripts for teleplays. Rohit is a media professional in the play. Vidula is a younger daughter of Nadkarni family. She is willing to marry with a suitable boy from the US whom she never met. In her engagement, she is telling the real family truth

while shooting of Rohit. While telling the family truth, Rohit disagrees by asking her if she is trying to impress her finance or scare of him. Vidula is resolute to tell the truth to her fiancé. It is great curse to the Indian marriage institution that the truths are never told by the both side of the bride and groom, if it is told not accepted by both sides and this leads to the settlement of marriage based on the falseness which results into unhappy married life after marriage. It was an honest effort of Vidula to tell the truth about her. Pratibha appreciates Vidula:

Pratibha: I must say I like your sister...very much. But I don't think...

Rohit: Don't think what?

Pratibha: That anyone will swallow it today' (Karnad 8).

Pratibha Khan is a producer of tele serials. She is not ready to accept Vidula's honest story as plot of her television serials which doesn't look commercial and not ready to take any kind of risk. Pratibha likes to move the story of Radhabai which provides more 'Mirch-Masala' to the plot her serial. Pratibha is a new type revolutionary woman who married with the Muslim man, Irfan. The anxieties related to being a pure and innocent are effectively dealt by the playwright. Karnad discusses women's sexuality with honesty by giving them a normal treatment and not a sinful one. The urge of equality is imbibed on the mind of Vidula who considers woman is equal to man. It is a demand of the playwright to niche of the woman is equal to man in patriarchal society. Vidula finds fault in her brother, Rohit who thought that she must impress her fiancé in every possible way. For this false exterior, she has to be present what she is not. Rohit is eager for her sister Vidula who presents herself beyond the original strength. Vidula is getting bore with all these marital anxieties and wants relax from tension by joking in serious situation. Marriage is not a spiritual for Vidula and she considers that the marriage is a physical and materialistic way to lead life.

The play presents a doting mother, an ageing father rapidly losing his authority and a royal cook, Radhabai. Consciously, Karnad locates *Wedding Album* in dreadfully familiar space; the Nadkarni's living room. The living room of Nadkarni family is presented in the second scene. The play begins with the gossiping of the Nadkarni family members who are busy in arranging the auspicious marriage ceremony of their loving daughter, Vidula. The excitements of Nadkarni family reached at the peak when the family prepares for the wedding of Vidula. The Indian marriage institutions and myths and realities are concerned with the marriage ceremony strongly displayed through the dialogue of the mother and different characters like the father, Hema, Radhabai and Rohit. Marriage is the golden opportunity for shopping of family members and relatives in the wedding of Vidula. The selection of sari, bridal groom, the garments of family members and relatives comes to attend the marriage of Vidula. This is a typical feature of Indian marriages. The play narrates the story of Vidula's wedding. The play presents the living room of Nadkarni family. The bedroom is consciously absent from the scene. The episode of Mukti's sari presents the climax of Indian marriages which creates the humorous episode before the audience. The mother has typical Indian female psychology that is ready to take revenge against her relatives who treated her up to mark in their household marriages. The purely humorous episode is created in the play. Karnad consciously rejects the chosen space is inadequate for the examination of Indian family at the time of wedding. Mother and Vidula are examining the silk sari piled on the sofa. Her father is sitting in a chair and reading the newspaper. Mother and Vidula were gossiping about the saris of Indira aunty, Mukti and Hema. Hema did not like the sari chosen by her mother. Hema said to Vidula, I don't think this is your colour. She wants to purchase sari of her own choice. Mother has purchased dhoti for Hema's husband as per the custom of wedding. As per the typical Indian psyche, Hema, the daughter was not happy with purchase of cloth in the wedding ceremony. She irritates on her mother and goes inside her room. Mother did not like the behaviour of Hema; it is significant to quote from the text in this context; 'Mother: It has nothing to do with your wedding. She is always like that!' (Karnad, 14). The father is awakening from his sleep by hearing the dispute between mother and daughter. The play presents different kind of relationship between mother and daughter, Hema's reciprocated behaviour against her own mother reveals typical characteristics of mother and daughter relations in Indian context. According to the mother, this relationship has taken intricate shape and the reason behind it was the biased treatment given to her from her childhood days which reached peak point at the time of marriage. These things, commonly observed at the time of marriage in Indian family. The blood relatives and other relatives

are displaying their rejection in acceptance and anger at the time of marriage and create chaotic situation before parent of the bride and groom. Mother said to Hema; 'A wedding means expenses – there is no getting away from that'. In Indian cultural tradition, the wedding means only expenses and there is no escape from it. As per the tradition of Indian marriage, the parents of bride will be taking a loan from the bank to make all the arrangements of the groom, relatives and other who come to attend the marriage.

The father asked her daughter 'What is it now? What are we discussing?' (Karnad, 15). Hema reveals her irritation on her mother that she could not offer anything to her husband in their marriage without 'just a small fire altar and seven steps round it' (Karnad, 15). The mother explained Hema that she told her father, our daughter and son-in-law are going abroad, let's get some jewellery made for them. The father snarled at mother that 'Our son-in-law isn't asking for anything. So what are you making such a fuss about?' (Karnad, 15). The father replied that he has grown up in the poor family and they ran from house to house for two times meal. The father has strongly declined to offer some jewellery to his daughter and son-in-law due to his financial condition. Vidula says that her future husband likes registration marriage in spite of traditional marriage. The mother of Vidula did not listen because she has desire to arrange the big marriage ceremony of her daughter. The father is agreed with his son-in-law's registered marriage. The mother strongly opposed father, 'It's all very well for him to waive these things.' He said that he had never attended the wedding of their neighbouring families. Mother said that they had accepted their hospitality, wedding feasts in their marriage. Now, in our daughter's wedding the father wanted from her mother to pack the guest off with a betel leaf and a nut. The mother was eager to offer the hospitality and wedding feasts to her neighbours, relatives and guests who arrived to attend the marriage of her loving daughter, Vidula. The play now turns to the groom, Ashwin Panje. The tension raised in Nadkarni family when he is coming to India to meet his life partner, Vidula Nadkarni and to see upcoming arrangements of marriage. Rohit clears Ashwin that he has postponed his tour to India. Rohit says that Ashwin can't come on the thirteenth instead of he will arrive on the seventeenth of the month. Ashwin is legal consultant of US badminton team who is travelling to Malaysia. He will travel with them up to Chennai and come to Dharwad to meet Vidula. Ashwin was not interested in the traditional marital rituals and wasteful *tamasha*. He prefers register marriage instead of traditional marriage. Mother told Rohit that they have seen each other on the video, why he is coming to visit a week in advance? They have talked on mobile and not meet to each other physically. They can meet and introduce each other in the Registrar's office. They can prefer online marriage instead of register one. After discussion, the marriage invitation cards proceeds to the printing, the hall, caters and all the required arrangements for the marriage. The family members of Nadkarni family were engaged and anxious about the role assigned them in the marriage. No one can identify the psyche of Vidula who is going to be bride. The family members did not take care of bridal tension of Vidula. The father is concerned about the huge advance given to the wedding hall. Rohit gives assurance to his father not loosing that. Her father said that accept everything, 'Let's face it. Marriage is a gamble' (Karnad, 27).

Rohit asked Vidula about her application for the birth certificate which is required for the passport and visa. Vidula was not serious about her application for the birth certificate. She has not photographed herself for the passport and visa. Rohit and Hema scold her for frequently going to internet café. Vidula says to Rohit that she has learnt a sermon of Swami Ananga Nath but Rohit knows that she plays a video game on internet. Vidula likes to play game on the internet. Today, we know that the world is addicted by internet. The youth of the country is using internet on their android phones for wrong purpose likes to watch pornography. Vidula is not an exception for such things. The generation avails many opportunities through internet for getting good education and information. There are a number of opportunities girls like Vidula on Internet but these young generations are not in the mood to utilize for themselves and welfare of their family. She indulges in sexual harassment and finds herself guilty to make her moral life tormentors. Hema brings birth certificate of Vidula on which wrongly written the name of her father. Instead of her father's name, there was a name of uncle Ramdas. The goldsmith has order some special samples from Belgaum for the marriage ceremony of Vidula. She has forgotten to tell Rohit, the ring of Isabel. Isabel is the girlfriend of Rohit who belongs to Christian religion. Hema opposes his choice of out caste religion and he could find a suitable match within their own caste.

The arrival of Gopal, Vatsala, Mohan and Mira was for the marriage of Vidula. They were gossiping about their old memories of Ramdas who was still alive and very active. The father apologises them for the absence of his wife and two daughter to welcome them personally. They are out of the house for the shopping. Someone said, 'Shopping! A wedding is essentially an excuse for shopping' (Karnad, 31). In our Indian marriage custom, the relatives are coming to attend the marriage before two or three days so it would look like the marriage house. Father explains them about his son-in-law, Ashwin Panje who has not taken dowry and he is also against the dowry system. Rohit interrupts the gossip of father and relatives and the point is Ashwin is planning to settle in India with his uncle, Govind Rao. He has to collect the details from him. Gopal asked Rohit that they were intentionally came here to marry their daughter Tapsya with Rohit. Tapsya is coming from Hyderabad to here today and she is eager to engage with him. Rohit is not interested in her because he was already engaged with Isabel, a Christian girl. Gopal and Mohan makes request to Rohit but he did not listen them. Ultimately, he gets relief from them by the entrance of Hema and Vidula.

Karnad has presented Vivan episode which reveals the children community and their problems that the parents and entire world is facing today. Vivan is talented boy who stands first in his class. He is techno savvy and prematurely adult grown puberty child by reading the books like *Madam Bovary* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. He starts to love Hema sensually and the feeling of puberty develops in his mind against Hema. He conveys his love through his letters to Hema. He intentionally keeps his letters in the books which he returns to Hema. By mistake, his letter is read by Vidula. Hema is not interested to glance at these letters but she feels fear if these letters reveal before others. Hema's husband is delighted because Vidula's sister gets these types of letter after her marriage of fifteen years. It is significant to quote Vivan who says;

'Vivan: Go ahead. I'll also tell her I love you. The moment I saw you the other day, I fell desperately in love. I want to die kissing you. I want to die with my hand inside your blouse' (Karnad 45).

Vivan is beyond the consideration of everyone, a filthy boy who wants to maintain sexual relationship with a woman of his mother's age. It is notified that the moral degradation of the youth of our generation. The youth of the country stimulates their sexual feelings by reading sexual books and watching porn videos on the website. Today, it is a need of every parent to keep their eyes on their children so they could not divert in wrong behaviour. The parent should be completely aware about their children's use of Android phones and if they used technology for wrong purposes then it would be difficult for their children to return back. The parents are providing facilities to their children but they are using with wrong intentions which exploit their life. The children's are unaware about the proper use of technology. So, it's up to their parents to look at the use of technology by their children.

Ashwin Panje is an expat boy who needs to be understood from the Indian point of view. He represents Saraswat Brahmin in USA. It is worthwhile to quote Amrit Srinivasan who says; "The coaxing of men into matrimony, away from the selfish, unsocial path and the appeal to their ambition (worldly or self motivated and spiritual) is brought out in the play, couched in the language of obligation and duty, even mission" (Srinivasan, xii).

The scene eight of the play highlights the extent to which the sectarian meaning of marriage has been internalized even by young character like Ashwin Panje. The marriage's in India is taking place with matchmaking on the status of virtue, the doing of 'good work' and all inclusive nature of both families. The South Indian Brahmin marriage gives rise to have imbued individual, traditional worldly success with civilisational and spiritual values. It is important to quote Srinivasan who posits about the marriage: "By providing pure food, sex, childcare and ritual daily needs, the wife in particular, renders distance from home irrelevant, enabling the very possibility if not achievement, of expatriate experience" (Srinivasan, xiii).

It is not surprising that the community's transnational youth like Ashwin Panje who indulges in Indian marriage custom. It is excruciating and self-imposed willingly restrictions of the husband and wife. For the South Indian Brahmins, the inevitability of marriage exists on the same experimental planet where the birth in a particular family. Therefore, Saraswat parents avoid the risk of community's youth not finding a suitable spouse and make them completely unreliable, looking for someone who is unknown. In the play, *Wedding Album*, it seems to be in the case of Vidula that the

presentation of boy and girl to one another through video images. They are only related to one another within the wider caste framework. Here, the flexibility is inbuilt and social system succeeds despite substantive aberrations. For instance, Tapsya is Rohit's father's sister's daughter, twice removed. The South Indian Brahmins succeed in marriage because of an inner obligation which keeps loyalty and expectation of both siblings. The marital bonds intact and transmuted the love, playfulness and desire of one into the duty, remembrance and chastity of the other which is preserved by generation after generation. Ashwin wants an honest Hindu Indian wife though he resides in America. Ashwin wants to marry with a woman who perfectly suits in the role of wife-mother and daughter. He is anguished by seeing a spiritual and cultural crisis in America as:

What I am anguished about then? I have drunk life in the US to the lees.

Girlfriends, affairs, mistresses, one night stands.

And on the public stage, glamour, success, social connections.

I have been through them all.

And I have come to the conclusion that the whole culture is empty of values now, bereft of any living meaning (Karnad, 80).

According to Ashwin, the culture of America is glittering and shallow. The European Industrial Revolution began by rejecting in favour of material values. Today, the legacy is strangling the West culture. There are no spiritual values left in the West. The West is wondering in a godless and amoral world by creating the chaotic situation. The Western culture threw Ashwin into depression and darkness. Now, he looks hopefully towards India for the guidance in the crisis. Indian has an ancient culture which is full of wisdom and insight. The country should have the capacity to lead the entire world. But when, Ashwin looked back to his homeland (India), again he found the darkness of ancient culture, spiritualism and the heritage. Karnad says that, India had become the 'Walmart of spirituality' (Karnad, 81). His belief of Indian Hinduism is deep rooted in his mind as: 'I have realized that Hinduism can indeed save the world from moral chaos, but not through this sort of branded spirituality' (Karnad, 81). According to Ashwin, the Indian should peep into their hearts and discover their ancient values afresh. The philosophy of Hinduism is going to help the world. He strongly believes in the culture of India; "That is why I have come to Dharwad to look for a life partner. I have come here because I believe that it is in places like Dharwad that belief in innocence, the very idea of purity, still survives" (Karnad, 81).

Ashwin wants to marry with Indian girl like Vidula as a life partner who will carry the best spiritual tradition of India to the West and save the West from the cultural and spiritual crisis. It is noteworthy for the Indians to see the cultural superiority of the East over the West in the final part of the play. It is important to quote Srinivasan who says; "Marriage with the caste being synonymous with approval, the very publicity and correctness of it muffles and chastens women and their sexuality after marriage. The wife is burdened now with a passion for purity so all comprehending that it exercises protective, beneficial effects on the husband (and today, Hinduism), when unseen and involuntary" (Karnad, xv).

In *Wedding Album*, Karnad has presented the kitchen of Saraswat Brahmin family and not presented the parent's bedroom. The power of wife has gone awry amongst South Indian Brahmin family. The traditional wife in Indian family is aggressive and possessive in their private space where they express their anxieties and cares about the welfare of their family. The kitchen becomes a parody and a battleground for class supremacy and control over the maid, Radhabai. She is the willing and competent shadow in the kitchen. She reveals the sense of failure and unfulfillment for the Nadkarni family.

To conclude, *Wedding Album* is the latest drama of Girish Karnad that deals with Indian marriage system of Saraswat Brahmin family. It explores the traditional Indian wedding in globalised and techno-savvy advanced India. Here, we come across the typical attitude of family members about the Indian marriage system. The characters belong to the modern, middle class Indian family. In the play, we come across the Diasporic discourse, Hema, a daughter who lives with her husband and children in Australia. A younger daughter, Vidula marries with an expat boy, Ashwin Panje whom she never met. A dotting mother and ageing father is rapidly losing his authority in Saraswat Brahmin family. The play encounters typical features of Indian marriage system. The relatives come to attend

the marriage. The relatives reveal their resentments due to small things in the marriage. The family members are engaged in the arrangement of marriage like cooking, honour of guest and many more things which are essential for the marriage. *Wedding Album* works at two levels: it explores the traditional Indian wedding in a globalized, technologically-advanced India. It juxtaposes very different life experiences and expectations of Saraswat Brahmin family members in the marriage and the loyal cook, Radhabai. Karnad discusses the notions of wealth, well-being, sexual propriety, Indian tradition of the marriage, class conflict, and modernity form the basis of middle-class society in contemporary India.

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